



Stanford Center on Adolescence

Society of Research on Adolescence Preconference Roundtable

Youth Purpose: How Adolescents Develop Meaningful Direction

Wednesday, March 10, 2010 1:30 - 4:30 p.m. Philadelphia Downtown Marriott, Liberty Ballroom Salon A

Opening remarks

Professor William Damon

Director, Stanford Center on Adolescence

Introductory remarks, Session 2

Professor Jeffrey Arnett

Clark University, Department of Psychology



Roundtable Session 1

Title & Discussion Leader	Description
Table A	
<p>Purpose Orientations and Development in Emerging and Middle Adulthood</p> <p>Dan Lapsley, ACE Collegiate Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, University of Notre Dame</p>	<p>This roundtable will examine the relationship over time between youth purpose and psychological well-being and adaptation in early middle-adulthood. Our recent research has identified four distinct types of "purpose orientations" (prosocial, financial, personal recognition and creative). We found that prosocial orientations demonstrated the most adaptive profile of psychological wellbeing during both emerging and middle adulthood. Continued research on specific purpose orientations may offer a more complex understanding of wellbeing than simply documenting one's overall sense of having a purpose. We will also take up the some specific features of the undergraduate experience that seem to be associated with purpose orientations.</p>
<p>Artistic Purpose in Adolescence</p> <p>Heather Malin, Research Associate, Center on Adolescence, Stanford University</p>	<p>The arts are important avenues of purpose development for many young people. In our research on youth purpose, the cases of artistic purpose raise important questions about what it means for a young person to contribute beyond the self, pursue life goals, and engage in personally meaningful endeavors. The discussion will start with some of these artistic cases and consider them in light of current thinking about youth purpose. What do these cases tell us about the ways that young people seek to make meaning in their lives and contribute beyond the self? And more broadly, what can we learn about youth purpose by examining how purpose manifests in different domains?</p>
Table B	
<p>Civic Engagement and Purpose: A Review of Constructs and an Empirical Study</p> <p>Carolyn Barber, Assistant Professor, Division of Counseling and Educational Psychology, University of Missouri, Kansas City</p>	<p>In outlining questions that scholarship on purpose should answer, Damon, Menon, & Cotton Bronk stress the importance of identifying the "noble purposes" to which today's youth are drawn. This presentation considers the potential of civic engagement to be considered as a type of youth purpose. It begins with a discussion of the construct of purpose as it aligns with what prior research has found related to youth civic engagement, with a focus on community-based forms of civic engagement. It then will report on the findings of a nationally-representative study of adolescents, determining the predictors of continued service in young adulthood.</p>
<p>The Development of Civic Purpose: Adolescent Newcomers and Language Brokering</p> <p>Lisa M. Dornier, Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology, Research & Evaluation, University of Missouri, St. Louis</p>	<p>This roundtable will examine preliminary findings and methodological challenges regarding a study of "civic purpose" in language brokers (the children of U.S. immigrants who translate, interpret, and do things to help others understand language and culture). Using grounded-theory analyses of 10 follow-up interviews and an ethnographic project with four adolescent children of Mexican immigrants, the roundtable will: (1) examine the development of "civic purpose" from youths' perspectives (how they "make a difference" in their families and communities); (2) highlight the challenges undocumented adolescents have in fully realizing their civic potential and desires; and (3) discuss issues with data collection efforts.</p>
Table C	
<p>Got Purpose? Yes, These Spiritual Exemplars Do!</p> <p>Pamela Ebstyn King, Assistant Professor of Marital and Family Studies, School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary</p>	<p>Based on findings from a recent study on adolescent spiritual exemplars from around the world, we will explore the relationship between spirituality and purpose during adolescence. Spirituality and religion is a vital part of diverse adolescents' lives; however, little is understood about how spirituality develops and functions in the lives of youth. This round table will base discussion off of findings from 30 exemplars from 8 different spiritual traditions and 6 countries, highlighting the intersection of spirituality and purpose. In addition, the round table will solicit participants' thoughts and questions regarding the relationship of purpose and spirituality.</p>

