A grounded theory study of the value derived by women in financial services through a coaching intervention to help them identify their strengths and practise using them in the workplace

Francesca Elston & Dr Ilona Boniwell

Objectives: *There are several definitions of strengths within psychology, united by a common theme: strengths are what people do best and most easily. Research shows that actively using strengths provides a range of benefits, and suggests that strengths-based coaching is a valuable approach. This study's purpose was to investigate strengths-based coaching using qualitative methods, concentrating on the experience of the coachee.*

Design: *The study explored what happened when six women in financial services practised using their strengths at work, through a coaching intervention and the VIA strengths inventory. Through three semi-structured interviews centred around a coaching intervention, participants described their experience using strengths, and the effects of greater awareness and practice of strengths.*

Methods: *The data was analysed using grounded theory. The value of strengths emerged as the central phenomenon, consisting of eight sub-themes: positive emotion, inspiring action, attention to the positive, feeling authentic, awareness of own value, valuing difference, sense of achievement and positive reflections from others.*

Results: *The study found that all participants derived value from using strengths. This appeared to lead to a 'virtuous circle': this positive benefit reduced the intervening factors that previously impeded using strengths. The virtuous circle was not identical for each participant, but all experienced it.*

Conclusions: *The study finds ways in which women may use strengths and gain value from using strengths in the workplace. This has practical implications for those wishing to improve their workplace experience and increase engagement with work, and for those who coach and employ them.*

THE USE of strengths in coaching is becoming increasingly popular, and there is a growing body of research in this area. This provides valuable information about how coaches can best work with strengths to help their clients achieve results.

However, this is still a relatively recent field of study. One area that is not well researched is the experience people have when they are using their strengths. Understanding this could be valuable to coaches in using strengths with clients. This qualitative study of a strengths coaching intervention hopes to provide some insight into that question.

Review of literature
Linley, Willars and Biswas-Diener (2010c) point out the need for a clear definition of strengths. The canonical classification is the VIA-IS (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), where virtues are defined as 'the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers', and strengths as 'the psychological ingredients…that define the virtues' (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.13).

Buckingham and Clifton (2002) define strengths as 'the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance'. Linley (2008) defines a strength as 'a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving,

thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance' (p.9). Definitions are broader still within counselling, vocational psychology and social work, suggesting that strengths lie in both knowledge and skills, and that they are situated in relationships and communities as well as individuals (Smith, 2006a; Saleebey, 2001). This study uses Linley's (2008) definition, which allows a flexible definition of strengths, but places them within the individual. This fits with the focus on coaching.

Many strengths are known to be beneficial. Peterson, Park and Seligman (2006) and Peterson et al. (2007) associate certain character strengths with wellbeing. Lopez, Snyder and Rasmussen (2003) summarise links between strengths and a range of physical, psychological and social benefits. There is evidence that strengths are valuable in counselling and social work, and that strengths-based methods bring benefits for clients. (e.g. Brun & Rapp, 2001; Saleebey, 1996; Smith, 2006a).

There is growing evidence to support the benefits of strengths use. Linley et al. (2010b) find that strengths use is associated with goal progress, which is associated with greater need satisfaction, and both these are associated with increased wellbeing. Proctor, Maltby and Linley (2009) find that strengths use uniquely predicts subjective wellbeing. Minhas (2010) finds that using strengths could lead to an increase in self-esteem, psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life. Linley et al. (2010a) provide a concise overview of the benefits of strengths use.

The use of strengths might improve experience in the workplace. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) find that strengths use increases employee engagement. Strengths might be valuable in providing a positive language for differences from organisational norms, and enabling greater authenticity and engagement (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Minhas (2010) finds that strengths use led to significantly increased engage-

ment. Linley, Woolston and Biswas-Diener (2009) find that people who use their strengths perform better at work.

There is also evidence that strengths are of value in coaching. Linley et al. (2010c) provide several case studies of successful strengths coaching. Oades, Crowe and Nguyen (2009) describe how a strengths-based coaching model in a hospital led to more powerful and affirmative frames for mental health patients. They credit the model with changing individual mindsets and cultures. Although Minhas's (2010) work does not involve a coach, the action planning facility of the *Realise2* strengths tool (Linley et al., 2010c) is used as part of the intervention.

Linley et al. (2010b) observe that it is important not just to know that strengths are useful but to understand how they work. They propose a model that links strength to wellbeing through the achievement of self-concordant goals. However, whilst providing an explanation for how strengths lead to benefits, this model does not address what happens to people when they use their strengths. It is focused on the external outcomes of strengths use rather than the accompanying internal processes.

The literature on strengths suggest several possibilities for how strengths work within us. For example, strengths may be linked to a positive self-concept. Roberts et al. (2005) invoke the 'reflected best self – envisioning the self at one's best, and then acting on this vision to translate possibilities for the extraordinary into reality' (p.712). Their theory is among the most detailed accounts of how strengths might develop, but they do not adduce evidence to support it.

Snyder et al. (2006) find that therapists' assessment of strengths leads to greater awareness and flexibility for the client in determining routes to desired outcomes (see also Sheridan et al., 2004; Smith, 2006b). Robitschek and Woodson (2006) claim that positive self-exploration is an essential component of strengths.

However, Seligman et al. (2005) find that focusing on 'you at your best' alone does not increase wellbeing. Also, strengths use predicts wellbeing even after controlling for self-efficacy (Govindji & Linley, 2007), but strengths knowledge does not. This is consistent with Linley et al.'s (2010b) model of the strengths use leading to goal achievement, and with Pritchard's (2009) findings that it is not simply sufficient to identify one's strengths – a development component is crucial too.

It has been theorised that strengths might link to self-efficacy. Pritchard (2009) shows that academic self-efficacy increased in students as a result of a strengths intervention. Govindji and Linley (2007) find that strengths knowledge and strengths use are significantly associated with self-efficacy. Harris, Thoresen and Lopez (2007) propose that strengths-based approaches act cognitively, leading people to reframe problems more constructively, and cite evidence supporting this.

