Adolescent Characteristics by Type of Long-Term Aim in Life

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Surveys were administered to adolescents ($N = 144$) to determine if young people varied based on the type of long-term aims they held. Using cluster analysis, four groups emerged from the data: youth without clear long-term aims, youth with self-oriented long-term aims, youth with other-oriented long-term aims, and youth with both self- and other-oriented long-term aims. The latter two clusters represent potentially purposeful youth and the self-oriented cluster represents youth with meaning in their lives. Therefore, the authors were able to compare potentially purposeful youth to youth with meaning and to youth with neither purpose nor meaning in their lives. Youth with other-oriented long-term aims were more likely to be searching for a purpose, to have identified a purpose, to report higher levels of life satisfaction, and to score higher on openness. Implications for understanding the purpose construct and for fostering purpose among adolescents are addressed.

A purpose in life represents *a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is meaningful to the self and leads to engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self* (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). This definition includes at least three important components. First, a purpose is a goal, but it is more stable and far-reaching than low-level goals such as to "find a date to prom" or to "win a soccer game." Second, a purpose is always directed at an accomplishment towards which one can make progress. The accomplishment may be reachable or unreachable; the important characteristic is not its attainability, but the sense of direction it provides in creating an objective for purpose.

Finally, a purpose is a part of one's personal search for meaning, but it also has an external component. Specifically, a purpose in life represents an intention to contribute to matters larger than the self. In this way, purpose is distinguished from meaning (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983). In addition to distinguishing

purpose from meaning, this other-oriented component represents the unique contribution the purpose construct makes to the growing literature on positive youth development. Despite the importance of this other-oriented component, it has not been examined apart from the broader purpose construct.

While this definition of purpose leaves open the possibility of negative or ignoble intentions to engage in the broader world, the present study, and the instrument described herein, is only concerned with noble or at least neutral aims. An examination of immoral or ignoble purposes is beyond the scope of this study.

A growing body of theoretical and empirical research points to the positive role a purpose in life can play in the lives of young people. For example, theoretical research identifies purpose as a developmental asset (Benson, 2006) and an important component of what makes humans flourish (Seligman, 2002). Empirical research finds that it is associated with greater levels of happiness (French & Joseph, 1999), resiliency (Benard, 1991), and psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989; Hutzell & Finck, 1994; Jeffries, 1995). Higher purpose scores also correlate with lower levels of drug use (Noblejas de la Flor, 1997; Padelford, 1974) and alcoholism (Schlesinger, Susman, & Koenigsberg, 1990; Waisberg & Porter, 1994) and higher rates of prosocial behaviors (Butler, 1968).

Given the positive role purpose clearly plays in the development of young people, leading researchers in

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adolescent development have recently expressed an interest in actively fostering purpose among young people (see Damon, 2009; Benson, 2008). However, before this important endeavor can get underway, it is essential to understand what the other-oriented aspect of the purpose construct contributes to positive youth development; otherwise, it might be just as beneficial or even more beneficial to foster a sense of meaning among young people. Therefore, adolescent participants in the present study were given a list of potential long-term aims that included both self- and other-oriented aspirations. The authors sought to ascertain whether hypothesized groups of youth existed who were attracted to other-focused long-term aims (in other words potential purposes in life) and who were primarily inspired by self-focused sources of meaning. These groups would presumably respond differently to the items on the Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick et al., 2006) described in the following. In addition, it was of interest to determine whether, if these groups were found to exist, the youth differed in terms of their levels of life satisfaction, religious affiliation, or the extent to which they were searching for or had identified a purpose in life. For example, are youth who are attracted to certain types of long-term interests more likely to have identified a purpose in life or to report higher levels of life satisfaction? Are boys or girls, older or younger adolescents, or youth from a particular religious background more likely to be attracted to a particular type of long-term aim?

The answers to these questions would be useful for at least two reasons. First, they will help further clarify the purpose construct. In particular they will determine whether the other-oriented aspect of purpose is associated with real differences or only theoretical ones. Second, these findings will be useful to teachers, parents, and other adults interested in fostering purpose among young people as they will help identify types of young people most in need of help discovering and maintaining a purpose in life.

