PURPOSE IN ADOLESCENCE
What am I here for?:
A qualitative examination on the expression, development and integration of purpose in at-risk and thriving male adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the differential role of purpose in the lives of high school male students representing a range of personal and academic well-being, including both thriving and at-risk participants. A primary aim of this study was to provide a comprehensive description of the types of purpose adolescent males express and to investigate the degree to which they are integrated into their lives. Results suggest that most youth, even those at risk, can articulate a sense of purpose, and the majority identify school as a primary source of purpose in their lives. This study found that while most young men report having purposes, these purposes lack differentiation and are just beginning to be defined. Most young men report having purposes that they are optimistic about fulfilling, are realistic in nature, influence their decisions and are salient.

Introduction

Definitional confusion, methodological limitations and lack of empirical findings have impeded the emergence of a comprehensive theory of purpose. A clear understanding of the features of purpose and how it functions during adolescence is especially lacking. This study attempts to describe youth purpose in detail, examining not only the types of purposes youth espouse, but also the features of those purposes and the role purpose plays in their lives. The present study explores what adolescent males identify as their purpose, how they integrate it into their lives. A major question was to explore the association between features of purpose in male adolescents and indicators of thriving, particularly the degree to which youth endorse restraint values and future orient.

Definition of Purpose

The term “purpose” has become increasingly popular, but what exactly does it mean? Webster’s New World Dictionary (1998) defines purpose as “(1) something one intends to get or do; (2) determination or resolution; (3) the object for which something exists.” Psychologically speaking, individuals intrinsically long and search for a reason why life their lives are worth living (Frankl, 1963). Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) envision purpose as “the ontological significance of life” (p. 201) and Klinger (1998) points out that purpose instills people with a sense of intention: “what is this for?” One’s personal reason for existence has been described as his or her purpose in life.
Although many authors have attempted to describe what purpose is, the concept is not well defined within research literature, and is often used interchangeably with meaning and life goals or aims (Damon, Mennon & Bronk, 2003). This study utilized a definition of purpose as a life goal that gives an individual a sense that he has a reason for his beliefs, behaviors or overall existence. It differs from the concept of personal meaning, in that it involves aspiring or striving to meet a specific state or goal.

**Function of Purpose**

Researchers have concluded that the primary function of purpose is to enable people to believe and feel that their lives are meaningful and important (Baumeister, 1991). The positive beliefs and emotions purpose promotes are thought to play a vital role in promoting psychological health (Debats, 1998). Studies have identified purpose as a key indicator of well-being (Ryff, 1989; Wong(a), 1998), while others associate it with positive outcomes such as meeting one’s clinical goals (Katz, 1988), facilitating prosocial behavior (Furrow, King, White, 2004), and living a longer, more satisfied life (Wong (b), 1998; Zika & Chamberlain, 1988).

Purpose has been shown to provide people with affective benefits, helping them feel fulfilled and satisfied (Frankl, 1963). It can also give people a cognitive framework for leading their lives (Battista & Almond, 1973) and motivating them to pursue their goals (Reker & Wong, 1988; Maddi, 1967). Purpose in life is also expressed in those who integrate their cognitive frameworks and emotional feelings of significance to create a clear vision for their future (Battista & Almond, 1973), providing inducement for the construction of concrete life goals. Once these life goals are in place, a sense of purpose motivates one’s current behavior in the direction of obtaining his or her envisioned future goal-states (Baumeister, 1991).

**Role of purpose in adolescence**

Much of the research that demonstrates the positive function purpose plays in one’s life, however, has only included adults. A gap exists in research literature exploring adolescent purpose in depth. Developmentally speaking, adolescents may express different purposes than adults, as well as the role it plays in their lives. Given that people need to commit to an ideology at the completion of their adolescent years in order to create a healthy life plan (Erikson, 1968) it makes sense that identity development would influence one’s purpose expression.