Roundtable Session 1 continued

Title & Discussion Leader Description

Table C continued

Measuring Contribution “Beyond the Self”: Overlapping Issues in the Study of Youth Purpose and Spirituality

Jennifer Menon Mariano, Assistant Professor, Psychological and Social Foundations, University of South Florida and **Sonia Issac-Koshy**, Doctoral student, Tufts University

Youth purpose and spirituality are burgeoning fields in developmental science. Purpose and spirituality share a common theme of positively impacting the world beyond the self. For instance, “generosity,” “contribution,” and “great love-compassion,” are only a few of the terms used to describe attainment of advanced forms of youth purpose and spirituality. But how can researchers effectively study contribution to the world beyond self? In this roundtable discussion, the moderators will review how the beyond-the-self aspect of purpose is examined in a series of studies.

Table D

Developing Youth Purpose in an International Context

Laura R. Johnson, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Mississippi and **Julie S. Johnson-Pynn**, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Berry College

We will explore questions related to cultural and contextual diversity in promoting youth’s sense of purpose in a global context. We highlight our collaborative research with The Jane Goodall Institute which examines youth purpose and civic action among members of an international youth program. Questions for discussion include: What are cultural and contextual factors that impact the development and measurement of youth purpose? Are there differences in youth purpose outcomes across cultural and ecological settings? We discuss findings for youth from different countries, such as Tanzania, China and the U.S., along with challenges we have faced conducting cross-national field research.

Purpose in Young People at Risk

Linda M. Wagener, Associate Professor of Psychology, Department of Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary

We have studied young people who are thriving under a variety of at-risk conditions including violent crime, ethnic cleansing, religious repression, corruption and economic collapse. In each of these contexts, there have been significant assaults to the developmental infrastructure, yet it has been relatively easy to find resilient young people. Purpose has been found to provide an orienting construct that enervates resilience and is even thriving in the youth we studied. On the other hand, young adult refugees from Iraq provide a stark contrast in hopelessness. Their extreme situation offers little to no opportunity for them to craft a realistic sense of purpose.

Table E

Family Social Location and Sense of Purpose: A Case Study of Rural Adolescents

Devora Shamah, Manager of Research and Reporting, Gateway to College National Network, Portland OR, and Instructor, Oregon State University

A case study of a rural Oregon county suggests that sense of purpose development is influenced by the ways youth engage in school, their community, and work. Moreover, *family social location* was found to shape opportunities for youth. Although family social location was linked to income, the ways youth *perceived* and *constructed* their family’s place within the local social hierarchy emerged as particularly salient. These findings have important implications for how school and community programs might buffer the *structural* effects of family social location to better support sense of purpose development among all youth.

Neighborhood Context and the Development of Future Orientation, Hope and Purpose

Sarah Stoddard, Research Fellow, University of Michigan, School of Nursing

How does social context, particularly neighborhood, influence the development of future orientation, hope and purpose for youth living in at-risk environments? Can a young person develop a sense of hope or purpose if they cannot envision a future with opportunities? Within an at risk environment, what factors might contribute to the development of hope and a sense of purpose? The focus of this round table is to discuss how neighborhood context may influence the development of hope and purpose for youth living in risk environments. A conceptual model and issues of measurement will be discussed.

Table F

Measuring the Purpose in Life Construct

Kendall Cotton Bronk, Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology, Ball State University

A rapidly growing body of research suggests that a purpose in life can play a key role in promoting optimal human functioning, but how can the construct be most efficiently and accurately measured? This roundtable will feature a novel interview protocol and data analysis codebook designed to measure purpose among adolescents. Pilot data using the measure will be shared, and discussion will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment tool and subsequent analysis of the data generated by it.

Measuring the Development of Youth Purpose and Related Skills

Theresa K. Sullivan, Independent researcher, consultant

This roundtable will bring together researchers interested in measuring the development of youth purpose and related skills. Participants will share and discuss indicators, measures and methods they have used. It will also include a discussion of issues and obstacles we have faced in attempting to identify developmental pathways including, but not limited to measuring change over time attributed to specific program interventions.