However, Smith (2006b) describes 'countless stories about people who evidence low perceived self-efficacy but display surprising strength in dealing with challenging situations' (p.135). Also strengths use predicts SWB and psychological wellbeing even after controlling for self-efficacy (Govindji & Linley, 2007). So this alone is insufficient to explain strengths,

There is evidence that strengths may relate not just to individual character but also to the environment. Biswas-Diener (2006) finds 'differences between and within cultures in terms of…cultural institutions that promote each strength' (p.293) and, interestingly, the students interviewed by Steen, Kachorek and Peterson (2003) suggested that 'school actually hindered the development of certain character strengths' (p.10). There is evidence that case-workers' ability to regard the client positively is critical to successful development of strength (e.g. Noble, Perkins & Fatout, 2000; Saleebey, 1996; Snyder et al., 2006; Wong, 2006).

Relationships may also affect strengths use. Peterson and Seligman (2003) speculate that 'people behaved differently by turning to others, which in turn changed their social worlds so that the relevant behaviours were rewarded and thus maintained' (p.383). Losada and Heaphy (2004) show that interpersonal connections build durable psychological resources. Researchers in counselling and social work situate strengths beyond the self, in relationships, communities and the environment (e.g. Noble et al., 2000; Saleebey, 1996; Smith, 2006a).

Aims of the study

The body of literature reviewed above suggests that there is growing evidence for the value of strengths in coaching. However, the question of how strengths work has not yet been answered satisfactorily.

This 'pilot' study aimed to provide some insight into the question: what is happening to people when they use their strengths? It was hoped that this might be a valuable addition to the growing body of work on the benefits of strengths use, for two reasons:, because it focuses primarily on the individual experience of strengths and because of the use of qualitative research methods.

The study was centred round a coaching intervention in which each of the participants identified their strengths and then actively practised using their strengths in the workplace. A qualitative grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is used. Bartunek and Seo (2002) show how qualitative research can increase understanding of local perceptions. Boniwell and Henry (2007) explain how qualitative methods can lead to identification of constructs and models that can be investigated using scientific methods. Gyllensten et al. (2010) use qualitative methods to elicit benefits of cognitive coaching.

Method

The research used a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory can be said to hold elements of both a positivist and an

interpretivist research paradigm (Smith, 2008). It is often considered to be the most 'scientific' qualitative research methodology (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Payne, 2007). Grounded theory is becoming more common in studies of coaching (e.g. Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009; Passmore, 2010).

This study uses Strauss and Corbin's (1998) methodology for grounded theory, for two reasons. Firstly, the transcribed data set is over 300 pages long, and this structured method provides rigour in ensuring that a theory is drawn from it systematically. Secondly, the only other study of strengths using grounded theory (Pritchard, 2009) uses Strauss and Corbin's methodology.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Smith (2008) suggest grounded theory can be used to interpret any data set, so the inclusion of the coaching intervention is not unconventional for the design of a grounded theory study. Strauss and Corbin (1997) describe grounded theory studies which collect a wide range of data from different sources.

Research design

There were six participants. Two were in their 20s, two in their 30s and two in their 40s. This is not a demographically diverse population, but there is value in this similarity, because it adds more weight to the participants' experience when it is consistent.

In addition, although not necessarily dissatisfied with their work situation, all but one of the participants had stated that they desired more engagement at work. Some believed that they were not valued and found this problematic.

Data collection took place through three semi-structured interviews with each participant. In the first, the inquiry explored two main themes: (a) what do the participants believe that their strengths are; and (b) what happens when participants use their strengths.

Second interviews took place after the participants took the VIA strengths inventory (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Linley et al. (2010b) describe the survey as 'the most

widely used strengths assessment specifically associated with the positive psychology movement to date' (p.7). The classification was used as a starting point for participants to define their strengths; after reviewing their top five 'signature' strengths, they reviewed the full list of strengths alphabetically to identify other strengths that resonated for them. They subsequently added their own personal list of strengths.

Linley et al. (2010a) analyse the pros and cons of using strengths scales; this study hoped to combine the advantages of both by using a well-known strengths scale but also allowing participants to supplement it with strengths that they had identified themselves.

The primary focus of the second interview was a coaching intervention around the strengths that had been identified. Through open questioning and support from the coach, each participant explored ways to use each strength at work and created a list of actions. During these interviews, the researcher also asked questions about the participants' experiences of using their strengths since the first interviews.

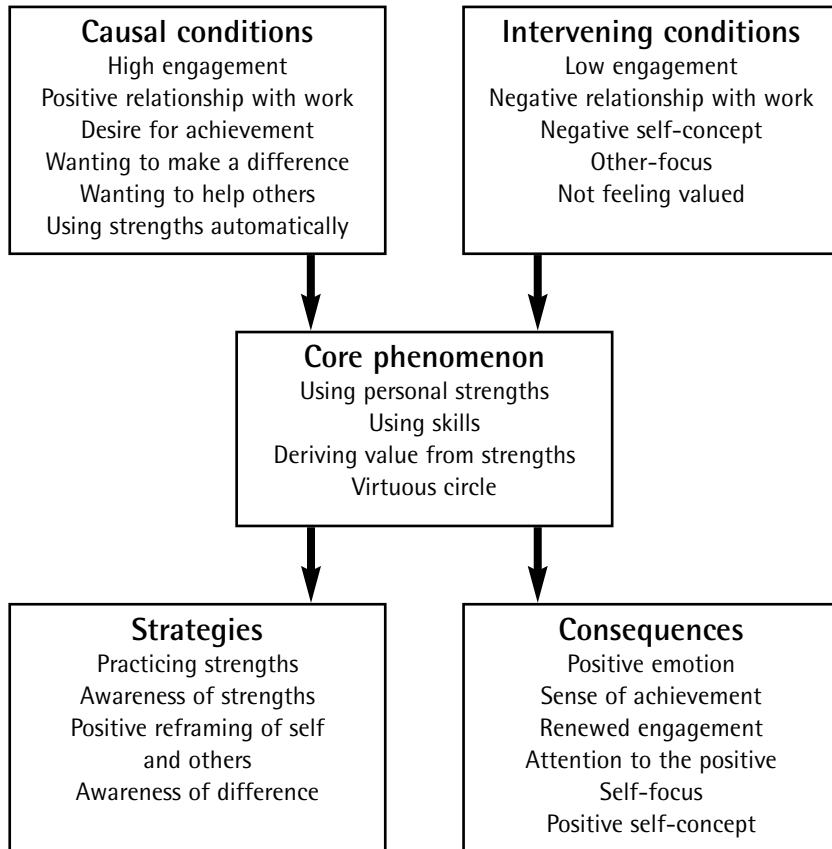The final interviews focused on the outcomes of the strengths practice and what happened as a result.