The present study was guided by the following research questions:

- *First, are there clusters of young people who are attracted to different types of long-term aims (self- vs. other-focused)?*
- *Second, if so, do these clusters of adolescents differ in terms of their likelihood of searching for or of having identified a purpose in life?*
- *Third, do these clusters of adolescents vary in terms of their self-reported levels of life satisfaction?*
- *Fourth, do clusters of adolescents share certain demographic variables? In other words, do males or females, older or younger adolescents, more or less religious young people, or youth from different ethnic backgrounds consistently aspire to certain types of long-term aims?*
- *Fifth, do clusters of adolescents share certain personality characteristics?*

Hypotheses guided our exploration of each of these questions. First, we expected clusters of adolescents would emerge based on the types of long-term aims to which the youth were attracted. Specifically, we expected a cluster of youth who reported being inspired by other-oriented purposes and a cluster of youth who reported being inspired by self-focused sources of meaning to emerge. This hypothesis is supported by theoretical research that distinguishes purpose from meaning (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2005). Second, the purpose construct is distinguished from other long-term aims by its other-oriented focus. Therefore, we expected to find that adolescents who reported interests in other-oriented long-term aims would be more likely to be searching for and to have identified a purpose in life. Third, related research concludes that purpose is associated with subjective well-being, a construct similar to life satisfaction (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002), and other research finds that among adolescents self-reported purpose in life is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009). Therefore, we expected to find that youth whose long-term aims included other-oriented focus would also report higher levels of life satisfaction. Fourth, researchers (see Damon, 2009; Benson, 2008) have argued that all young people are capable of discovering life purposes. In other words, purpose is not a construct which favors youth from certain socioeconomic backgrounds or ethnic groups. Consistent with this theoretical argument, we did not expect to find significant differences with regard to demographic variables based on the types of long-term aims that inspired youth. Finally, the first author conducted a study of adolescent purpose exemplars, or youth with intense commitments to various purposes in life, which suggested that young people with particularly strong commitments to purposes share certain personality characteristics, including openness, humility, and vitality (Bronk, 2005). Therefore, we expected to find that more typical youth with purpose or at least a potential sense of purpose in their lives would share certain personality characteristics as well.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 144 adolescents from a medium sized Midwest town. Males made up 61.3% of the sample, with 72.5% being Caucasian, 10.6% African American, 6.3% Asian, 1.4% Hispanic, 1.4% Native American,

and 7.8% self-identifying as Other (e.g., biracial). Just under half (47.2%) of the participants were in grades seven or eight, while another 46.5% were in grades ten or eleven. The remaining students were in either grade nine (1.0%) or twelve (5.6%).

Measures

Participants completed three surveys, including portions of the Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick et al., 2006), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), and the Big Five Inventory (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998).

Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick et al., 2006)

A portion of the Revised Youth Purpose Survey, which was created by members of the Stanford Center on Adolescence to assess, among other things, the degree to which young people are inspired by certain categories of meaning and purpose, was administered. The survey asks participants to complete the phrase, "The purpose of my life is…" and offers respondents seventeen potential answers that they are asked to rate along a seven-point (strongly disagree- strongly agree) Likert scale. The seventeen items were generated based on related research conducted on meaning in life (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983). As previously mentioned, purpose and meaning are related but distinct concepts. Meaning in life refers to any source of personal meaningfulness, but personal meaningfulness is only one component of purpose. A purpose in life also features a prosocial commitment to aims beyond the self. The seventeen long-term aims included items that indicate an interest in serving others (e.g., help others, serve God or a Higher Power, make the world a better place), items that indicate an interest in serving one's own needs (e.g., make money, have fun, be successful) and items that do not indicate a clear orientation toward the self or others (e.g., do the right thing, earn the respect of others, fulfill my duties). Participants completed portions of the Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick et al., 2006) to assess their propensity to be searching for a purpose or to have identified one. A higher score on the searching for purpose subscale indicates that the individual is making an effort to find a purpose for his or her life, while a higher score on the identified purpose subscale indicates that the individual has discovered a purpose for his or her life. The portions of this scale that were used in the present study appear in the Appendix.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale assesses one's global sense of life satisfaction. Participants rated the five items on a seven-point Likert scale with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. A sample item from the scale (five items, $\alpha = .87$) is "In most ways my life is close to ideal."

