

The Role of Purposeful Work Goals in Promoting Meaning in Life and in Schoolwork During Adolescence

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What type of work goals provide adolescents with the sense that schoolwork is important and that their lives are meaningful? This mixed-methods study of a diverse sample of 6th-, 9th-, and 12th-grade adolescents ($N = 148$) investigated the relationship between work goals, purpose, and meaning using a semistructured interview and a survey. Interview analyses showed that multiple motives were normative (68%), and that 30% of adolescents aspired to an occupation that would allow them to contribute to the world beyond themselves. Regression analyses found that adolescents with purposeful work goals also reported more meaning in life and in schoolwork than those who did not.

Keywords: *adolescence; meaning; purpose; career; goals; motivation; identity*

Adolescent goals are associated with well-being and motivation in important ways. Previous research has found that when adolescents have personal projects (Little, 1983) that are meaningful, manageable, and supported by others, they show fewer depressive symptoms and higher subjective well-being (Little, 1989; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). Furthermore, adolescents' personal goals (Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007; Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008), future orientation (Nurmi, 1991, 2004), and thoughts about the possible selves that they hope to become or avoid

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(Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006; Oyserman & Markus, 1990) are associated with academic success (Oyserman et al., 2006) and lower levels of risk behavior, such as delayed initiation of sexual intercourse (Vesely et al., 2004), lower acceptance and frequency of adolescent pregnancy (McCabe & Barnett, 2000; Mirza & Somers, 2004), lower cigarette and alcohol use (Aloise-Young, Hennigan, & Leong, 2001), and many indicators of adolescent well-being (see Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008 for a review).

Among the most frequently named personal goals during adolescence are those regarding a future occupation or work role (Lanz, Rosnati, Marta, & Scabini, 2001; Nurmi, 1991), called *work goals* in the present analysis. Settling on a work goal is a core part of committing to an adult identity—in addition to commitments to love and worldviews (Erikson, 1968)—and the process of exploring and eventually committing to a work role is considered a normative part of the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood and into full adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

The central aim of the current study is to explore the association between adolescent work goals and positive outcomes. Two complementary views might explain this association. First, it may be that work goals engage young people in thoughts about their present and future selves, leading to the development of an identity that can serve as a source of integrity and as a protective factor during the difficult adolescent years. Second, it could be that some young people see their future occupations as opportunities to make a contribution to the world (called *purposeful work goals* here), leading them to have a sense that their lives have meaning, in addition to helping them commit to an adult identity.

Identity and Purpose May Link Adolescent Work Goals to Positive Outcomes

Identity

A major task of adolescence and emerging adulthood is to forge an identity that consolidates one's beliefs, values, and goals into a coherent story that can be used as a basis for making life decisions, as well as for judging the value or morality of one's actions across the lifespan (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968; Schwartz, 2001; van Hoof, 1999). When an adolescent's goal for a future career comes from a knowledge of skills, interests, and personal strivings, the presence of that work goal indicates progress was made toward articulating an identity. The proximity between work and

identity is even implicit in how some people define identity: Some studies measure identity development by asking about work commitment (e.g., “I have definitely decided on the occupation I want to pursue”; Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995).

Identity and well-being. One might predict that young people with carefully reasoned work goals have developed a more coherent personal identity and are thus more likely to demonstrate eudaimonic well-being (defined as the knowledge of what makes one’s life meaningful and what maximizes one’s potential; see Ryan & Deci, 2001) than those with incoherent identities. From this perspective, Waterman (2007) argued that “people are more likely to experience enhanced well-being when they realize self-generated goals that satisfy personal needs” (p. 269). Supporting this claim, several survey studies of college students have found that, on average, people who were more committed to their identities (as conceptualized by Marcia, 1966) also reported higher levels of subjective, psychological, and eudaimonic well-being (Hofer, Kärtner, Chasiotis, Busch, & Kiessling, in press; Waterman, 2007). Furthermore, one study of American high school students found that young people who actively sought information about their identities were more likely than those with less adaptive identity development styles to report higher optimism and self-esteem, as well as less hopelessness and delinquent attitudes (Phillips & Pittman, 2007).

Identity and motivation to learn. Middle and high school students are ostensibly preparing for adult work, but the length of time between school and a future career, as well as the perceived disconnect in the relevance of their schoolwork to their career aspirations, can make it difficult for adolescents to find personal meaning in their studies. Work goals that result from a knowledge of one’s own skills, interests, and values might help young people to construe academic tasks as a means to getting a job that they will enjoy having one day. It is possible, in that scenario, that schoolwork that is perceived to be more relevant to one’s identity could also be more meaningful and academically motivating, potentially leading to increased educational engagement (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; National Research Council and the Institutes of Medicine, 2004). Experimental studies of intrinsic motivation support the claim that engaging in identity-relevant tasks (Cordova & Lepper, 1996), as well as having the chance to determine one’s own future (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000), are intrinsically motivating.

Summary. Work goals might relate to both eudaimonic well-being and academic motivation through identity development, that is, when adolescents think about *who they want to become in life*, their decisions and daily tasks may become more meaningful than if they were not connected to important personal strivings.