Research has not determined how normative it is for adolescents to articulate clearly defined and differentiated purposes. How much should we expect young people to articulate having a defined sense of purpose? De Vogler and Ebersole (1983, 1985) found that both kindergarteners and young adolescents are able to identify things in their life that are meaningful. These authors concluded that when asked, 95% of respondents are able to express the presence of something meaningful to them in their lives. A small number of case studies conducted with aging adults concluded that the subjects formed their purpose in life during late adolescence (Atkinson, 1987), but this research did not indicate how developed their purposes were.
In addition, all adolescents may not integrate purpose into their evolving identity in similar ways. Researchers have not examined purpose in youth in sufficient detail to determine whether purpose looks differently across different groups of adolescents. It could very well be the case that the rate of development of purpose varies significantly during this time of life. Some have suggested that one begins to construct his or her life plan during adolescence (Parks, 2000), but the construction of a life plan, which involves identifying one’s purpose, may extend well past the adolescent years. Wong (1998) recently stipulated that the search for coherence, order and purpose in life does not only depend on what one does but also is invested from who one is. It makes sense that youth purpose would vary along a continuum of differentiation and developmental maturity as they explore their identities.

Furthermore, what do adolescent do with their purposes? Although two adolescents may express having similar purposes in life (e.g. to pursue a career), one may express that this purpose motivates him to enroll in business classes while another generally connects his purpose to doing well in school. No study to date has examined the way youth integrate purpose into their lives.

The Current Study

There have not been definitive studies asking youth to explain how they see their purposes being integrated into their lives. The current study therefore examines purpose in a population that has primarily been excluded from the literature.

One of the primary contributions of this study to the purpose literature is describing what types of purposes adolescent men report. This study explored the categories of purpose youth espouse, attempting to delineate what types of purpose are prominent during this period of life. These two questions have been examined qualitatively and quantitatively for the concept of meaning in life in both adult and adolescent samples (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1985) but little research to date has provided a comprehensive assessment of youth purpose.

The study also investigates the developmental maturity of purpose during this stage of life, describing the degree to which purpose is differentiated and defined for this group of young men. Baumeister (1991) argued that purpose involves several connected goals that are generated from who we think we are, and how we think life operates. Purpose is not just about what one does or wants to do, but may also serve as a reflection of one’s identity (Emmons, 1999). As adolescents are beginning to answer these questions (Parks, 2000), it is likely that their purposes may not be developmentally mature. Research has not examined the developmental maturity of purpose in any population, and thus has offered no insight into what it looks like in adolescents.

In addition to developmental maturity, a major interest was how purpose functioned in the lives of these youth. Although research with adults suggests that the longing to feel and think purposefully in life often manifests itself in daily decision-making (Klinger, 1994), no study has endeavored to explore
how purpose functions in the lives of adolescents. This study investigated six key functional qualities of purpose in the lives of male adolescents, exploring whether their purposes are long-term in nature, realistic, optimistic, activated, progressing, and salient.

Research has circumvented qualitative approaches in asking youth to articulate their purposes, limiting the development of a comprehensive understanding of the role it plays in their lives (Damon, Mennon & Bronk, 2003). The current study used a semi-structured purpose interview with youth to allow youth to speak in their own words about their understanding of purpose and how they incorporate it into their lives. By including both thriving exemplars and at-risk youth, the present study employed a qualitative methodology to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the features and function of purpose in adolescents from diverse backgrounds.

Methods

Participants
The sample included 57 male adolescents. At the time of the interview, participants were in their sophomore and junior of high school, ranging in age from 15 to 18 years old (M = 16.2). As a whole, the sample included youth from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Participants reported that 55% of their mother’s worked full-time and 18% had earned a college degree. They also reported that 9.8% of their fathers were unemployed and 16% had earned a college degree. The group comprised a diverse sample of ethnic backgrounds, 39.3% African American, 27.9% Hispanic, 9.8% Caucasian, 4.9% Asian, and 18% Other/more than one of the above.

Procedures
This study was part of a larger research project funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice examining a broad range of youth issues, including but not limited to: violence, gambling, drug and alcohol use, community resources and risk factors, identity, critical life experiences, values and religious and community involvement.

Sample selection included recruiting youth from two populations within the same community in order to evaluate whether purpose varies among youth who exhibit a range of thriving or at-risk behaviors. The first group of youth included 28 at-risk males identified through an alternative school program or a court diversion program. The second group included 29 thriving young men identified as “thriving” from teacher nominations at a nearby public school.