Big Five Personality Inventory (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998)

The Big Five Personality Inventory is a 44-item measure that assesses individuals along the five core dimensions of personality, including openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Participants answer questions, such as "I see myself as someone who is talkative" using a five-point strongly disagree- strongly agree scale.

Statistical Analysis

In order to determine whether clusters of adolescents emerge with respect to the types of long-term aims they find inspiring, and if so how many, hierarchical cluster analysis based on Ward's method was used. Given that reasonable clusters were identified, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), discriminant analysis, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to compare the groups with respect to scores on other measures of constructs that have been identified as related to purpose. Finally, in order to gain a greater understanding as to membership in these clusters, frequencies, means, and standard errors were calculated for each cluster on selected demographic variables.

RESULTS

For the following analyses, the assumptions of normality and equality of variances (or covariance matrices in the case of multivariate analyses) were assessed. Normality was checked using QQ-plots, while equality of variances was checked using Levene's test or Box's M statistic. In all cases, the assumptions were satisfied, and thus will not be discussed with regard to each analysis.

Several common fit statistics were used to determine the likely number of clusters and appear in Table 1. These statistics were all studied (along with numerous others) by Milligan and Cooper (1985) and found to perform generally well in terms of identifying the optimal cluster solution. It should be noted that no one value can be taken as the best indicator for the number of clusters. Therefore, several were used in order to gain consensus regarding the number of clusters to retain. Results were truncated at six clusters because for all reported indices, the solution was worse as the number of clusters increased beyond that point. As would be expected, the value of R^2 declines with the number of

TABLE 1
Measures of Cluster Fit

Clusters	R^2	Semi-partial R^2	RMSSTD	CCC
2	0.18	0.10	1.34	5.41
3	0.28	0.07	1.17	9.27
4	0.35	0.04	0.89	12.29
5	0.39	0.04	0.80	9.69
6	0.42	0.03	0.99	11.17

clusters. This statistic is a measurement of the ratio of between-cluster variance to total variance. As individuals are combined into fewer and fewer clusters, this value becomes smaller because the individuals within the clusters are more heterogeneous leading to less between cluster variability. The semi-partial R^2 value is a measurement of the change in R^2 as the number of clusters is reduced. In this case, there was a marked change when the number of clusters was decreased from four to three, suggesting the presence of four clusters in the data. The root mean squared standard deviation statistic (RMSSTD) is a measure of variance across all variables in a new cluster made from combining two preexisting clusters. This value is summed across all clusters for a given number (e.g., three clusters). Larger values of the RMSSTD indicate that the resulting clusters are more heterogeneous, thus making for a less optimal solution. In this case, the five cluster solution provided the smallest value, followed by that for four clusters. Decreasing the number of clusters further resulted in increasing values of the RMSSTD. Finally, the cubic clustering criterion (CCC) as introduced by Sarle (1983) was also used. This statistic assumes that the data come from a population, in which the clusters demonstrate a uniform distribution, essentially connoting no useful grouping information. The alternative hypothesis in this case is that the data come from multiple clusters based on the measured variables. Larger values of the CCC indicate a better clustering solution, with values greater than three indicating "good" clustering (Sarle). In this case, the maximum CCC value was obtained for four clusters, suggesting that this would be the optimal number for this set of data.

Taking the results of these three statistics together, it appears that based on the hierarchical clustering using Ward's method, four clusters present in the data. In addition, an examination of the response patterns to the seventeen categories of long-term aim items was also optimal for the four cluster solution, as compared to others such as two, three, and five clusters. The following discussion will focus on describing these clusters in terms of their types of long-term aims, as well as other relevant variables that have been shown in previous research to be related to the construct of purpose in adolescents.

The means on the seventeen categories of long-term aims items appear in Table 2. As a reminder, each of these items was coded on a one to seven scale, with lower scores indicating lower levels of agreement for the specific type of long-term aim. In other words, lower scores for a specific category indicate that this type of aim was relatively unimportant to a given respondent. In order to determine which variables were contributing the most to group separation, and how the groups could best be differentiated, descriptive discriminant analysis was used, where the four clusters served as the grouping variable and the seventeen categories of long-term aim items were the predictors. Discriminant analysis is the standard approach for following up a significant MANOVA result in a post hoc fashion (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). All three of the possible discriminant functions were found to be statistically significant (a = 0.05), indicating that there were three distinct ways in which the four clusters could be differentiated on the items. The structure coefficients for the items, which appear in Table 3, were used to identify variables that were most important in defining each discriminant function. Structure values that were greater than 0.32 were considered important in differentiating the groups (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Taken together, the structure coefficients and the cluster means can be used to understand the nature of the clusters.