Purpose, Meaning and Identity

In conjunction with the identity processes described above, there is a second reason why work goals might lead to eudaimonic well-being and motivation in school: By thinking about *what they want to accomplish in life*, adolescents may see how their lives are meaningful and be inspired to learn so that they can be equipped to make a contribution. In this view, young people seek to understand not only how their work goals incorporate who they want to be but also how their work will allow them to make a contribution and feel like they have a purpose. Youth are thought to vary in the extent to which they have a *life purpose*, defined as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Adolescents with articulated life purposes are motivated to make a personally relevant contribution to the world around them. It may be that a major task for adolescents and emerging adults is to find a purpose that gives direction and meaning to their lives (Damon, 2008a), in addition to being a pivotal element of an adult identity.

Purpose and well-being. Through purposeful work goals, some adolescents may see that their actions and, indeed, their entire lives, matter to others and are of consequence to the world, helping them to develop a life purpose. Frankl (1959) argued that believing that your life is irreplaceable and essential for the world can provide hope in the face of despair, direction amidst seeming aimlessness, and a sense of purpose when none was readily apparent: “When the impossibility of replacing a person is realized,” Frankl argued, “it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continuance to appear in all its magnitude . . . He knows the ‘why’ for his existence, and he will be able to bear almost any ‘how’” (pp. 79-80).

Knowing the “why” for one’s existence is thought to relate to various indicators of well-being. Identifying and engaging one’s purposeful life goals may ameliorate the normative disengagement from school that begins in middle school and continues into late adolescence (Eccles, 2004; Eccles et al., 1993; Wigfield, Byrnes, & Eccles, 2006) by giving young people the

belief that their schoolwork is done in service of a larger, long-term goal that matters to the world and providing a sense that their lives have meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Steger, in press). Meaning in life has been found to be associated with a variety of other positive outcomes, such as lower depression, higher positive affect, and greater life satisfaction (King, Hicks, Krull, & DelGaiso, 2006; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007). Damon (2008a) has argued that promoting purpose may lead to successful youth development by preventing the problems of “drift” and listlessness, signaled by the high rates of high school dropout (Brown, Moore, & Bzostek, 2003), substance abuse (Luthar & Goldstein, 2008) and adolescent depression and suicide (Costello, Erkanli, & Angold, 2006).

Clarifying purpose and meaning. Purpose and meaning have been used inconsistently to refer to various constructs in the literature, and it is worth clarifying that we see purposeful goals as distinct from the related constructs of life purpose, meaning, sense of purpose, identity, and adolescent goals, for several reasons. First, a purpose in life is an “intention to accomplish something.” It propels a person forward (Damon et al., 2003) and is not simply limited to a feeling or an orientation toward the future (e.g., Ryff, 1989). In the present definition, having a purpose in life requires having a goal, or an *ultimate concern* (Emmons, 1999), that “gives meaning to short-term goals (such as passing tests and getting good grades) by asking where those short-term goals will lead” (Damon, 2008b). Furthermore, this ultimate concern includes an intention to make some kind of impact; that is, purposeful goals are desired for the benefit to some part of the world beyond-the-self, in addition to any intended benefits to the self. A purposeful goal, in our analysis, is one important goal, among many, that is motivated at least partially by an intention to make an impact on the world beyond the self.

Given how the term *purpose* has been used in previous literature, this *a priori* definition of a purpose in life may be confusing. First, purpose is commonly used to refer to any reason that people have for their actions, regardless of who benefits from them. One study of identity, for example, uses the phrase “purposive use of skills” to refer to skills that were used intentionally to reach a goal (Côté, 1997), without invoking a beyond-the-self connotation. Nevertheless, when adolescents are asked what a purpose in life means to them, many of them (including the majority of older adolescents) define it as something that makes an impact on the world (Moran & Damon, 2008). In alignment with this finding, we use the phrase *purposeful work goal* in reference to one part of a beyond-the-self purpose in life, and not “having a reason for a work goal.”

Second, several scales that purportedly measure purpose in life ask questions about whether one is generally future-oriented and/or has a reason for living (e.g., Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969; Ryff, 1989). To complicate matters further, one measure of agentic personality (the Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale; Côté, 1997) often used in studies of identity, includes one of the aforementioned purpose in life scales to measure how intentional people are about their life decisions. This greatly contributes to the difficulty in distinguishing the notions of identity, a sense of purpose, and purpose as a goal.¹ To limit this potential confusion, in the present article, we refer to work goals that are motivated by at least one intention to make an impact on the world beyond the self as “purposeful work goals.” We refer to the sense that one’s life is meaningful as having a “presence of meaning,” and we call the sense that one’s life is generally future-oriented and goal-directed “having a sense of purpose.”

Purpose and motivation to learn. Purposeful work goals may also increase adolescents’ motivation to learn by helping them to connect their schoolwork with how they will use that knowledge in the future to make an impact, leading to an adoption of mastery goals in school (Cury, Elliot, Da Fonseca, & Moller, 2006). Eccles (2008) has suggested that, in addition to people’s needs for competence, autonomy, and connectedness, as detailed in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), adolescents also have a fundamental need to *matter*. In her view, the idea of adolescent “voice and choice” (Eccles, 2004) does not sufficiently address this “mattering” need; adolescents need to know that their opinions are not simply heard but that they are powerful and can make an important impact on the world. Intuitively, it seems that when an adolescent feels “counted on” to learn the material in school, several motivational outcomes may occur. He or she may adopt learning, or “mastery” goals, as opposed to focusing on getting high grades or competing with peers (a.k.a., performance goals) academic information more deeply and synthetically; or persist longer, seek more challenges and enjoy learning more because the tasks are personally meaningful and satisfying to them.