In grounded theory, data analysis and theory generation are inextricably intertwined. Initial analysis gives rise to a theory that can be tested and refined through further rounds of analysis. Data analysis takes place through assigning codes to the data, then using axial coding to aggregate codes into categories and establish relationships between them. This enables creation of a theory that shows the relationships between overarching themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Table 1 shows the code statistics for the axial coding, comprising the frequencies with which they occurred and the number of participants who referred to them.

Figure 1 shows the axial coding model for this study. This used the components outlined in Creswell's (2005) description of the requirements for an axial coding paradigm, as used in Pritchard (2009).

Table 1: Coding statistics from the middle round of coding (Axial).

Category	Frequency/ no. of participants	Category	Frequency/ no. of participants
Other-focus	274/6	Collaboration	59/5
Positive self-management	258/6	Positive feedback	56/6
Positive self-concept	218/6	Negative emotion from using strengths	55/6
Positive emotions when using strengths	180/6	Positive view of own difference	53/6
Attention focused on negative	170/6	Creativity and different approach	51/4
Valuing strengths approach	162/6	Identification with VIA strengths	49/6
Engaging others	155/6	Positive organisational fit	48/5
Integrity and authenticity	132/6	Lack of authenticity	45/6
High engagement	131/6	Believing she can make a difference	43/4
Attention focused on positive	113/6	Low engagement	43/6
Conscious use of strengths	110/5	Lack of identification with VIA strengths	39/6
Negative self-concept	105/6	Self-focus	32/6
Desire for achievement	101/6	Positive relationships with authority figures	31/6
Negative organisational fit	101/6	Negative relationships with authority figures	29/5
Getting things done	98/6	What is a strength	24/6
Using strengths automatically	93/6	Negative view of own difference	20/6
Sense of achievement	80/6	Negative feedback	19/5
Problem solving	78/6	VIA strengths useful	19/6
Wanting to make a difference	73/6	VIA strengths not useful	14/3
Want to help others	70/6	Valuing difference	12/3
Negative self-management	64/6	Believing she can't make a difference	8/2

Figure 1.

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      Causal conditions      │        │    Intervening conditions   │
│      High engagement        │        │       Low engagement        │
│ Positive relationship with  │        │ Negative relationship with  │
│           work              │        │           work              │
│   Desire for achievement    │        │    Negative self-concept    │
│  Wanting to make a difference│       │         Other-focus         │
│    Wanting to help others   │        │      Not feeling valued     │
│  Using strengths automatically│      │                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────────┘
              │                                        │
              ▼                                        ▼
          ┌───────────────────────────────────────────┐
          │              Core phenomenon               │
          │         Using personal strengths           │
          │               Using skills                 │
          │        Deriving value from strengths       │
          │              Virtuous circle               │
          └───────────────────────────────────────────┘
              │                                        │
              ▼                                        ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│          Strategies         │        │         Consequences        │
│     Practicing strengths    │        │       Positive emotion      │
│    Awareness of strengths   │        │     Sense of achievement    │
│  Positive reframing of self │        │      Renewed engagement     │
│          and others         │        │   Attention to the positive │
│    Awareness of difference  │        │          Self-focus         │
│                             │        │     Positive self-concept   │
└─────────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────────┘
```

This led to a final round of theoretical coding. Table 2 shows the statistics for the codes that formed the basis of the final theory, comprising the frequencies with which they occurred and the number of participants who referred to them.

Finally, the relationships between the categories were re-examined to produce and test the final theory, represented in Figure 2.

The study used several methods to ensure validity. In particular, the grounded theory methodology's rigorous structure for coding, analysis and theory generation contributed to this (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The study was made more reliable by triangulation of data over time, and the consistency of the participants' experiences lends credibility. Payne (2007) suggests that another measure of validity is the soundness of fit between theory and data, which is again supported here.

Each participant was asked to review her interview summary and provide feedback, to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the data was consistent with the participants' own experience. They were either very minor comments or none at all.

Critiques could include that only one researcher has been involved and the data is drawn from one source type, semi-structured interviews. Also, the researcher has no previous experience in grounded theory. To mitigate this, two research supervisors also provided input to the study design and one of them also agreed the design of the interview protocols.
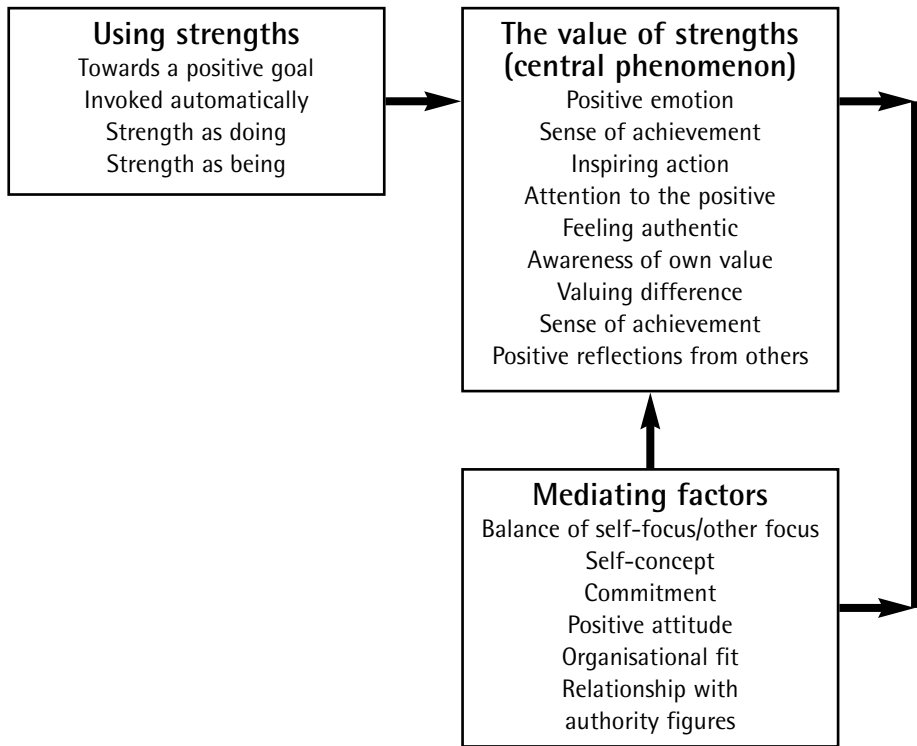
Table 2: Coding statistics from the final round of coding (Theory).

Category	Frequency/ no. of participants	Category	Frequency/ no. of participants
Towards a positive goal	286/6	Valuing difference	86/6
Other-focus	267/6	Sense of achievement	82/6
Positive self-concept	225/6	Problem solving	69/6
Positive emotion	177/6	Lack of commitment	55/6
Commitment	164/6	Positive reflections from from others	54/6
Positive attitude	162/6	Not inspiring action	53/6
Inspiring action	158/6	Creativity and different approach	51/5
Attention to the negative	148/6	Negative emotion	48/6
Engaging others	144/6	Positive organisational fit	47/6
Feeling authentic	122/6	Not feeling authentic	46/6
Awareness of own value	116/6	Positive relationships with authority figures	29/6
Attention to the positive	115/6	Self-focus	29/6
Negative self-concept	105/6	Negative relationships with authority figures	29/5
Negative organisational fit	102/6	Not valuing difference	21/5
Getting things done	94/6	Negative reflections from others	18/5
Negative attitude	94/6	Lack of awareness of own value	6/3
Invoked automatically	89/6	Lack of sense of achievement	2/2
Integrity	88/6		

Any qualitative study highlights the role of the researcher (Willig, 2001). Riley, Schouten and Cahill (2003) point out the power dynamics of the researcher's role, particularly relevant here because of the coaching intervention. Specifically, participants might have regarded the researcher as an 'expert' because the second interview involved the researcher coaching the participants, which can feel like an 'expert' role. Therefore, participants might not have felt able to be honest if they were not finding the study useful.

Three strategies were selected to manage this. The first was discussing the power dynamic with participants in order to minimise its effect (McArdle, 2004). The second was designing the interviews to minimise the voice of the researcher and maximise the voice of participants, through using open questions that focused on the participants' experience in their own words. Finally, the analytic process included returning to the data repeatedly to ensure that the theory was genuinely grounded in the participants' voices, making conscious

Figure 2.