Discriminant function one was primarily characterized by the items *Help others*, *Make the world better*, *Fulfill duties*, *Do the right thing*, *Earn respect of others*, *Support family/friends*, and *Be successful*. The most notable pattern apparent in Table 2 is that the first cluster has much lower means for these items as compared to the

TABLE 2
Means for Categories of Purpose Items by Cluster

Item	Cluster 1 (N=6)	Cluster 2 (N=32)	Cluster 3 (N=19)	Cluster 4 (N=87)
Help others	2.00	5.13	6.21	6.41
Serve God	1.00	3.91	5.05	5.58
Make the world better	2.50	4.81	5.94	6.36
Change way people think	2.33	4.03	4.32	5.35
Create something new	3.83	4.18	4.47	5.44
Make things beautiful	3.17	4.03	4.47	5.28
Fulfill duties	2.17	4.81	5.16	6.20
Do right thing	1.83	4.75	6.05	6.59
Live life to fullest	5.33	5.63	5.84	6.71
Make money	4.17	5.47	2.47	5.47
Discover new things	3.33	4.69	4.68	6.03
Earn respect of others	1.83	5.78	4.53	6.35
Support family/friends	3.33	5.97	5.84	6.74
Serve country	2.17	3.88	3.58	5.01
Have fun	5.50	6.53	5.26	6.61
Be successful	2.67	6.38	4.63	6.64
Have good career	2.33	6.25	3.53	6.74

TABLE 3
Structure Coefficients for Categories of Purpose Items by
Discriminant Function

Meaning Item	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
Help others	0.45	−0.37	0.29
Serve God	0.21	−0.16	−0.01
Make the world better	0.36	−0.31	0.05
Change way people think	0.20	−0.07	0.17
Create something new	0.14	−0.06	0.34
Make things beautiful	0.17	−0.09	0.25
Fulfill duties	0.38	−0.13	0.09
Do right thing	0.49	−0.40	0.04
Live life to fullest	0.17	−0.06	0.41
Make money	0.15	0.45	0.34
Discover new things	0.28	−0.03	0.39
Earn respect of others	0.40	0.22	−0.19
Support family/friends	0.37	−0.02	−0.13
Serve country	0.18	0.02	0.18
Have fun	0.13	0.25	0.14
Be successful	0.46	0.42	−0.22
Have good career	0.52	0.62	0.16

other clusters. For each of these items, the means for Cluster 1 were less than 3.5, which would be in the slightly disagree to strongly disagree range. Cluster 4 consistently had the highest means on these items, whereas Cluster 2 had the second highest means on *Earn respect of others*, *Support family and friends*, and *Be successful*. Cluster 3 had the second highest mean values on the items *Help others*, *Make the world better*, *Fulfill duties*, and *Do the right thing*.

Function two was characterized by *Help others*, *Do the right thing*, *Make money*, *Be successful*, and *Have a good career*. As noted previously, for the items *Help others* and *Do the right thing*, Cluster 3 had the second highest mean, with values within approximately 0.5 of Cluster 4. On the other hand, Cluster 2 had the second highest means on the items *Make money*, *Be successful*, and *Have a good career*. This differential pattern in the cluster means for the variables *Help others* and *Do the right thing* as compared to the other three variables that were associated with this canonical variable is the reason that the structure coefficients for these two variables are negative. The means of these items ranged in the agree range (5.5 to 6.75), indicating strong agreement by members of these clusters with these items. For both clusters, the means were above six indicating values between *agree* and *strongly agree*. As was true for the items associated with discriminant function one, Cluster 1 had the lowest mean value on these items, with the exception of *Make money*, in which case the lowest mean belonged to Cluster 3.

Finally, the third discriminant function was characterized by *Create something new*, *Live life to the fullest*, *Make money*, and *Discover new things*. For each of these items, Cluster 4 had the highest mean values. In

addition, across the three significant discriminant functions, these four items represent the cases in which the means for Cluster 1 were the most comparable to those for the other three clusters. In fact, for *Make money*, Cluster 1 had a higher value than Cluster 3, as was noted previously. In addition, the mean for Cluster 2 was slightly higher than for Cluster 3 on the *Create something new* item and the mean for Cluster 3 was slightly higher than for Cluster 2 on the *Live life to the fullest* item, whereas the means for *Discover new things* for the two clusters were essentially the same.