Summary. Taken together, we think of an adolescent’s identity development as being characterized by the question “*who* am I?” while the development of a life purpose adds a second question, “*why* am I?” Both purpose and identity processes may be related and lead some young people with well-reasoned work goals to experience heightened eudaimonic well-being and show enhanced motivation to learn. When young people explore work

goals that are personally relevant, they may engage in important identity work that can consolidate their senses of self and ease their transition into adulthood. When they do so in order to make an impact on the world beyond themselves, they may also come to realize that their lives matter and that people are counting on them to succeed in school and, ultimately, in life. Of course, it may also be the case that some adolescents' work goals are externally determined, or are purely instrumental. We would not make the same predictions linking those work goals to positive outcomes.

The Present Study

In light of the above findings and theories, the present study sought to

- Explore the types of reasons adolescents have for their work goals;
- Estimate the frequency with which young people named different types of reasons for their future occupations; and
- Investigate whether purposeful work goals contribute unique variance to measures of meaning in life and in school, such as the Meaning in Life Questionnaire – Presence subscale (Steger et al., 2006) the Purpose in Life subscale of Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being measure, and a measure of whether studying and doing homework for school were meaningful, above and beyond other reasons for the work goal.

Method

Overview

This study used a mixed-methods approach—an interview and a survey—to provide adolescents with an opportunity to share their purposes in life, their work goals, why they had those goals, and whether their lives and schoolwork were meaningful.

Sample and Procedure

In the Fall of 2006, about 700 6th-, 9th-, and 12th-grade students were randomly selected from the class rosters of two conveniently sampled high schools and two conveniently sampled middle schools in Northern California.² They were invited to complete an online survey during school hours in return for a chance to win a US\$25 gift certificate, and slightly more

than 80% did so, with parent's consent. From this group, 25% were randomly invited to complete a 45-minute interview with a trained research assistant during school hours in return for a US\$25 gift certificate, and nearly all ($N = 148$) did so. Students spent a median of 27 minutes for the survey and 45 minutes for the interview, which was audiotaped, transcribed, and coded from typed transcripts.

Of the 148 participants who provided interview data, 49 were 6th-grade students, 47 were high school freshmen and 52 were high school seniors; 58% were female; 4% self-identified as African American, 30% as Asian American, 25% as Latino, and 23% as White; 57% were in the middle category (US\$60,000-US\$79,999) of a 5-point SES scale that used average income for households in the participant's zip-code as a proxy for socioeconomic status, 15% were in our highest category (US\$100,000+), and no participants lived in the lowest category (US\$20,000-US\$39,999); last, 39% reported receiving "mostly As" in school, 19% reported "mostly Cs," with the rest reporting "mostly Bs."³ Of these participants, only the 9th- and 12th-graders were used for survey analyses ($N = 98$), although all were used for interview analyses.

Interview Measures

Semi-structured interview. To explore adolescent work goals, we used an interview derived from studies of self-understanding and identity (see, for example, Colby & Damon, 1993; Damon & Hart, 1988; Hart & Fegley, 1995) but with additional questions that asked about beyond-the-self contributions. The interview was designed to elicit the most important things in the young person's life and the associated explanations for them and did not include questions that asked specifically about work or career. It was relatively open-ended, and interviewers were trained to ask unbiased questions in an effort to limit socially desirable responding.

The interview protocol began by asking, "What is important to you?" and "What matters to you?" If a participant provided a career-related response (such as "to become a doctor" or "get a good job"), the interviewer asked the participant to explain why that was important to him or her. Where necessary, participant responses to that probe were followed up with other "why" probes until the interviewer felt the participant provided the full reasoning for that response. The protocol covered young people's short- and long-term life goals, their hopes and dreams, their values, their occupational aspirations, and the kinds of people they wanted to become.⁴

Each specific occupation mentioned (e.g., doctor, fireman, business owner) was reliably classified by two independent coders (Cohen's $\kappa > .85$) using the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics' (2000) Standard Occupation Classification system (SOC). When participants mentioned more than one occupation (as 48% of participants did), all were classified. Statements about reasons for their work goals were also coded.

We reliably coded four different types of reasons for work goals provided in the interviews (in-depth explanations and examples of the codes follow the three cases below). Some reasons were *intrinsic* to the job that the young person aspired to have (i.e., they reflected something about the content of or daily activities involved in performing the job), while other reasons were *extrinsic* to the job (i.e., they were related to the occupation mentioned only to the extent that the occupation might confer some benefit, namely, money or status, on the adolescent). Both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons were further bifurcated on the basis of their intended beneficiary—either self-oriented or beyond-the-self-oriented. Some participants mentioned multiple work goals (nurse, business, etc.) with different reasons for each one (help others, make money), although this was less than 5% of our sample. Participants were given credit for each type of reason if it was given for *any* of the work goals mentioned.⁵

Work goals were operationalized as “purposeful” when the participant provided a reason for the goal that was inherent to the actual work to be done and was intended to benefit some part of the world beyond the self. Work goals were operationalized as “self-oriented” when the participant provided at least one intrinsic reason intended to benefit the self but did *not* mention any intrinsic reasons that were intended to benefit others. Extrinsic, beyond-the-self-oriented reasons were not used to categorize work goals as “purposeful” because, in our judgment, the content of the goal was the money or status conferred for having done the job and not specifically about the work itself. Using this system, independent coders, blind to survey responses and participant demographics, reliably classified reasons into four categories: “Intrinsic Beyond-the-Self-Oriented,” “Intrinsic Self-Oriented,” “Extrinsic Beyond-the-Self-Oriented,” and “Extrinsic Self-Oriented” (Cohen's κ for a random sample of 25% of the interviews = .78). Table 1 demonstrates the two axes on which the reasons were split (Extrinsic/Intrinsic and Self-Oriented/Beyond-the-Self-Oriented) and the frequency of each. Many adolescents mentioned several different types of reasons for each work goal. 22% named *both* a purposeful and a self-oriented intrinsic work goal, 8% named a purposeful but not a self-oriented work goal, 30% named a self-oriented but not a purposeful work goal, and 34% named neither reason.