```
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Using strengths     │        │   The value of strengths    │
│  Towards a positive goal│───────▶│     (central phenomenon)    │
│   Invoked automatically │        │       Positive emotion      │
│    Strength as doing    │        │     Sense of achievement    │
│    Strength as being    │        │       Inspiring action      │
└─────────────────────────┘        │    Attention to the positive│
                                   │       Feeling authentic     │
                                   │     Awareness of own value  │
                                   │      Valuing difference     │
                                   │     Sense of achievement    │
                                   │  Positive reflections from others│
                                   └─────────────────────────────┘
                                                 ▲
                                   ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                   │      Mediating factors      │
                                   │ Balance of self-focus/other focus│
                                   │        Self-concept         │
                                   │         Commitment          │
                                   │       Positive attitude     │
                                   │      Organisational fit     │
                                   │       Relationship with     │
                                   │      authority figures      │
                                   └─────────────────────────────┘
```

choices to excise the responses of the researcher so they interfered as little as possible with interpreting participants' stories (Riley et al., 2003).

The study was conducted in accordance with University of East London ethical guidelines (UEL, 2010) and Willig's (2001) overview of ethical standards for qualitative research. Each participant has been given a pseudonym, which is used throughout this paper.

Results
The study showed that participants derived value from discussing, learning about and using their strengths, and that this value was experienced in several ways. It identified intermediating factors affecting how participants viewed their strengths and deployed them at work. Finally, it found that the use of

strengths had some impact on the intermediating factors, creating 'virtuous circles' for many participants. Each theme is reviewed in turn.

(1) Using strengths
The study showed how participants made a conscious effort to use their strengths. They discussed both the act itself, using words like 'trying', 'preparing' or 'taking the time to', and the intention behind it, with indicators such as 'making a point of', or 'making an effort'. Strengths were used deliberately in pursuit of a personal goal – almost every conscious act had a purpose that the participant considered important.

In addition to using strengths deliberately, participants also experienced strengths as authentic parts of themselves, enacted without effort and often without conscious

awareness. All participants frequently referred to this, using words and phrases like 'natural', 'comfortable', 'easy', 'subconscious' or 'unconscious' and 'that's [just] who I am'. Additionally, participants stated that these strengths are constantly present, and a few suggested that they are present both in work and home life.

Bella suggested that 'I do that all the time unconsciously; it just comes very naturally', and Eliza, describing her strength of creativity, said '…it's because it's the only way I know how.'

(2) The value of strengths

The central phenomenon that emerged from the data was 'The value of strengths'. This theme highlighted that all participants found it valuable to learn more about and use their strengths.

The theme subdivided into eight categories: Positive emotion; Inspiring action; Attention to the positive; Awareness of own value; Feeling authentic; Valuing difference; Sense of achievement; and Positive reflections from others.

The experience of using strengths was enjoyable. Eliza said 'When I use my strengths, I'm much, much happier', and Bella suggested that 'The things that make you feel good are the things that are more likely to be your strengths'.

Beyond that, using strengths led to positive emotions about work. After using strengths, Daisy commented that 'I just didn't want to go into work…I'm not experiencing that any more', and Alyssa said that 'I suppose when you feel like you're doing a better job…you feel better about doing the job'

Participants also referred to positive emotion inherent in activities they felt good at. Eliza said 'I feel yes, just kind of joyous, I meant it's a remarkable word to use in the context of work but it does, it brings you joy when you do the things that you love most and that you're best at.'

Participants also experienced negative emotion using strengths, although significantly less than positive emotion. Of this, fear was most cited, and all but one referred to this at least once. Frustration when strengths were not valued and tiredness from over-use of strengths were also mentioned. Linley et al. (2010c) refer to the risks of the over-use of strengths.

The participants described how using strengths inspired them towards action. Chloe observed that 'When you are using your strengths, life is easier and you're more likely to kind of get into the flow.'

Several participants came to the realisation that small interventions can lead to valuable changes (Linley, 2008). Alyssa said, 'When you use [strengths] it doesn't have to be in any earth shattering way, it could be just recognising that you're doing certain small things that play to your strengths.'

Towards the beginning of the study, most of the participants observed more negative than positive phenomena, and this code is in fact more prevalent over the course of the study. However, the balance shifted during the interviews: there were 50 codes for 'Attention to the negative' across all the first interviews and 28 across all the final interviews; the corresponding figures for 'Attention to the positive' are 14 and 68 respectively.

All but one reported that using their strengths made their focus more positive, and they found this valuable. Daisy felt that 'I probably am more positive at work and if it gets to the point that I begin to be a bit more negative at work, I've now got the armoury to see my way through that', and suggested that '…thinking about your strengths and what you're actually good at…maybe helps you not be so negative.'

Several participants found this increased their commitment at work. Alyssa commented that 'I'm feeling much, much more positive…there will be challenges but that I'll be able to cope with them.' Chloe found that… 'I might have lost the battle but I'm still heading along looking like I might win the war.'

For Alyssa, Bella and Daisy, paying attention to the positive led to a 'virtuous circle' where they experienced more and more of it. Bella suggested that 'When you focus on the negative you get the negative; focussing on the positive you really unlock a lot of really positive energy.' Flora experienced a shift from only noticing negatives about colleagues to observing their strengths: 'It actually gave me…a new vision, you know seeing the world in a different way.'

Every participant reported that using strengths led to a feeling of authenticity, often using phrases like 'being myself'. As the project progressed, Eliza reported that 'When you use your strengths you give back much more of yourself and that in turn makes you happy.' She was then put up for promotion, and she attributed this at least in part to her increased willingness to be herself in the workplace.

Daisy found 'It was good to know that you could be yourself, using those strengths.' Through awareness of her strengths, she reframed 'being herself at work' as career-enhancing rather than problematic. Flora reported that by the end of the project, she was 'less of a machine and…more of an independent risk taking, autonomous person.'