Based on these results, it is possible to characterize the four clusters as unique representatives of subgroups within the population of adolescents based on their preferred categories of long-term aims. Cluster 1 will be referred to as the no orientation group. They had the uniformly lowest scores on all of the items with the exception of *Live life to the fullest*, *Make money*, and *Have fun*. Even for these items their means were the second lowest. These results suggest that, relatively speaking, they demonstrated neither a strong self- nor other-orientation in regard to life goals. Cluster 2 can be characterized as a predominantly self-focused group. They had the highest mean for *Make money* (along with Cluster 4), and the second highest means for *Earn the respect of others, Support family and friends, Be successful*, and *Have a good career*. They had relatively lower means for *Help others, Make the world a better place, Fulfill duties*, and *Do the right thing*. In many ways, Cluster 3 demonstrated a diametrically opposite pattern from Cluster 2. Indeed, Cluster 3 can be seen as primarily other-focused. They had the second highest mean values on the items *Help others, Make the world a better place, Fulfill duties*, and *Do the right thing*. In addition, they had the lowest value for *Make money* and the second lowest for *Be successful, Earn the respect of others, Be successful*, and *Have a good career*. Finally, Cluster 4 can be characterized as being both other- and self-focused in terms of the categories of long-term aims they identified as most important. A review of the item means indicates that this group had uniformly the highest means on all of the items, indicating that they endorse long-term aims that are oriented toward themselves as well as others.

In order to more fully describe the nature of the four clusters, the demographic characteristics of each were examined, results of which appear in Table 4. Individuals were classified by gender, race (Caucasian or other), self-identified religious affiliation (Christian or other), and grade in school. The chi-square test of association was used to determine whether there was a relationship between cluster membership and each of these categorical demographic variables, including gender, race, and religious affiliation. In order to maintain an overall Type 1 error rate of 0.05, the Bonferroni

TABLE 4
Demographic Characteristics by Cluster

Demographics	Cluster 1 (N=6)	Cluster 2 (N=32)	Cluster 3 (N=19)	Cluster 4 (N=87)
Gender- Male	83.3%	75.0%	52.9%	56.3%
Race- Caucasian	83.3%	80.7%	77.8%	67.8%
Religion- Christian	16.7%	64.5%	79.0%	77.9%
		Mean (standard error)		
Grade	8.83 (0.83)	8.88 (0.33)	9.21 (0.34)	9.21 (0.18)

correction was employed, so that for each test the effective α level was 0.05/3, or 0.017. The results of these tests indicated that cluster membership was related to gender ($p = 0.001$), religious affiliation ($p = 0.00008$), and ethnicity ($p = 0.007$). These results suggest that there were significant differences across clusters in the distribution of each of these demographic variables.

Standardized residuals can be used to ascertain which combination(s) of cluster membership and the demographic variables contributed the most to the significant overall Chi-square values (Agresti, 2002). These values are simply the standardized difference between the observed frequency for a given combination of cluster and demographic category, and the expected frequency if the null hypothesis of no relationship between the variables held true. It is typically recommended that values greater than 2 signify that a combination of categories is contributing significantly to the overall significant Chi-square value. With respect to religion, the standardized residuals indicated that Cluster 1 reported a non-Christian religious affiliation more frequently than would be expected if the null hypothesis of no relationship between cluster and religious affiliation were true. In addition, the standardized residuals showed that Clusters 3 and 4 had fewer males than would be expected were the null true, and Cluster 4 had fewer Caucasians than would be expected. The adolescents in all of the clusters were enrolled in grade nine, on average.

In order to gain greater understanding of the nature of the four clusters identified here, mean scores on the searching for purpose and identified purpose subscales were compared using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). This analysis revealed a significant difference among the clusters on searching for and identified purpose ($p < 0.05$), while structure coefficients from the discriminant analysis follow up indicated that both variables contributed to the difference, with identified purpose contributing the most (structure values: identified = 0.9877, searching = 0.7577). The means and standard errors for these variables by cluster appear in Table 5. Based on these values, it appears that the no orientation group (Cluster 1) had much lower scores on both searching for and identified purpose. In addition, the both self- and other-focused cluster (4) had the highest means for both scales, followed by the other-focused cluster (3) and then the self-focused group (Cluster 2).