Table 1
Types and Frequencies of Reasons That Adolescents Mentioned in a Semistructured Interview About Their Work Goals

	Intrinsic Reasons	Extrinsic Reasons
Self-oriented reasons	53%	57%
Beyond-the-self-oriented reasons	30% (Purposeful)	39%

Some participants (7%) gave reasons for their hoped-for job that were not intentions. For example, they sometimes preferred occupations that their parents had, that they felt pressure to achieve, or that the job market was favoring right now. These explanations for preferring a job were not analyzed in the current study.

Survey Measures

We administered an online survey that included traditional measures of meaning and purpose in life and a new measure of the meaningfulness of one's schoolwork.

Sense of purpose in life. The Sense of Purpose in Life scale, a subscale of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being measure (Ryff, 1989), was a 9-item scale on which responses were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (*Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*) and measured the extent to which respondents were oriented toward their futures and generally goal-directed. Sample items included, "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them" and "I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life." The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency in the current study ($\alpha = .81$), and, in previous research, validity, as it was a positive predictor of other psychological well-being measures, a correlate of subjective well-being, and a negative indicator of depression and other mental illnesses (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2006). Note that this scale, though validated, differs from our operationalization of purpose in that it measures a general sense of intentionality and future-directedness, and not a specific type of goal.

Presence of meaning in life. The Presence of Meaning in Life scale (Steger et al., 2006), was a 5-item scale on which responses were rated on a

7-point Likert-type scale (*Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*) and measured the extent to which the respondent had identified something that gives his or her life meaning. Sample items included “I understand my life’s meaning” and “I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.” The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .80$), and, in previous research, validity, as it was related to a variety of aspects of well-being, such as life satisfaction and long-term positive affect, and negatively related to depression (Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007). Sense of Purpose and Presence of Meaning are thought to be related but distinct (see Steger et al., 2006), and they were moderately correlated in our sample ($r = .35, p < .001$).

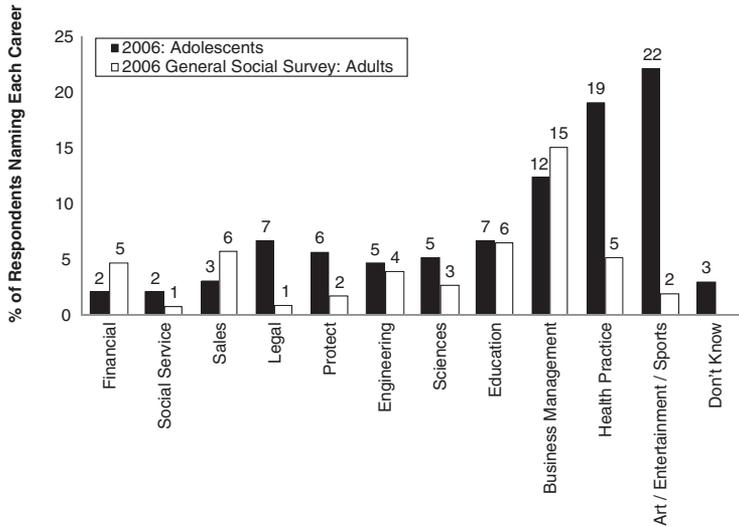
Meaningfulness of schoolwork. The meaningfulness of studying for school item asked participants to rate on a 5-point scale, “How meaningful is this activity to you? Studying/doing homework for class” (from “Not at all meaningful” to “Extremely meaningful”), and it is thought to measure the extent to which respondents were able to connect work done at school to what matters in their lives. This one-item measure was correlated with the Presence of Meaning scale ($r = .35, p < .001$) but not the Sense of Purpose in Life scale ($r = .05, p > .50$).

To test the alternative hypothesis that the word “meaningful,” and not the content “studying for school” was driving the results, we also included a meaningfulness item that was unrelated to school (“How meaningful is this activity to you? Music”), rated on the same scale, and we used it in a regression analysis reported below. To control for the tendency to provide socially desirable answers, we asked participants to take the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (10-item version; see Reynolds, 1982 for psychometric information). To test the validity of our interview coding, we included four items that asked participants to rate economic life goals on a 5-point scale (i.e., “How important are the following goals in your life? Having a high-paying job”; $\alpha = .81$; adapted from Roberts & Robins, 2000). Finally, we asked the respondents to write what career they hoped to have in the future, and these were also coded using the SOC system. All survey measures were recoded from 0 to 1.

Results

Overview. We report four sets of analyses to address our three research questions. After summarizing the careers mentioned, we address the first

Figure 1
Comparing Adolescent Work Goals to
Frequencies of Adult Occupations



question by reporting the types of work goals mentioned, followed by three cases. To address the second question, we report the results of a qualitative coding procedure that classified the reasons that adolescents gave for their work goals. Finally, to address the third research question, we conducted regression analyses to test which kind of reason was associated with higher levels of meaning in life and school.