Recruitment of the participants took place in three settings within one community. A few of the at-risk youth (N = 3) were selected based on their enrollment in a first offense court diversion program. Youth participating in this program were arrested for offenses ranging from truancy to petty theft. The majority of at-risk youth included in this study (N = 26) were selected based on their placement in alternative school in the public school system. This target school provides alternative educational strategies, such as shortened school days and vocational training, for youth who have not performed well in traditional school settings. Students in this school were required to enroll in the alternative
school due to conduct problems in traditional school settings. These behavioral problems included illegal, aggressive or violent behaviors, negative attitudes towards authority figures, a lack of attendance, or the failure to restrain for risk. These students were placed in an alternative school until they demonstrated appropriate citizenship. As participants qualified as being at-risk by the nature of their enrollment in this school, the research study was presented to interested students on numerous occasions. Researchers presented the purpose and procedure of the research project to youth in this alternative school, and interested students were then able to self-refer.

Thriving youth were nominated by teachers at a high school within in the same community. Many of the at-risk young men had been enrolled in this school before transferring to the alternative school. The recruiting of these thriving youth followed the nomination procedure established by Hart and Fegley (1995) in their study of adolescent care exemplars in Camden, New Jersey. The nomination process unfolded three major steps: (a) forming criteria by which moral exemplars could be identified, (b) soliciting nominations from community members, and (c) selecting a sample from the pool of nominees. The criteria for nomination were drawn from church youth group leaders in Camden and from previous research and care and morality (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992).

Following all nominations, the parents/guardians of each adolescent were sent a letter introducing the study, reviewing its primary objectives as well as the limits to confidentiality. Follow-up phone calls were made to the nominated youth and their parents to answer questions about the study and ascertain the interest of the child in participating in the interview. Before participating in the interview both verbal and written consent were obtained from the youth and his parent. Youth were compensated with a gift card worth $75 for participating in the research study.

**Measures**

Although a number of other written scales were included in the larger research project, the present study utilized only demographic information (including age, grade, gender, race, and SES variables), and verbal responses to the purpose in life semi-structured interview.

**Purpose in life interview protocol.** A semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on a review of purpose and meaning literature and primary research questions. The interview was designed to allow each participant to describe their perspectives and viewpoints in his own words (Morrow & Smith, 2000). The interview protocol was tested in two pilot interviews with youth matching the demographic profile of the participants being recruited for the study in order to determine the length of time needed for an interview, the effectiveness of the questions for eliciting narratives of concrete experiences, and for completeness. The interview protocol was adjusted and revised based on this pilot testing. The interview can be found in the Appendix A.

**Data Analysis**

A coding scheme was developed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1988) that followed a constant comparison method until theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Following a
training period on a separate sample of purpose interviews, two advanced, clinical psychology graduate students employed double coding procedure (Cohen, 1960) in order to establish inter-rater reliability for the coding scheme and data analysis. Both raters coded the same 18 interviews (27%) randomly selected from the pool of 57 interviews. This coding scheme showed good reliability, with an average Kappa of .75. For exploratory research, a coefficient of .70 or more is considered statistically reliable (Lombard et al., 2002).

Spearman Rho calculations were used to determine the associations between the purpose variables.

Results

A primary aim of this study was to examine what types of purpose adolescent males express and to investigate the degree to which they are integrated into their lives.

Most participants reported that they felt their lives had purpose, with 85% of the sample reporting that they had a sense of purpose. Only 6% reported that they did not know if they had a purpose. In addition, most participants reported having at least two categories from which a sense of purpose emerges (90%, N = 53) and 37% reported having multiple purposes from three or more categories.

Over the whole interview, the most frequently cited purpose across subjects was achieving in school, described by 51% of the sample as purposeful. Although this category of purpose was frequently cited during the purpose interview, it was not the most common category to be cited first. When first asked about their purpose, only 17.5% of the sample first mentioned school. Service-oriented purposes tended to be at the forefront of participants’ minds when thinking of their purpose, with 26% speaking about service purposes first before mentioning other types of purposes. One participant explained his purpose this way, which reflects that service provides him with a sense of purpose: “I am trying to grow up to be somebody that helps other people so um I think I have a purpose to be someone to do something to make other people’s lives better.”

In addition, many of the participants (21%, N = 13) of the sample first mentioned “self-actualization” strivings as their sense of purpose. These strivings often included becoming a better person, or restraining from negative activities. One person was emphatic that his purpose was to not follow a negative family pattern: “I am not being a drop out and in my family, that’s a good sign, like “he’s going to make it,” and I don’t have babies, I don’t have no tattoos, I don’t gangbang or nothing and in my family, that’s good.”

No participants initially mentioned gaining material objects as their sense of purpose, although these sources emerged after they provided other categories of purpose first. Table 1 depicts the frequency of the purposes reported by the participants.