Related research suggests that a purpose in life may be associated with life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). Mean life satisfaction scores for the clusters were compared using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results of this analysis were statistically significant ($F_{3,137} = 11.1$, $p < 0.0001$) indicating that the clusters had significantly different means on the life satisfaction measure. Tukey's studentized range test was used to determine which clusters' means, which appear in Table 5, differed from one another. The no orientation group (Cluster 1) had significantly lower life satisfaction scores than any of the other groups ($a = 0.05$), whereas both the self- and other-focused group (Cluster 4) had significantly higher means than the other clusters. The other (Cluster 3) and self-focused (Cluster 2) groups did not have significantly different means on the life satisfaction measure.

Finally, in order to gain insights into potential personality differences among the four groups, their mean scores on the Big 5 personality measures (extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness)

TABLE 5
Outcome Measures by Cluster

Characteristics mean (standard error)	Cluster 1 (N=6)	Cluster 2 (N=32)	Cluster 3 (N=19)	Cluster 4 (N=87)	F
Searching for purpose	17.83 (1.86)	22.70 (0.88)	24.05 (1.05)	25.88 (0.52)	8.5**
Identified purpose	48.17 (4.89)	67.59 (2.31)	70.84 (2.75)	77.08 (1.38)	
Life satisfaction	14.17[a] (2.31)	22.94[b] (0.99)	22.00[b] (1.30)	26.16[c] (0.62)	11.1**
Extraversion	29.25 (1.74)	29.96 (0.67)	30.83 (0.82)	32.51 (0.40)	1.8*
Conscientiousness	34.00 (1.36)	32.59 (0.52)	32.33 (0.64)	33.55 (0.31)	
Neuroticism	30.25 (1.60)	28.15 (0.62)	27.72 (0.75)	29.81 (0.36)	
Openness	37.75 (1.85)	36.15 (0.71)	37.94 (0.87)	38.69 (0.42)	
Agreeableness	31.75 (2.52)	33.00 (0.97)	33.33 (1.88)	34.88 (0.58)	

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.
[a]Means with different subscripts were found to have significantly different means based on Tukey's post hoc test.

were compared using MANOVA. The groups were found to have significantly different means (lambda = 0.799, $p = 0.03$). The structure coefficients from the discriminant analysis revealed that extraversion (SC = 0.77) was the most important at differentiating the groups, followed by neuroticism (SC = 0.61), and openness (SC = 0.59), and finally agreeableness (SC = 0.43) and conscientiousness (SC = 0.41). The means and standard errors for these five scales by cluster appear in Table 5. An examination of these means reveals that the both self- and other-focused cluster (Cluster 4) had the highest mean for the extraversion measure, whereas the no orientation group (Cluster 1) and self-focused group (Cluster 2) had the lowest means on this variable. In contrast, the no orientation group (Cluster 1) had the highest mean on the neuroticism measure, followed by the both self- and other-focused group (Cluster 4), whereas the other-focused group (Cluster 3) had the lowest mean value, with the self-focused (Cluster 2) group mean being slightly higher. The both self- and other-focused group (Cluster 4) had the highest mean on the openness variable, with the no orientation group (Cluster 1) and other-focused group (Cluster 3) having nearly identical means, and the self-focused group (Cluster 2) having the lowest mean openness score.

DISCUSSION

Given the aforementioned results described, the answer to both of the overarching questions posed by this study—are there clusters of young people who are attracted to certain types of long-term aims, and do these clusters differ in consistent ways—appears to be yes. Clearly defined clusters of young people who said they were attracted to certain types of long-term aims emerged from the data. This conclusion was consistent with our first hypothesis. However, we had expected only two groups to emerge; instead four did. The first group of youth, the no orientation cluster, reported the lowest scores for nearly all types of long-term aims. We believe this means that a small, but not insignificant, number of young people have yet to identify a source of life meaning or purpose. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they never will, only that they have not yet done so. Since this cluster consisted of only six youth, results related to this cluster should be interpreted with caution. However, other studies of purpose have similarly identified clusters of young people who fail to report a strong commitment to any type of long-term aim (Moran, 2009); therefore, despite the small number of participants in this group, we include this cluster in our discussion of the results. The second group, or the self-focused cluster, consisted of youth who reported high scores for self-oriented sources of meaning