Roundtable Session 2

Title & Discussion Leader

Description

Table G

The Interplay Between Purpose and Career Aspirations in Late Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood

Matthew J. Bundick, Postdoctoral Fellow, MacArthur Foundation Network on Transitions to Adulthood, The Pennsylvania State University

How do purpose development and the career decision-making process overlap in late adolescence and emerging adulthood? Starting with a brief discussion of the contemporary research, we will discuss questions such as: What potential might be held in the notion of career as “calling”? How can the construct of purpose help inform how educators (especially guidance counselors and student service professionals) in high schools and institutions of higher education provide career-related advice? Are there differences in the ways in which adolescents from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds approach their career aspirations as purposeful pursuits?

Table H

Service ↔ Justice Forms of Altruistic Purpose and the Potential Relationships to Problem-Based Learning in the Community

Brandy Quinn, Ph.D. Student, Psychological Studies in Education, Stanford University

Within the broad category of altruistic forms of purpose, purpose may be classified along a service ↔ justice continuum. Drawing from literature on purpose, youth contribution, implicit theories, types of morality and citizenship, and problem and/or community based learning; this discussion will hypothesize a model of relationships between these areas of interest. At the heart of this discussion will be the question of how problem-based learning, situated in authentic community needs, might foster forms of altruistic purpose that fall somewhere on the service ↔ justice spectrum.

Table I

How can interventions to support purpose or purpose precursors be designed in ways that are age-appropriate?

Tim Reilly, Ph.D. Candidate, Psychological Studies in Education, Stanford University

This roundtable will focus on the ways in which purpose might be supported by interventions. Age related concerns in interventions will be discussed, particularly with regard to developmental transitions. Various sources of possible interventions will also be considered, such as counselors, teachers, other adults, technologies, or peer activities. We will discuss issues of specificity and generality of intervention, such as the value of focusing interventions on specific life domains (family, career, avocation, or leisure) versus general life goals.

Table J

How Urban Adolescents of Color Interpret and Respond to Noble and Ignoble Purposes Constructed in Media Texts

Jeanine Staples, Assistant Professor of Language and Literacy, The Pennsylvania State University

How do urban adolescents of color who are placed at risk of academic and social failure interpret and respond to noble and ignoble purposes constructed in media texts? Drawing from New Literacy Studies, which provide impetuses for educators and researchers to explore youth’s literacy practices and media engagements as they occur and evolve in alternative teaching/learning contexts, this study uses [discussion will focus on how?] surveys, participant observations, interviews and participant journals to determine youth’s conceptions of purposes. These interpretive methods provide critical insight into the rationalization processes and personal trajectories of these youth as evidenced through their literate lives.

Table K

Complicating College Students’ Conception of the American Dream Through Community Service Learning

Scott Seider, Assistant Professor of Education, Boston University

In a previous study, we demonstrated that the SERVE Program at Jesuit University strengthened the public service motivation of participating college students. Here, we utilize a mixed-methods approach to demonstrate that the SERVE Program achieved these results, in part, by providing participants with diverse opportunities to think critically about the American Dream. These opportunities included a year-long community service placement; assigned readings in philosophy, theology and sociology; and weekly discussion sections. The ensuing round table will focus on the impact of young adults’ beliefs about America’s opportunity structure in fostering (or inhibiting) a sense of purpose.

Table L

How Stable is Purpose in Adolescence?

Seana Moran, Research Associate, Stanford Center on Adolescence

In studies of purpose with adults, purpose is defined as a stable beacon or reference to which individuals calibrate their goals, identities, contributions, and meanings about life events. Yet, adolescence is a time of tremendous growth, exploration, and broadening of life horizons. If purpose is a developmental phenomenon—that is, if it changes over time in qualitative ways—is it helpful to define purpose as “stable”? Which aspects or dimensions of purpose are stable and which fluctuate or change from age 12-22? What are the conceptual opportunities and methodological challenges brought by a more dynamic perspective on purpose?