Jobs mentioned. In the interview, participants were asked about what was most important to them in life. Of the participants, 98% mentioned a future job at least once, and 87% also said why having a job was important to them. The types of careers mentioned were moderately stable across measures: 56% of the careers written on the survey were also mentioned in the interview.⁶ Figure 1 shows that the most common SOC career category mentioned in the interviews was Art/Entertainment/Sports (22%), followed by Health (19%), Business Management (12%) and Education (7%). Notice that these careers are truly *aspirations*; they deviate substantially from the percentage

of adults in each of those career categories, as estimated by the 2006 General Social Survey (GSS; Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2007). For example, Health and Art/Entertainment/Sports make up 41% of the adolescent career plans in the current sample but only 7% of the adult careers.

Case Studies Overview

Below we describe three cases that show the variability in youth purpose and work goals, intentionally chosen as archetypes of three different ways in which young people tended to think about their work goals. The first adolescent is purposeful about his work goal and is motivated both to succeed and to make a difference. The second also appears to have developed his identity somewhat—he has a sense of what he is good at and is very motivated—but he does not intend for his work-related activities to have consequences for the world beyond himself. The third adolescent can name a career, but she has neither given the details of her work goal very much thought, nor does this goal seem to organize her life decisions.

Case Study 1: Purposeful Work Goal

Alberto. Alberto is a 12th-grade boy born in Mexico who attends a low-income high school and who dreams of going to college so that he can one day become a doctor.⁷ When asked what the most important thing in his life was, he said, “Well, lately the most important thing is probably college. Going to a good college and being able to go for and expand what I want to do; follow what my goals are . . . I want to major in pharmacology.”

He lists several different reasons for his future career in medicine, some intrinsic to his job and some extrinsic. He thinks it would be intrinsically pleasurable—“It’s something I would enjoy doing”—and he wants to provide a social benefit—“Just knowing helping others in medicine. The thought of that it makes me really want to do it [sic].” He mentions the extrinsic benefits of the financial gain and job status. He wants to have the money to afford the expense of a “good family, good house,” but he also knows that his success would have a powerful positive impact on his family. He is driven to continue working hard, and never give up, because he feels that people are counting on him:

I would be the first generation in my family to actually go to college. So it will make me feel good and it will also make my family see me in a different view that I could succeed and I’m not going to go down as step that some of my

family members have. Because some of them have gone down kind of the wrong path almost. They're doing good now, but before they would struggle. So I don't want my family to see me struggle. I want to take a big step and have them look at me as someone who will benefit the family kind of like that . . . So, my dream is I could make my cousins see that there are chances for us, the next generation, and we don't have to follow what our parents are like . . . I mean, if my cousins were to succeed in their college steps, then maybe my aunts and uncles would see and they would change it along.

Summary. Alberto's work aspiration is considered purposeful because not only are his goals meaningful to him—he wants to be successful, do his job well and enjoy what he does—but also they are of intended consequence to some part of the world beyond himself—he wants to be a doctor who helps people through his work. He also appears to have a sense that his life is meaningful, and that he matters, because he sees how his family members are counting on him to be a success. This purposeful goal seems to influence his decisions to prepare for his future job and also motivate him to do it in the right way, so that he can be a role model for his family members.

Case Study 2: Self-Oriented Work Goal

Nguyen. Nguyen is a high-achieving 12th-grade student who, according to him, is one day going to be a heart surgeon. It has been a dream of his for a long time, and this aspiration is driving him to prepare dutifully for the tough road ahead. His ambition for the future has led him to work harder in school: "I've been focusing on my studies a lot, last few years [sic] since college admission offices look at sophomore and junior years." His knowledge of college admissions has also led to his joining extracurricular activities:

I've been volunteering at Vietnamese schools, S.F.V.S., and every Saturday they have a school session on Saturday, so I go there as a teacher's aid. And also in my church, I teach Vietnamese to people like SAT II Vietnamese and enlisting people to take those classes. And I teach them how to do that.

It has affected his sleep patterns—"I guess I try to be most efficient [sic] as possible in my life. I mean I sleep maybe five hours a day because I think sleeping takes up time I could do better stuff, than when I'm sleeping."—and it has given him a reason to go to church and believe in God—"So, I think religion is important [for surgeons to have], so I can have mental

support in my future career, and stuff. That's the reason why, I believe in God." He does not say whether faith or theology also affect his decision to go to church.

When asked why he wants to have this career, he at first says that it is what he has always wanted to do. When probed with further "why" questions, he gives different types of reasons, both extrinsic to the job and intrinsic. Extrinsicly, his status as a doctor will make him successful. Also, his success will inspire others: "I guess I could become successful in my future and show, set an example as how Asian could take high place [sic]." Nguyen also finds science intrinsically enjoyable and interesting: "I mean I just want to learn, like deep into science." Finally, he thinks that being a doctor will help him have a good life because he will stay in touch with his family and friends: "And I think it's my dream to get a family hospital."

Summary. For Nguyen, being a doctor has been the organizing force for most of what he has done, and he mentions that this occupational identity motivates him to make sacrifices, delay gratification, and seek personal success. This drive for success in turn had led him to engage in extracurricular activities that can help him achieve his dream, including (incidentally) some prosocial activities, but these activities are, according to him, secondary to his hopes for success. Nguyen did not mention what, for many people, is an obvious reason to become a doctor: helping people feel better. Certainly, Nguyen's goal of being a doctor is an important life goal that would fit many people's lay definition of purposeful, in the sense that he is planful and agentic. In the present analysis, however, we call "purposeful" only those goals that are done for at least one intrinsic, "beyond-the-self" reason. Although we do not consider his goal purposeful in our strict sense and predict it would be associated with a different profile of outcomes than a purposeful goal, we notice that it is still extremely important and motivating for him.