Five participants benefited from greater understanding of the value that their strengths can bring. They valued the discovery that character strengths such as integrity, humour and love can be considered strengths even when not directly related to work achievement, and reported that knowing their personal strengths led to a greater perception of their professional value. Alyssa found that 'Maybe what I do is different but different in a good way.' Daisy concluded that 'I can be myself and I have unique selling points.'

Five of the six spoke of a new understanding of difference. This insight into others' difference brought Alyssa a new perspective on her own: '…it's recognising that you have something to contribute and that it's not the same as other people, and that just because you are doing something

differently, doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.' Daisy intentionally used her strength of appreciating beauty and excellence to notice difference positively.

All participants found that using their strengths led to a sense of achievement. Eliza was aware that some of this derived from her knowledge that she was bringing her creative strengths into an environment that lacked them.

Five participants reported that using strengths led to positive feedback, which was personally rewarding and which led to professional advantage in some cases. This engendered positive emotion and higher engagement.

(3) Mediating factors

All participants found that certain factors affected how much they used their strengths, although the importance of these varied. These divided into six categories: Balance of self-focus/other-focus; Self-concept; Commitment; Positive attitude; Organisational fit; and Relationship with authority figures.

Each participant revealed a blend of negative and positive intervening factors, some of which shifted during the project. For everyone, one or more of these factors improved, potentially at least in part as a result of using their strengths, thus creating a 'virtuous circle'.

All but one participants repeatedly referred to the importance of others' opinions, and their impact on engagement. The word 'valued' was used repeatedly. Eliza said, 'I think recognition is a big thing for me', and Bella discussed the difficulties of using her counter-cultural strengths because of negative feedback.

By the end, several participants had shifted attention away from others' views. Daisy observed, 'I think that once you're starting to use your strengths and feeling quite buoyant and positive, you do become a bit impervious to others' comments.'

All but one reported negative aspects of their self-concept at work. Daisy observed that 'I'll sort of forget what I'm good at, and

think more about what's been said that I'm not so good at.' Alyssa said 'I think that's the main thing that holds me back.'

Most participants reported greater self-belief by the end. Daisy described the experience as 'I just think you knew you were doing really well, you could just tell that you were at your best', and Flora said 'Yes I'm more self confident, and yes I accept myself more.'

By the end, several participants expressed renewed engagement with work. Alyssa talked about increased confidence that she can be successful, and hence greater desire to invest in her career. Bella described greater readiness to 'speak my truth' and believe her viewpoint is a valuable strength rather than an undesirable difference.

Some participants expressed negative bias in their attitude to themselves. Flora suggested that 'It's more about what are your weaknesses rather than what are your strengths.' Eliza thought she had more weaknesses than strengths, despite her record of achievement.

Participants also showed evidence of positive attitudes. Chloe expressed a preference for focusing on successes rather than failures. Bella reported that 'I always describe myself as a glass half full type of person, always choose to see the best in people.' She listed positivity as a strength.

By the end, several participants found their awareness had shifted towards noticing more positives about themselves and their work. Chloe used her strength of optimism and her intellectual strengths to reframe her definition of hope and find new positives to inspire her, even within the bleak landscape of climate change. Alyssa reported that 'It's made me more conscious of the aspects, or the attributes that are positive and made me more proud of those, I suppose.'

All participants talked about the organisations they work for. Positive topics included feeling valued, feeling suited to the role, believing that her strengths are useful and believing that she makes a difference. Negative topics included not feeling valued, not finding opportunities to use strengths and not feeling suited to the work, culture or industry.

Bella commented: 'I think it's a bit like a relationship, I'm attracted to those organisations that value those strengths.' Chloe experienced a good fit with colleagues: '…as my career has drifted in that kind of bigger picture kind of direction, people I'm working with tend to be, kind of, big picture type of people, which I like.'

Negative organisational fit appeared to affect how strengths were invoked. Alyssa noted, 'I do have strengths and it's a shame sometimes that you feel you have to kind of mimic other people's strengths rather than using your own.' Bella suggested that 'I'm not sure that it's the right environment to use my strengths.'

Five participants reported that relationships with authority figures influenced their engagement with work and their strengths. Alyssa described her disappointment with managers' lack of interest, and, later, that she was now using her strengths in a positive collaboration with her new boss and this stimulated and motivated her. Eliza talked about the profoundly demotivating effect of not feeling valued, and Chloe reported that 'I think the most important thing that people have helped [in using her strengths] is allowing me to be me.'

Discussion
(1) Using strengths
In the category *'Towards a positive goal'*, participants invoked strengths deliberately in pursuit of something they valued. This was the most popular category. This is interesting when considered alongside self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In SDT, three psychological needs comprise self-determination: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The idea, supported by this study, that strengths are invoked consciously in the pursuit of positive goals, is consistent with the concept of autonomy in SDT and is supported by Linley et al. (2010b), who draw on SDT to

find evidence for a model that links strengths to wellbeing through the achievement of self-concordant goals (Sheldon & Eliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). From a practical angle, this offers suggestions to individuals wishing to develop their strengths, as well as coaches and employers: getting in touch with a personal reason for achievement might provide a gateway to using strengths. The participants' consistent experience that strengths were frequently *Invoked automatically* suggests that some strengths are specific to the individual, regardless of environment. It also gives credence to the idea that strengths are somehow part of the identity.

(2) The value of strengths

It is unsurprising that all the participants consistently experienced *Positive emotion* as a result of using strengths. Strengths are known to link to wellbeing (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Park & Peterson, 2007; Peterson et al., 2007) and positive emotion is a component of this. Seligman et al. (2005) found that using strengths in a new context increases wellbeing, and this is what participants have been doing. Proctor et al. (2010) find that strengths use is a unique predictor of subjective wellbeing.