Posters:

Title and Presenter

Description

Purposeful Writing after a Natural Disaster

Deborah M. Alvarez, Assistant Professor of English, University of Delaware

After a natural disaster, youth purpose is defined by finding a new normal, through narrative writing. I conducted ethnographic research in five New Orleans public schools, June 2006 - August 2008, to study the effects of Hurricane Katrina on adolescent literacy habits, primarily writing habits. The study examined what writings teachers, students, and community members initiated. Students had varied responses to the hurricane, but there is a consistent pattern of story narratives that adolescents used to describe and reflect upon the events. Central to the narrative structure is the exigent context which allows resiliency, development, or continuing factors of stress.

Development of an Assessment Tool to Investigate the Underlying Dimensions of Youth Purpose as a Psychological Construct and How it Contributes to Individual and Societal Development

Lia Falco, Adjunct Assistant Professor and **Jessica Summers**, Assistant Professor, University of Arizona College of Education

This research focuses on the development and validation of a formal assessment tool of adolescent purpose (MAP) in order to investigate the underlying dimensions of the construct and to explore the individual and contextual variables associated with adolescent purpose. Additionally, it will provide a tool for educators, researchers and others who work with adolescents to assess the impact of efforts to increase or enhance purpose among adolescents. The poster will present the initial instrument blueprint with items based on existential or psychosocial (identity) theories of human development, and qualitative inquiry with a small sample of adolescents.

Purpose and Adjustment in High School: Adolescent Purpose Aligns with Marcia's Identity Statuses

Amanda O'Dell, Ph.D. student, Developmental Psychology, Loyola University Chicago

Purpose has largely been neglected in youth-focused developmental research thus far. To address this shortcoming, we classified adolescents based on reported levels of purpose exploration and commitment and investigated associated patterns of adjustment. Adolescents from the Midwest (N=318) completed questionnaires about identity, hope, agency, and purpose. Cluster analyses revealed four distinct purpose profiles: "diffused" (N=125), "achieved" (N=114), "foreclosed" (N=25), and "uncommitted" (N=54). These statuses align closely with identity statuses previously theorized (Marcia, 1966). Notably, adolescents demonstrating achieved profiles reported the most adaptive adjustment, while uncommitted youth reported the lowest levels of each outcome assessed. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Implicit Theories in Altruistic Forms of Purpose

Brandy Quinn, Ph.D. Student, Psychological Studies in Education, Stanford University

Implicit theories about the self and the world are an important part of the dynamics of altruistic forms of youth purpose. Through a qualitative, focused content analysis of interviews from the Youth Purpose Project that coded into three altruistic categories of youth purpose, this study sought to understand what, if any differences are found in the kinds of implicit theories held by individuals with differing forms of youth purpose. Preliminary findings suggest that all forms of altruistic purpose must be grounded in an incremental view of people, but there are differences found in implicit worldview theories.

Purpose and Spirituality in Diverse Adolescents Around the World

Jenel S. Ramos, Psy.D. student, **Casey E. Clardy**, Ph.D. student, and **Pamela E. King**, Assistant Professor: Fuller Theological Seminary

Little research exists on the intersection between spirituality and purpose in adolescents, especially those outside Western, Judeo-Christian contexts. Using a CQR methodology in a diverse sample of adolescent spiritual exemplars from around the world, the current study explored how 1) they describe their sense of purpose within diverse spiritual contexts, 2) various spiritual influences contribute to the process of clarifying and/or solidifying a youth's sense of purpose, 3) purpose functions within a developmental model of spirituality. Findings describe how purpose functions within a theoretical model of spiritual development by highlighting the variety of definitions and influential factors reported by participants.

Impact and Purpose of Students Engagement in After School Activities that Promote Civic Participation

Ramon Robles-Fernandez, Ph.D. Candidate, Urban Education, City University of New York

Adolescence is a critical time in the development of civic orientation. Recent research has reconfirmed the importance of participation in real life activities, such as service learning, to promote civic engagement and awareness of "beyond the self" values. When direct engagement is carefully integrated into academic content, these activities support the development of skills such as effective communication and cooperation. This poster examines the impact that two distinct after school programs had on students' beliefs and values about social justice and civic participation, and explores the reasons that led students to decide to participate in these programs.