When examined for developmental maturity, this sample’s purposes tended to reflect an emerging differentiation (60%). Youth with emerging purposes provided vague details of how the purpose was concretely connected to their identities (e.g. “to be successful...have
he was to provide clear reasons why his purposes were important, or salient, to his life. In addition, the more optimistic a participant expressed that he would fulfill his purpose, the more likely he was to express realistic purposes. Having purposes that influence one’s decisions, or purposes that are activated, was significantly related to reports of intentional behaviors aimed at progressing the participant’s purpose.

The developmental maturity of the participant’s responses was found to be significantly related to activated purpose (Spearmans’ rho \( rs = 0.353, p = .008 \)) progressing purposes (\( rs = .374, p = .005 \)) salient purposes (\( rs = .450, p = .001 \)) and long-term purposes (\( rs = .365, p = .006 \)). Other qualities of purpose were not significantly correlated with development of purpose.

Discussion

The study aimed to better understand three key dimensions of life purpose in adolescence: the categories of purpose, the maturity of purpose, and the functional qualities of their purpose.

This study examined the frequency young men at this stage of life report having a sense of purpose in order to determine how appropriate it is to research purpose in adolescent populations. Most of the young men in this study expressed that they had a sense of purpose, although some stated that they could not concretely define it at the current point in time. This finding reflects previous research indicating that most people report having a sense of meaning in their lives (DeVolger & Ebersole, 1980). However, one study conclud-
ed that adolescent males in particular report a lower degree of purpose than any other group (Meier & Edwards, 1974), and another points out that a sense of purpose strengthens with age (Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987; Van Ranst & Marcoen, 1997). The current study suggests that adolescent males understand the concept of purpose and can articulate their own purposes readily when asked.

If most youth report having a sense of purpose, what type of purposes do they have? There is convergence between the categories of meaning and purpose when it comes to what this sample reported was purposeful to them. Analysis of youth descriptions of their purposes identified 8 different categories of purpose, with school being the most frequently cited category of the entire sample throughout the interview. Similar to school providing a sense of meaning (De Volger & Ebersole, 1983), many youth find school to be purposeful and important to their lives. This finding makes sense given the amount of time and energy adolescents spend in school. Youth have been bombarded over the last ten years with messages reinforcing the value of an education (Kirst, 1998) and their educational confidence has been reported to be at an all time high (Astin, 1996).

School achievement may have been the category of purpose that emerged the most times across both groups, but it was not often the category the youth talked about first. In fact, no participant ever mentioned school first when describing his purpose. Twenty-eight percent of the entire sample named service oriented purposes first. The sample as a whole described their purposes in terms of prosocial activities, namely, “helping others.”

In addition to helping others, the young men reported self-actualization purposes often. If service purposes are intended to benefit other people (they are inter-personal) self-actualization purposes are intended to benefit oneself (they are intra-personal). Adolescence may be a time in general where focusing on developing a sense of self may foster intrapersonal goals. The fact that part of the sample was selected based on their achievement may also explain the prevalence of intrapersonal purposes.

This study found that while most young men report having purposes, these purposes lack differentiation and are just beginning to be defined. The majority of youth knew they had a purpose, but could not articulate the exact direction or form their purposes would take. Purpose may develop more distinct features, such as clear commitment and fidelity, as youth naturally explore their identities (Furrow, King, & White, 2004). This stage of life in particular is the most crucial to successfully launch people into adulthood, as youth are creating their identity and learning how to build significant relationships with other people (Markstrom & Kalmanir, 2001). During this period of life, youth have only begun to identify and evaluate their strengths, weaknesses, and resources (Marcia, 1966; Elder, 1998). Using an analogy, youth may already have developed the concrete “bones” of purpose, a motivational desire to accomplish something meaningful to them. These bones provide motivation and general structure of what types of things are purposeful, which may be described as categories of purpose (e.g. school, service, relationships). During this stage of life, they are beginning to try on different “skins” of purposes as they shape
their identities. It could be the case where youth “try on” different purposes through high school and even college before settling on a permanent, differentiated purpose. In fact, more than one-third of the entire sample reported having three or more purposes in his life, which further suggests that youth are exploring general purposes during this period of life.