(e.g., *Make money*, *Be successful*) and low scores for other-oriented sources of purpose. The third group of adolescents, or the other-focused cluster, exhibited essentially the opposite pattern of responses. These young people reported high scores for other-oriented sources of purpose (e.g., *Help others*, *Make the world a better place*) and low scores for self-oriented sources of meaning. Finally, the fourth group, or the both self- and other-oriented cluster, reported high scores for both self- and other-oriented long-term aims. Respondents in the latter two groups reported being drawn to at least some other-oriented long-term aims; therefore, these groups represent youth with potentially purposeful interests.

Because clusters of youth emerged with and without other-oriented interests, the authors were able to compare these groups and to begin to determine if the other-oriented component of the purpose construct was associated with real differences or only theoretical ones. In the analyses that follow, a pattern emerges that demonstrates clear differences between young people based on whether or not they demonstrated an interest in at least some other-oriented long-term aims. These differences confirm that the other-oriented component of purpose is significant in differentiating purpose from the meaning in life construct.

For example, the other-focused clusters of young people differed from the self-focused youth and from the youth with no clear long-term aims in regards to their levels of self-reported purposefulness. Consistent with our second hypothesis, results revealed that the latter two groups of young people, or those who expressed other-oriented interests, were more likely to be searching for a purpose and more likely to have identified a purpose in life than the former two groups. In other words, the young people in our sample who were drawn to long-term aims that could have an impact on the broader world represented the same young people who were most likely to be searching for and to have identified a purpose for their lives.

Next analyses were conducted to see if youth with potentially purposeful interests reported higher levels of life satisfaction than youth without such interests. The both self- and other-oriented group reported the highest levels of life satisfaction, followed by the other-oriented group and the self-oriented group, which reported essentially the same life satisfaction scores. The no orientation group reported the lowest life satisfaction scores. In sum, the groups that expressed purposeful interests reported relatively high life satisfaction scores. This finding lends empirical support to researcher's theoretical claims that purpose is associated with positive youth development outcomes (Benson, 2006; Damon, 2009).

Analyses were also run to determine whether youth with potentially purposeful, other-oriented interests were more likely than other adolescents to share certain

demographic or personality characteristics. In partial support of our fourth hypothesis, results revealed only minor demographic differences. Potentially purposeful youth were slightly more likely to be ethnically diverse and older than non-purposeful clusters of young people. They were also more likely to identify themselves as Christian. A growing body of literature suggests that religiosity in young people correlates with positive developmental outcomes (Lerner, Roeser, & Phelps, 2008), which often include a desire to contribute to causes larger than the self (Damon, 2009; Lerner, 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising that the other-oriented groups were more likely to identify themselves as religious. It may also be the case that the sample interpreted religion as a proxy for church engagement, and Christian sects typically socialize youth to a worldview that expects persons to balance self-needs with a concern for others. Potentially purposeful youth were also more likely to be female, which underscores existing research that finds that girls are typically more other-oriented than boys (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, & Bridges, 2000). Finally, in partial support of our fifth hypothesis, results revealed that in terms of personality characteristics, the potentially purposeful groups were slightly more likely to be extraverted and open and less likely to be neurotic than the other groups.

Taken together, the demographic and personality characteristics findings are significant for at least three reasons. First, they help clarify an important theoretical claim. Damon (2009), Benson (2006), and others have argued that all young people are capable of pursuing purpose in life; purposes, they argue, are not only available to young people from particular ethnic or religious backgrounds, for example. The present study lends some empirical support to this claim, and it confirms that young people from varied backgrounds and with varied personality profiles are likely to identify other-oriented long-term aims.