Case Study 3: Work Goal With No Specific Reasons

Samantha. Samantha is a 12th-grade girl born to parents who emigrated from the Philippines. She is the senior class secretary, and knows that she wants to go to college, have a job, and "succeed in life." Right now, she is considering nursing but does not provide any reasons why nursing, in particular, is a good fit for her. Instead, she talks in platitudes about education and success: "I don't want to be like someone that doesn't care because

you're not gonna get anywhere with that . . . I just want to succeed later on, and be successful in my, because I'm responsible."

When asked what success means to her, she said, "Like reaching your goal. Yeah. Just reaching my goal to be a nurse, and have a steady job, have a steady life." These broad plans have not turned into any sort of specific preparations, "Well I'm planning on, that's going to be my major, and I just want to try to actually be a registered nurse, just make it," although she does acknowledge the connection between school and her future, "plus school is good for your future, for education to have knowledge of stuff. And not for fun, just to hang out with your friends. It's not just that, there's, other aspects to school."

One of the reasons why she wants success is so she can have security and stability in life: "Well, I don't want to have to deal with all these issues, oh yeah I'm going through troubles with money, and the financial issues. I don't want to go through that." She also wants her family to know that she is successful and be proud of her: "I want my family to think of me as a successor [sic], I'm just going to be successful like them because they're just so successful. I look up to them."

Summary. Interviews like Samantha's were common in our sample. She is mostly concerned about school and what is going on there, and less concerned about what she is trying to accomplish in life. She can name a preferred career—nursing—but she does not list any specific reasons why that career is a match for her skills or interests, nor does she say why it might have an impact on others, beyond making her family think she is a success. She is able to express reasons why having a good job, in general, is a good thing, but neither do these reasons seem to be contributing to her identity development or motivating her in any particular way, nor do these intentions seem related to the sense that her life is especially meaningful for the world beyond herself. She may, in the future, discover how her skills, interests, and/or prosocial inclinations can be expressed in a job like nursing, but at this time neither is she purposeful about nursing nor is her aspiration what we call a self-oriented life goal. We predicted that, reasons for work goals like Samantha's would not be related to high scores on measures of meaning and purpose.

Interview Coding Results

Guided by inferences drawn from the interviews, such as the three cases summarized above, we developed four interview codes that best

represented the voices of the adolescents. An explanation and the frequency of each type is provided below:

Intrinsic self-oriented reasons. Some of the intrinsic intentions adolescents mentioned were of intended benefit to themselves. These were mostly intentions to find a job that matched their skills or interests and therefore make their lives fun, personally meaningful or enjoyable, including such statements as “I think I will be good at that job” and therefore “I will enjoy that job.” For example, in response to the question “Why do you want to pursue that profession?” (in this case, a cosmetologist), one young person noted, “It just kind of fascinates me, you know, doing hair and makeup and stuff. I want to learn how to put makeup on properly” (Allison, White and Asian American girl). In response to the same question, another young person, who loves food and wants to own a restaurant to honor his cultural heritage, said, “Well I’m half Black and Italian. So my Dad’s half—it’s just like all of the real soul food-ish like chicken and barbecue and everything. And then, like, Mom’s Italian. So it’s like the noodles, the seafoods, the pastas” (Ryan, White and Black boy). Still another student wants to enter advertising because she loves “being creative or I guess artistic type things” (Sarah, White girl). A majority (53%) of our respondents provided this type of job-related intention at least once for at least one of their hoped-for careers. Participants giving *only* this kind of intrinsic reason, and not the prosocial one below, were said to have a “self-oriented work goal.”

Intrinsic beyond-the-self-oriented reasons. Some of the intrinsic reasons adolescents mentioned for their job aspirations were of intended benefit to the world beyond themselves and had a noble purpose to them. These were such statements as “I want to help others” or “I want to make the world a better place,” and are called “intrinsic” because these benefits are inherent in the daily work of that job. One young woman wanted to be a nurse to help victims of natural disasters abroad: “If I was a nurse I think I would be going over [to the homes of tsunami victims] as often as I could to help them, the villages where they don’t have any medical attention” (Natalie, White girl). Another student wanted to be a scientist or an engineer because technology may help solve society’s problems and so he would “invent some stuff that could help us if global warming ever happens” (Albert, boy). One student summarized her beyond-the-self intention in this way: “I think career is the way people choose to contribute to the world” (Marisol, Latina girl). This sort of intention related to their career plans was provided by 30% of the respondents. Of these respondents, 75% (or 22% of the whole sample) also gave an

intrinsic self-oriented intention. Participants giving this intention were said to have a “purposeful work goal” because these intentions were both meaningful to them and to some part of the world beyond themselves.

Extrinsic self-oriented reasons. Some of the adolescents explained that having a job would allow them to earn money or respect that would benefit themselves and actualize their version of the “American Dream.” The extrinsic benefits of their job were mediated by either financial gain or status. This included statements such as “I want to buy a house” or “I would be proud of myself.” One participant explained his aspirations like this: “I don’t know, it just sounds really awkward to say that, but yeah, living the American dream” (Colin, Asian American boy) and another described her intentions this way: “I want to have a comfortable living situation, a secure job and have a happy family. Be all American, picket fences” (Marisol, Latina girl). These statements epitomize the “American Dream” intentions, which were provided by 57% of the participants.