The benefits of positive emotion are considerable for employers and employees. Positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires (Fredrickson, 2001; Isen, 2003) and build durable resources (Fredrickson, 2001). They improve coping with adversity, support resilience and buffer against depression (Fredrickson et al., 2003). Positive emotions can lead to an 'upward spiral' where they support adaptive behaviours that lead to more positive emotions (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2003). Luthans (2002) finds that organisations derive benefit from positive emotions among employees.

Evidence suggests that action is essential to realise value from strengths (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Pritchard, 2009; Seligman et al., 2005) and this study's category of *Inspiring action* supports this. All participants reported that actively using strengths brought positive value.

Clifton and Harter (2003) suggest that strengths-based development should focus on two areas: identifying strengths and integrating them into work through practice. Minhas (2010) reports a range of benefits from using strengths. Linley et al. (2010b) suggest a range of strategies that can be used to make the most of strengths use.

Feeling authentic was a key theme, with all participants reporting that they 'feel like I'm being myself' when using strengths and repeatedly suggesting that strengths 'come naturally'. For several, using strengths led to an attitude shift from feeling that they must act a part at work to believing that they could be authentic and still successful. Minhas (2010) found that use of strengths led to increased self-esteem. Proctor et al. (2010) theorise that 'strengths use is energising and authentic' (p.4).

Linley (2006) and Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggest that strengths are intrinsic and accompanied by authenticity and fulfilment. Use of strengths might be an 'organismic valuing process' in which people, as active agents, move towards their most authentic selves and realise adaptive benefits as a result (Joseph & Linley, 2005). This might be thought-provoking for employers. Arakawa and Greenberg (2007), Luthans and Youssef (2004) and Peterson and Park (2006) all find evidence of employer benefit from strengths-based approaches. Linley et al. (2010c) provide a list of 10 positive outcomes from strengths-based coaching.

The categories of *Awareness of own value* and *Sense of achievement* might link to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). In particular, self-efficacy is primarily built through mastery experiences, which could equate to the successful use of strengths. Self-efficacy is linked to a range of adaptive benefits including perseverance, less distress, innovation and overcoming rejection (Bandura, 1994), all of which were shown by participants in this study. Govindji and Linley

(2007) find links between self-efficacy and strengths knowledge and use, and Pritchard's (2009) grounded theory study showed that a strengths intervention increased academic self-efficacy in the participants. In addition, Minhas (2010) found that using unrealised strengths leads to an increase in environmental mastery and self-acceptance, which might relate to these two themes.

This might be useful because there is considerable research suggesting that self-efficacy can be built, including through intentional practice of 'mastery experiences' (Bandura, 1994). Pritchard (2009) suggests that positive self-belief among students may lead to increased resilience.

Self-efficacy might also contribute to the value of *Positive reflections from others*. Bandura (1994) suggests that social persuasion is a factor in building self-efficacy – people are more likely to remain actively engaged with goals if given positive feedback on their capability. Oades et al. (2009) found that strengths-based coaching led to improved collaboration. This is consistent with participants' experience.

Roberts et al.'s (2005) 'reflected best self' may contribute to positive development – five participants reported that positive feedback encouraged strengths use. Snyder et al.'s (2006) finding that therapists' positive views supported clients' adaptive behaviour also supports this, and is relevant for coaches using a strengths-based approach.

(3) Mediating factors

The factor of self-concept supports potential links between self-concept and strengths use. Some participants initially found that a negative self-concept inhibited them from using their strengths; by the end of the study all reported a more positive self-concept, and many felt that using strengths had a direct impact on this. Pritchard (2009) provides a detailed review of the potential benefits of a strengths-based approach to the self-concept. Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that exercising competence leads to increased

motivation and wellbeing; perhaps successfully using strengths led participants to greater appreciation of themselves?

This increased tendency towards intrinsic motivation might also provide insight into the category of *Commitment*. Linley et al. (2010b) suggest that strengths may be linked to intrinsic motivation. Self-efficacy might contribute here also; Maddux (2002) suggests that self-efficacy is a key determinant of how much people persevere when faced with challenge. An agency-based model is a valuable way to regard this study; four of the participants (Bella, Chloe, Daisy and Eliza) found direct links between their regulation of their behaviour and the value that they realised from their strengths (e.g. Baumeister, 2003). Many of Pritchard's (2009) research participants 'exhibited a clear progressive sense of agency…as a result of becoming aware of their strengths' (p.147). Pritchard's work also suggests that use of strengths might lead to greater energy and an accompanying commitment to work. Oades et al. (2009) found that a strengths-based coaching model led to increased empowerment and self-direction.

The theory of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001) might also be relevant. Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003) suggest that inquiry in a positive direction leads to positive emotion and the experience of relatedness, which opens up 'a world of strengths' (p.237) and produces energy for change. This mirrors the experience of several participants.

The final constituent of SDT is relatedness, which might be reflected in the category of *Organisational fit*. Dutton and Heaphy (2004) suggest that high-quality connections at work lead to greater energy, engagement, meaning and organisational strengths. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) suggest that positive environments generates higher team performance. Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenstein and Grant (2005) propose that a climate of trust and respect stimulates self-motivated behaviour; this might relate to the autonomy desired by the

participants as well as the valued positive feedback.

Conclusion

The study found several ways in which using strengths may be beneficial at work. This was mediated by intervening factors affecting the extent to which strengths were used. In addition, the positive benefits of learning about and using strengths affected the intervening factors themselves, thus creating a 'virtuous circle'.

This has practical implications for those wishing to improve their workplace experience and increase their engagement with work, and for those who coach and employ coaches:

● Learning about and using strengths is valuable. Benefits include positive emotion, feeling more valued at work, a more positive focus, greater sense of authenticity and renewed willingness to take action.

● In particular, identifying character strengths may be valuable because understanding personal strengths is useful in the workplace. It is not sufficient to learn one's strengths; use is necessary.

● The benefits of using strengths in the workplace may vary for different people. This practice may lead to a 'virtuous circle' wherein it becomes progressively easier and more rewarding.