Second, the subtle personality differences that surfaced also have important implications for fostering purpose among youth. Just as openness and extraversion emerged as characteristics of the more typical youth with purposeful interests in this study, openness and the related construct, vitality, also appeared as defining characteristics of adolescent purpose exemplars (Bronk, 2005). It may be the case that more open and extraverted youth are actually more likely to identify other-oriented long-term aims in life, but it seems more likely that youth with this personality profile are better equipped to seek out the support required to identify and remain committed to other-oriented interests over the long-term. Young people who are open are likely to be more receptive to new ideas and activities, which could serve as purposes in life, and outgoing youth are more likely to elicit support from both peers and adults who can help them identify and pursue purposeful interests. For researchers and practitioners interested in fostering purpose among young people, then, this finding suggests interventions should target young people who might be more reserved and not as immediately receptive to new ideas. These types of youth may represent the individuals most in need of help discovering an inspiring life purpose.

Finally, an interesting and unanticipated finding that emerged from this study was that those young people who expressed both self- and other-oriented interests generally demonstrated more positive developmental outcomes than those youth who expressed only other-oriented interests. For example, young people with both self- and other-oriented long-term aims reported higher levels of life satisfaction and searching for and identified purpose scores than young people who reported only other-oriented long-term aims. Youth with long-term aims directed toward the self and others were also slightly more open and extraverted than the solely other-oriented group. These findings suggest that young people should be encouraged to link their own aims to others' needs rather than to focus exclusively on others' needs. This focus on promoting both self-focused along with other-focused aims is likely to make the concept of purpose more palatable to young people.

The present study, as with most studies, raises several questions that warrant additional attention from researchers. For example, a similar study with a more diverse sample would yield more broadly applicable findings. The present sample consisted primarily of Caucasian youth which limited our ability to draw significant conclusions about the way ethnicity contributes to young people's long-term aims. It would be useful to determine if youth from particular ethnic backgrounds are more likely to espouse particular types of long-term aims. The present sample also consisted of young people living in a relatively homogenous Midwest town. Future studies should investigate the role regional differences and socioeconomic backgrounds play in influencing the types of long-term aims that appeal to young people.

It would also be useful to conduct this study with a participant-generated list of long-term aims. It is possible that individuals who failed to identify long-term aims might have been drawn to interests or aims that did not appear on the survey. It is also possible that those young people who expressed interests in self-focused aims might have been drawn to other-oriented long-term aims that were not included in the present study. Further, the list of long-term aims included in this study was based in part on De Vogler and Ebersole's (1980, 1981, 1983) research, which consisted of a series of extensive studies of meaning. These studies identified the most commonly cited sources of meaning in life according to adolescent, college aged, and adult participants. However, the De Vogler and Ebersole studies were conducted in the 1980s, and the past thirty years have witnessed

significant social, political, and economic changes which are likely to influence reports of meaning and purpose in life. If these studies were conducted today, participants would probably generate a slightly different list of long-term aims, and offering a different list of long-term aims from which to choose may have altered the results of our study.

Despite these relatively minor limitations, findings generated by this study have important implications both for researchers' and practitioners' growing knowledge of the purpose construct, as well as for the ways in which parents, teachers, and other adults concerned about the welfare of young people should approach the important task of fostering purpose among adolescents. The conclusions of the present study suggest that indeed purpose and meaning in life are distinct concepts, not just in a theoretical sense, but also in a practical sense. The difference between purpose and meaning is associated with significant differences in the lives of young people. In particular, young people who are attracted to at least some other-oriented long-term aims, or potential sources of purpose, are more likely to demonstrate purpose, report high levels of life satisfaction, and be open and extraverted.

Because this study determined that the other-oriented component of the purpose construct was associated with positive youth outcomes and with higher rates of purpose, adults interested in fostering purpose should encourage young people to develop at least some other-focused long-term aims. For example, teachers could encourage students to focus not just on what an education will allow them to do for themselves, but also on what it will allow them to do for others; religious leaders for youth could do the same. Parents could share with adolescents the many ways in which their own other-oriented life aims have positively influenced their lives. However it is achieved, encouraging youth to connect their own interests with the interests of others appears to be a desirable aim as it seems likely to foster positive youth outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick et al., 2006) 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); items will be randomly arranged The purpose of my life is to . . .

1. Help others.
2. Serve God/a Higher Power.
3. Make the world a better place.
4. Change the way people think.
5. Create something new.
6. Make things more beautiful.
7. Fulfill my obligations.
8. Do the right thing.
9. Live life to the fullest.
10. Make money.
11. Discover new things about the world.
12. Earn the respect of others.
13. Support my family and friends.
14. Serve my country.
15. Have fun.
16. Be successful.
17. Have a good career.