Extrinsic beyond-the-self-oriented reasons. Some of the participants explained that having a job would allow them to earn money or respect that they could in turn use to benefit others by “giving back.” We thus conceive of the intended benefits of their job as being mediated by either financial gain or status. This included such statements as “I want to give the money I earn to charity” or “I want to be a role model.” One White boy, who wanted to be an American football star, explained it like this: “And then you can, like, give money to charities and stuff” (Colin). Alberto, the 12th-grade Latino boy from the case above, explained that he needed to succeed in whatever job he ended up having because it was important that his cousins, aunts, and uncles knew that they too could have success. Of the respondents, 39% provided this sort of intention.⁸ These intentions were not considered purposeful work goals because the content of the goal was to get money or status and not necessarily to engage in a specific career. Regression analyses below show that they are not associated with any of our survey measures.

Summary: Research Questions 1 and 2. Using a semistructured interview, we found that young people provided four types of reasons for their careers. These varied on two dimensions—self-versus beyond-the-self-oriented, and intrinsic to the desired job versus extrinsic. Next we found that 30% of our participants named a career goal that was motivated by at least one intention to make an impact on the world beyond-the-self. 52% were motivated by an intention to have a job that

they thought was a good match for their skills, interests, or abilities. 22% mentioned both.

68% of our sample had multiple motives; that is, they mentioned more than one of the four types of reasons. Both types of reasons appeared to be indicative of identity development, as they both required some kind of self-knowledge and at least early signs of occupational commitment. But it is unclear whether the self- and beyond-the-self-oriented reasons differentially relate to eudaimonic well-being and academic motivation outcomes. Therefore, we turned to we turn to regression analysis to answer our final question.

Regression Analysis Results

Overview. The “identity” perspective summarized earlier might lead one to predict that work goals which appear to be the product of identity development would be related to positive outcomes. The purpose perspective, which incorporates the identity perspective and includes an intention to contribute to the world, would predict that an intention to accomplish something that is both meaningful to the self and to some part of the world beyond the self ought to be associated with positive outcomes. In the present study, these included higher levels of personal meaning, both in life and in what one is doing to prepare for that future accomplishment, which in adolescence is usually schoolwork.

To address the third research question, we first tested the validity of our coding. Next, we conducted Ordinary Least Squares regression analyses, predicting three different survey rating scales (Sense of Purpose in Life, Presence of Meaning in Life, and meaningfulness of studying for school) using four binary variables indicating whether a respondent mentioned each type of reason for their work goal, controlling for gender, racial/ethnic minority status, school attended, type of career mentioned, and the tendency to provide socially desirable responses.⁹ Conducting the analyses in this way did not allow for a causal interpretation, both because the data were correlational and because many participants mentioned more than one type of reason. Nevertheless, this regression procedure allowed us to test whether the purposeful reasons added unique variance to the predictive model of the outcome measure. A two-step regression was used to test whether the self-oriented reasons were associated with life and school meaningfulness before adding the purposeful and extrinsic beyond-the-self-oriented reasons. Finally, we tested and rejected an alternative hypothesis by using the same regression model to predict a measure of “listening to music” meaningfulness.

Sample. For the survey analyses, only the 9th- and 12th-grade respondents ($N = 98$) in our sample provided usable data.¹⁰ The 9th- and 12th-grade respondents showed the same trends in all analyses, and so they were grouped together for all following analyses.

Validity of Interview and Coding. First, we wanted to know if our interview and coding procedures successfully discriminated respondents, and so we chose a survey measure that ought to be related to our coding but is not a key variable in our theoretical model of youth purpose. To this end, we chose an economic life goals scale (Roberts & Robins, 2000), a four-item measure that asked respondents to rate how important various self-oriented goals were, such as having a high-status career and having a high-paying career. If our coding procedure was effective, then respondents who provided self-oriented reasons for their career—both intrinsic and extrinsic—should be more likely to say that economic life goals—which include mostly self-oriented ends—were important to them than those who did not. Because we ignored self-oriented aims in the coding of purposeful reasons, we made no prediction about whether those who were purposeful about their work would have higher or lower self-oriented economic goals.

To test the validity of our coding, we calculated unstandardized regression coefficients predicting the average score on the four-item, 5-point economic life goals scale with binary variables for each of the four “reasons” coded in the interviews. Intrinsic Self-Oriented reasons ($b = .07$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .10$) and Extrinsic Self-Oriented reasons ($b = .09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .05$) were at least moderately associated with higher scores on the economic life goals scale, while the purposeful (Intrinsic Beyond-the-Self-Oriented: $b = -.05$, $SE = 0.04$, $p > .30$) and Extrinsic Beyond-the-Self-Oriented ($b = .04$, $SE = 0.04$, $p > .30$) reasons showed no significant differences (adjusted $R^2 = .10$). We concluded that there was some validity to our interview and coding procedures, and we proceeded to test our key predictions.

Regression analysis results. We found that 9th- and 12th-grade adolescents who were purposeful about their work goals, and not those who either had a self-oriented work goal or a work goal without any intrinsic reasons, reported higher scores on these three scales, even after controlling for what type of career the person mentioned (e.g., doctor, lawyer). Table 2 shows the results of the two-step regression analyses.