● Interventions that engage with the mediating factors directly might also be useful in supporting the use of strengths. These include developing greater positivity about oneself and the working environment, cultivating action-focus and an internal locus of control, and using strengths to improve relationships with managers.

Study limitations

The study has limitations. The results would have to be tested further and with different populations to gain validity. Also, the study produced a considerable volume of data – over 300 pages. The data supports the theory, but might hold more information that would give a richer and more sophisticated picture.

The interview questions focused primarily on inquiry into positive aspects of strengths. Although they were crafted with the aim of avoiding bias towards positive answers, nonetheless there were no questions that paid specific attention to any costs of using strengths in the workplace. This information would have been valuable for further testing and refining of the model.

The study's findings might be compromised by the inclusion of a coaching intervention. Is the value experienced by participants genuinely derived from using strengths, or might it be from being coached? However, this is mitigated by the fact that the benefits of strengths were identified by participants in the first two interviews, before the coaching intervention.

Although the study gains reliability through its triangulation of data over time, there are still only three interviews, and only six participants, all female. It was not possible to gauge and control for the effect of mood and other external factors such as the economic downturn, and generalisability is clearly limited.

The literature reviewed here is mostly drawn from the canon of positive psychology. Other areas of psychology, including theories of identity, motivation, development and interaction, might provide relevant insight into the study but are not explored here.

It would be useful to test the results of this study further. In particular, it would support the current study to continue to test strengths interventions experimentally (e.g. Minhas, 2010), considering measures of positive emotion, self-efficacy, self-determination, engagement, authenticity and/or self-esteem.

Repeated testing with the same subjects, similar to the 'upward spiral' experiments, might be used to test the 'virtuous circle'. Linley et al. (2010) posit that strengths use

might be part of an 'affective learning loop' (p.13) which could link to the virtuous circle described here. It would be interesting to find ways to compare this study's model of internal change with their outcome-based model of strengths.

In conclusion, the study suggested that the experience of strengths use may be beneficial and these benefits in themselves lead to further reward. More research, and qualitative research in particular, is required here.

Francesca Elston & Dr Ilona Boniwell
University of East London.

Correspondence
Francesca Elston
School of Psychology,
Stratford Campus,
Water Lane,
London E15 4LZ, UK.
Email: f.elston@uel.ac.uk

References

Arakawa, D. & Greenberg, M. (2007). Optimistic managers and their influence on productivity and employee engagement in a technology organisation: Implications for coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 2*(1), 78–89.

Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V.S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human behaviour* (Vol. 4, pp.71–81). New York: Academic Press.

Bartunek, J. & Seo, M-G. (2002). Qualitative research can add new meanings to quantitative research. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour, 23*(2), 237–242.

Baumeister, R.F. (2003). Ego depletion and self-regulation failure: A resource model of self-control. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research 27*, 281–284.

Biswas-Diener, R. (2006). From the equator to the North Pole – a study of character strengths. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 7*, 293–310.

Boniwell, I. & Henry, J. (2007). Developing conceptions of wellbeing: Advancing subjective, hedonic and eudaimonic theories. *Social Psychology Review, 9*, 3–19.

Brun, C. & Rapp, R.C. (2001). Strengths-based case management: Individuals' perspectives on strengths and the case manager relationship. *Social Work, 46*(3), 278–288.

Buckingham, M. & Clifton, D.O. (2002). *Now, discover your strengths.* London: Simon & Schuster.

Clifton, D.O. & Harter, J.K. (2003). Investing in strengths. In K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organisational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp.111–121). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler,.

Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D., (2001). *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: A constructive approach to organization development and change.* Cleveland, OH: Lakeshore Publishers.

Cooperrider, D. L., & Sekerka, L. E. (2003). Toward a theory of positive organizational change. In K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organisational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp.225–240). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler

Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M.(1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour.* New York: Plenum.

Dutton, J.E. & Heaphy, E.D. (2003). The power of high-quality connections. In K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organisational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp.263–279). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler,.

Fredrickson, B.L. & Joiner, T. (2003) Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional wellbeing. *Psychological Science, 13*, 172–175.

Fredrickson, B.L. (2001), The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 218–226.

Fredrickson, B.L. & Losada, M.F. (2005). Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist, 60*(7), 678–686.

Fredrickson, B.L., Tugade, M.M., Waugh, C.E. & Larkin G.R. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crises? A prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 365–376.

Gyllensten, K., Palmer, S., Nilsson, E.-K., Meland Regnér & Frodi, A. (2010). Experiences of cognitive coaching: A qualitative study. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 5*(2), 98–108.

Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

Govindji, R. & Linley, P.A. (2007). Strengths use, self-concordance and wellbeing – implications for strengths coaching and coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 2*(2), 143–153.

Harris, A.H.S., Thoresen, C.E. & Lopez, S.J. (2007). Integrating positive psychology into counselling: Why and (when appropriate) how. *Journal of Counselling & Development, 85*, 3–14.

Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L. & Hayes, T.L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*, 268–279.

Isen, A. (2003). Positive affect as a source of human strength. In L. Aspinwall & U. Staudinger, *A psychology of human strengths: fundamental questions and future directions for a positive psychology.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Joseph, S. & Linley, P.A. (2005). Positive adjustment to threatening events: An organismic valuing theory of growth through adversity. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 262–280.

Linley, P.A. (2006). Counselling psychology's positive psychological agenda: A model for integration and inspiration. *The Counselling Psychologist, 34*(2), 313–322.

Linley, P.A. (2008). *Average to A+. Realising strengths in yourself and others.* Coventry, UK: CAPP Press.

Linley, P.A., Garcea, N., Hill, J., Minhas, G., Trenier, E. & Willars, J. (2010a). Strengthspotting in coaching: Conceptualisation and development of the Strengthspotting Scale. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 5*(2), 165–176.

Linley, P.A., Nielsen, K.M., Wood, A.M., Gillett, R. & Biswas-Diener, R., (2010b). Using signature strengths in pursuit of goals: Effects on goal progress, need satisfaction, and wellbeing, and implications for coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 5*(1), 8–17.