This study was designed to comprehensively describe how integrated purpose is into the lives of adolescent males. As a whole, the majority of the sample were able to demonstrate that their purposes were integrated and making a difference in their lives. In fact, over 60% of the sample conveyed that their purposes were optimistic and realistic. Over 50% of the overall group expressed purposes that influenced their decisions and were personally salient to them, and 49% of the young men communicated that they were engaged in activities progressing toward their purposes. Adolescents may report emerging purposes, purposes that are less defined, but even these purposes continue to significantly impact their lives.

Understanding these qualities helps us understand the unique qualities of purpose during adolescence. For instance, while a handful of young men did express a desire to play professional sports or become millionaires, most expressed purposes that they would be able to reasonably achieve. If anything, youth reported purposes that were socially expected, such as getting a good job and having a family. So, while purposes may be realistic, they are overall unchallenging.

Compared to other purpose qualities, where the majority of the sample demonstrated developed purpose characteristics, only one-third of the sample conveyed having purposes that were long-term in nature. It appears that youth are just as likely to envision goals that extend past 5 years as they are to set their sights on goals that are more immediate. Damon, Mennon and Bronk (2003) articulated that purpose is a stable and far-reaching construct. Yet these findings have indicated that purpose during adolescence can be either short or long reaching construct. Having short-term purposes may enable youth to explore different interests, or to more fully realize their strengths and weaknesses. Again, this finding supports the notion of purpose in adolescence as fluid and related to identity exploration.

Some authors may argue that short-term purposes are not purposes at all (Damon, Mennon & Bronk, 2003; Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 1988). However, short-term purposes, such as graduating from college, may be quite necessary for youth to develop more long-term purposes, such as finding fulfilling life work. Furthermore, youth may imagine purposes that are short-term in nature because they feel that their identities are more predictable over the next five years than over the next twenty-five. Research has shown that even during late adolescence, youth are more concerned about the future above and beyond their concerns about religion, death, meaning or identity (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996). This quality of purpose may be less developed than other qualities for this sample because of these feelings uncertainty about what the future holds. The current study suggests that
purpose may begin as a concrete goal and differentiate once one’s future becomes more certain.

The study investigated how these six purpose qualities are related to one another. Correlational analysis did in fact find significant relationships between certain purpose qualities. If youth were optimistic they will reach their purposes, they were also more likely to report being involved in activities to achieve that purpose and were more likely report that their purposes had personal relevance for them. Research indicates that people are more likely to reach their goals if they are important to them, are confident about them and are clearly invested in making an effort to reach them (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2002). A relationship between having a sense of hope and achieving one’s goals has also been postulated in theory (Snyder et. al, 2002). The current study findings are consistent with this literature. One young man who was confident that he would do something with art in his life felt that way because he was looking into enrolling in an art course at a nearby design school. It is quite likely that youth who feel confident that they can and will fulfill their purposes will be more motivated and inspired to do something to bring their purpose to fruition.

In addition, the findings indicate that the more influence a purpose has on the decisions youth are making, the more likely youth will also report intentionally pursuing their purposes. Activated purposes were significantly related to progressed purposes. Bauer and McAdams (2004) argue that self-development and narrative emerges from what a person does, or the behaviors they are actively engaged in. For the youth in this sample, if purposes were making an impact on their day to day decisions, they were more likely to express having a concrete plan to fulfill their purpose.

Having a plan and making progress towards fulfilling one’s purpose is also related to optimistic and salient purpose. It may be that progress allows youth to feel as if their lives are more cohesive and whole. Actively pursuing one’s purpose increases the degree to which one is making day-to-day plans based on purpose, which in turn increases a feeling of control and confidence over ones future and reaffirms that the purpose is indeed meaningful. These four features, optimism, influence, progress and salience, mirrors Baumeister’s (1991) argument that meaning in life centers on four key “needs”: to find value (salience), be efficacious (progress), to have self worth, or feel positive about their lives (optimistic) and to have a purpose that impacts our current behavior (influence).

It is critical to point out that in this sample, young men were more likely to actively pursue their purposes if they expressed that they were personally salient to them. Why is having a salient purpose so important? It may be that having salient purposes motivates youth to become directors of their own futures, helping them achieve their self-set visions. Campbell and Laskey (1991) have suggested that youth make good decisions when they are able to identify a clear connection back to their interests. Salience may also help youth make a commitment to their purpose. Making a commitment is key to progressing towards one’s goals (Battista & Almond, 1973).
the more committed one is in fulfilling their concept of meaning/purpose, the more it gives them a framework motivating their behavior towards fulfilling it. As Frankl noted, “meaning must be found and cannot be given” (1975, p. 112). This finding of this study point out that purpose must be salient for youth in order for it to make any difference in their lives.