Linley, P.A., Willars, J. & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010c). *The Strengths Book.* Coventry, UK: CAPP Press.

Linley, P.A., Woolston, L. & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). Strengths coaching with leaders. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 4*(1), 37–48.

Lopez, S.J., Snyder, C.R. & Rasmussen, H.N. (2003). Striking a vital balance: Developing a complementary focus on human weakness and strength through positive psychological assessment. In S.J. Lopez & C.R. Snyder (Eds.), *Positive psychological assessment* (pp.3–20). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Losada, M. & Heaphy, E. (2004). The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of business teams. *The American Behavioural Scientist, 47*(6), 740–765.

Luthans, F. & Youssef, C.M. (2004). Human, social, and now positive psychological capital management: Investing in people for competitive advantage. *Organisational Dynamics, 33*(2).

Luthans, F. (2002a). The need for and meaning of positive organisational behaviour. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour, 23*, 695–706.

Maddux, J.R. (2002). Self-efficacy: The power of believing you can. In C.R. Snyder & S.J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp.277–287). New York: Oxford University Press.

McArdle, K.L. (2004). *In-powering spaces: A co-operative inquiry with young women in management.* Doctoral thesis.

Minhas, G. (2010). Developing realised and unrealised strengths: Implications for engagement, self-esteem, life satisfaction and wellbeing. *Assessment and Development Matters*, in press.

Noble, D.N., Perkins, K. & Fatout, M. (2000). On being a strength coach: Child welfare and the strengths model. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 17*, 141–153.

Oades, L.G., Crowe, T.P. & Nguyen, M. (2009). Leadership coaching transforming mental health systems from the inside out: The Collaborative Recovery Model as person-centred strengths-based coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 4*(1), 25–36.

Park, N. & Peterson, C. (2007). Methodological issues in positive psychology and the assessment of character strengths. In A.D. Ong & M.H.M. van Dulmen (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of methods in positive psychology* (pp.292–305). New York: Oxford University Press.

Payne, S. (2007). Grounded theory. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analysing qualitative data in psychology.* London: Sage.

Passmore, J. (2010). A grounded theory study of the coachee experience: The implications for training and practice in coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 5*(1), 48–62.

Passmore, J. & McGoldrick, S. (2009) . Super-vision, extra-vision or blind faith? A grounded theory study of the efficacy of coaching supervision. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 4*(2), 145–161.

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2003). Character strengths before and after September 11th. *Psychological Science, 14*, 381–384.

Peterson, C. & Park, N. (2006). Character strengths in organisations. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour, 27*(8), 1149–1154.

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E. P.(2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification.* Washington, DC: APA Press.

Peterson, C., Park, N. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). Greater strengths of character and recovery from illness. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 1*, 17–26.

Peterson, C., Park, N. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 6*, 25–41.

Peterson, C., Ruch, W., Beerman, U., Park, N. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2007). Strengths of character, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 2*(3), 149–159.

Pritchard, G.M. (2009). *A grounded theory of the factors that mediate the effect of a strengths-based educational intervention over a four-month period.* PhD thesis, Azusa Pacific University.

Proctor, C.L., Maltby, J. & Linley, P.A. (2010). Strengths use as a predictor of wellbeing and health-related quality of life. *Journal of Happiness Studies.* http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-009-9181-2..

Riley, S., Schouten, W. & Cahill, S. (2003). Exploring the dynamics of subjectivity and power between researcher and researched. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 4*(2).

Roberts, L.M., Dutton, J.E., Spreitzer, G.M., Heaphy, E.D. & Quinn, R.E. (2005). Composing the reflected best-self portrait: Building pathways for becoming extraordinary in work organisations. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(4), 712–736.

Robitschek. C. & Woodson, S.J. (2006). Vocational psychology: Using one of counselling psychology's strengths to foster human strength. *The Counselling Psychologist, 34*, 260–275.

Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and wellbeing. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68–78.

Saleebey, D. (1996). The strengths perspective in social work practice: Extensions and cautions. *Social Work, 41*(3), 296–306.

Saleebey, D. (2001). The diagnostic strengths manual? *Social Work, 46*(2), 183–187.

Salovey, P., Mayer, J.D., Caruso, D. & Lopes, P.N. (2003). Measuring emotional intelligence as a set of abilities with the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso emotional intelligence test. In S.J. Lopez & C.R. Snyder (Eds.), *Positive psychological assessment* (pp.251–266). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Seligman, M.E.P., Steen, T.A., Park, N. & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress – empirical validations of interventions. *American Psychologist, 60*, 410–421.

Sheldon, K.M. & Eliot, A.J. (1999). Goal striving, need satisfaction, and longitudinal wellbeing: The Self-Concordance Model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*(3), 482–497.

Sheldon, K.M. & Houser-Marko, L. (2001). Self-concordance, goal attainment, and the pursuit of happiness: Can there be an upward spiral? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*(1), 152–165.

Sheldon, K.M., Arndt, J. & Houser-Marko, L. (2003). In search of the organismic valuing process: The human tendency to move towards beneficial goal choices. *Journal of Personality, 71*(5), 835–871.

Sheridan, S.M., Warnes, E.D., Cowan, R.J., Schemm, A.V. & Clarke, B.L. (2004). Family-centred positive psychology: Focusing on strengths to build student success. *Psychology in the Schools, 41*(1), 7–18.

Smith, E.J. (2006a). The Strengths-Based Counselling Model. *The Counselling Psychologist, 34*, 13–79.

Smith, E.J. (2006b). The Strength-Based Counselling Model: A paradigm shift in psychology. *The Counselling Psychologist, 34*, 134–144.

Smith, J.A. (2008). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods.* London: Sage.

Snyder, C.R., Ritschel, L.A., Rand, K.L. & Berg, C.J. (2006). Balancing psychological assessments: Including strengths and hope in client reports. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*(1), 33–46.

Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, A. & Grant A. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organisational Science, 16*(5), 537–549.

Steen, T.A., Kachorek, L.V. & Peterson, C. (2003). Character strengths among youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 32*(1), 5–16.

Steger, M.F., Kashdan, T.B. & Oishi, S. (2008). Being good by doing good: Daily eudaimonic activity and wellbeing. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*, 22–42.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (Eds.) (1997). *Grounded theory in practice.* London: Sage.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

UEL (2010). *Code of Good Practice in Research.* www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/codeofpractice.htm

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Wong, Y. J. (2006). Strength-centered therapy – a social constructionist, virtues-based psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy-Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 43*(2), 133–146.