This study found that most youth report purposes centered on bringing something into one’s life, rather than avoid something. This corroborates the view that purpose is about obtaining something, bringing something meaningful into one’s life, and/or the lives of others (Damon, Mennon & Bronk, 2004). Very few participants stated purposes about not experiencing or avoiding something (e.g. “to not become a drug-addict”). This suggests that contrary to goal-making, where the object is either pursued or avoided, purpose involves direct thoughts and behaviors to chase. Purpose is strongly rooted in a positivist approach.

However, graduating males today are less likely to report that finding one’s purpose in life is important to compared to male graduates 25 years ago (Bachman, Johnston, & O’Malley, 2001). This study found that young men today are more preoccupied with making money than they were 25 years ago. While having a purpose may be important to young males today, it may not feel as relevant as other short-term goals. This study found that purpose during this time is primarily an emerging construct and vaguely defined, thus it makes sense that finding one’s purpose takes a back seat than finding financial security. When working with contemporary youth, programs must speak to the day to day decisions youth face in addition to the overarching life vision and goals.

It is also important to comment on the impact of the sample’s demographics on the findings. This study investigated young men only, and thus the results cannot be generalized to comment on the features of purpose in all adolescents and particularly in female adolescents. Boys have been shown to be less likely than girls to reach their long-term goals and purposes (Hanson, 1994), and thus helping boys define their purpose may be a key step in helping them achieve later in life. Given the fact that lower levels of purpose in males is associated with drug abuse and risk behaviors but not in females (Padelford, 1974), purpose may play more of a protective factor in boys than girls. Future research can explore group differences between adolescent male and females in terms of categories and qualities of purpose, its developmental maturity and association with thriving indicators.

As purpose may be a normal aspect of adolescent development, careful consideration must be given to the group of young men who did not report having a sense of purpose. It is important to note that while the current study examined purpose in at-risk young men, it did not include youth who are actively engaging in risk behaviors, those that have dropped out of high school, are addicted to drugs or alcohol, or are incarcerated. Thus, the current results cannot be generalized to describe the purposes of these youth. Although Reker (1977) noted that a sense of purpose is low is an adult prison population, research has not
determined how not having a sense of purpose in youth may predict criminal behavior as adults.

In addition, this study provided a snapshot of purpose in adolescence at a very specific point in time. It could not possibly investigate the differences between the different developmental stages of purposes given both the lack of variability in the subjects’ ages. While the study does postulate that the more developed a purpose is, the more protective it is, future research should employ longitudinal methods to embark on examining the differences in adolescents who exhibit differentiated versus emerging purposes. It remains to be seen if differentiated purposes protect youth from engaging in risk behaviors or if youth with more developed purposes actually display more thriving behaviors.

The second major limitation lies in the nature of qualitative interviews themselves to prompt respondents to provide socially acceptable responses. The purpose interview itself may have pulled for socially desirable responses. Youth did speak in depth about their purposes, but many of their answers may have reflected socially desirable responses rather than accurate reflection of their behaviors or beliefs. One must also consider that another reason why respondents expressed having evidence of developed purpose qualities was because the interview itself prompted such responses. It could be the case that when observed in their natural settings, the purposes of adolescent young men are not realistic, optimistic, activated, progressing or salient. The nature of the semi-structured interview may have yielded responses that over-estimated the developed qualities of purpose.

This study’s main strength underscores the value of exploratory qualitative research in carving new directions for future research endeavors. This design made it possible to understand that purpose for young men at this stage of life is primarily emerging and undifferentiated, but conceptually optimistic and actively influencing their plans for the future. Future research on youth purpose in the future must recruit a large sample of youth from diverse ethnic, economic and community backgrounds to drawn inferences on the variation of purpose within adolescence, giving special attention to the positive role it plays in preventing psychological distress or promoting thriving behaviors.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

Purpose in Life semi-structured interview

Would you say your life has a sense of purpose? How would you describe it?
Would you say you have some life goals that are important to you?
Would you tell me about a goal that most affects the way you live your life today?
Can you tell me a story about a time where this goal made you do something differently?
Have you reached this goal? Do you think you will reach this goal?
What are some thing you are doing right now to achieve this goal?
Sometimes people have many goals, I am interested to know why this goal become important to you. Do you have an idea why this goal is important to you?