Table 2
Regressions Predicting Meaning and Purpose Measures With
Different Types of Reasons for Adolescent Work Goals

Predictor	Sense of Purpose in Life		Presence of Meaning in Life		Meaningfulness of Studying and Homework	
	Step I	Step II	Step I	Step II	Step I	Step II
Constant	.54*** (.05)	.49*** (.1)	.61*** (.06)	.58*** (.06)	.41*** (.10)	.37*** (.10)
BTS						
Intrinsic-BTS (Purposeful)	—	.14*** (.04)	—	.09* (.04)	—	.16* (.07)
Extrinsic-BTS	—	-.01 (.03)	—	-.00 (.03)	—	-.10 (.06)
Self						
Intrinsic-Self	.02 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	.07 (.04)	.04 (.04)	.03 (.07)	-.02 (.07)
Extrinsic-Self	.06† (.03)	.10** (.03)	-.03 (.03)	-.00 (.03)	-.01 (.06)	.07 (.06)
Fit:						
Adjusted R ²	.10	.24	.27	.30	.16	.22

Note: BTS = beyond-the-self-oriented; Regression coefficients are above standard errors. All variables are coded from 0 to 1. All regressions control for gender, race/ethnicity, school, and tendency to provide socially desirable responses and include dummies for the specific career mentioned (using the SOC code). Effect sizes and significance show no noticeable differences for a fixed effects model, clustering on the specific career mentioned. Effect sizes were smaller but significance and trends were identical for a model that excluded dummies for the specific career mentioned.

† $p < .1$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Sense of purpose in life. For the Sense of Purpose in Life scale (Ryff, 1989), the second column (Step I) shows that the self-oriented intrinsic reasons for a work goal were not significantly associated with higher scores on the Purpose in Life subscale, although the self-oriented extrinsic reasons trended in that direction ($b = .06$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .10$). The third column (Step II) shows that, again, neither the self-oriented intrinsic reasons nor the extrinsic beyond-the-self-oriented reasons were significantly associated, but the purposeful reasons for a work goal ($b = .14$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$) and the extrinsic self-oriented reasons ($b = .10$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .01$) were significant predictors of higher scores. Furthermore, it appears that the Step II regression is a better fit (adjusted $R^2 = .10$ vs. adjusted $R^2 = .24$).

Presence of meaning. For the Presence of Meaning in Life scale (Steger et al., 2006), the fourth column in Table 1 (Step I) shows a similar trend to the previous scale, with both the intrinsic and extrinsic self-oriented reasons not showing significant associations. But the fifth column (Step II) shows that purposeful reasons were the only significant predictors of the presence of meaning in life ($b = .09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .05$), with the intrinsic self-oriented reasons and both extrinsic reasons showing no associations. Again, it appears that the Step II regression is a slightly better fit (adjusted $R^2 = .27$ vs. adjusted $R^2 = .30$).

Meaningfulness of schoolwork. Finally, we tested whether being purposeful about one's work goals was associated with a greater sense that studying for school was meaningful, and again we found similar results. The sixth column in Table 2 (Step I) shows that neither of the self-oriented reasons for a future job were significantly related to the meaningfulness of studying and doing homework, and the seventh column (Step II) shows that the purposeful reasons for a future job were significantly related with school being more meaningful ($b = .16$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .05$), while the other reasons were not. It appears that the Step II regression is a better fit than the Step I model (adjusted $R^2 = .16$ vs. adjusted $R^2 = .22$).

Summary: Regression Results. Standardized regression coefficients were also calculated for the three outcome variables, yielding effect sizes of .23, .22, and .27 for Sense of Purpose, Presence of Meaning, and studying meaningfulness, respectively. Having a purposeful work goal was associated with going from *Neither agree nor disagree* to *Agree* on the Sense of Purpose in Life scale, from *Slightly agree* to *Agree* on the Presence of Meaning scale, and from *Somewhat meaningful* to *Moderately meaningful* for the meaningfulness of schoolwork item.

Test of an alternative hypothesis. To test whether the word “meaningful,” and not the content “studying for school” was driving this relationship, we included a question about the meaningfulness of activities related to music as a validity check and ran an identical regression (switching the dependent variable) as the Step II analysis in the seventh column of Table 2. Consistent with expectations, none of reasons for work goals were significantly associated with the meaningfulness of music activities (all $ps > .10$) and the model had a very poor fit statistic (adjusted $R^2 = .0018$).

Discussion

Overview of Results

This study explored the types of reasons that motivate young people to aspire to work in a particular occupation, how many of them have those reasons, and which reasons were associated with the most positive outcomes. Using a semistructured interview, we found that adolescents who named a future occupation talked about four different types of reasons for naming that occupation. These reasons were coded as either self-oriented or beyond-the-self-oriented, and either intrinsic to the work to be done or extrinsic. Turning to the frequencies of these reasons, we found that about 30% of our sample had a beyond-the-self reason that was intrinsic to their future occupation (called a *purposeful work goal*) through which hoped make some kind of impact on the world beyond themselves.

Next, we explored whether the young people with purposeful work goals, compared to those with other or no reasons, also reported higher levels of meaning in life, a greater sense of a higher sense of purpose in life, and said that studying and doing homework for school were more meaningful to them. Regression analyses showed that they did, even when controlling for demographics and the types of career to which they aspired. These results suggest that a complete account of how work goals relate to eudaimonic well-being and academic motivation in adolescence might also consider the development of adolescents’ purposeful intentions to accomplish something of consequence to the world, in addition to other useful constructs such as identity and future orientation.

Implications

Identity. From an identity status (Marcia, 1966) perspective, one might predict that future careers sought for their intrinsic enjoyment might be a sign

of self-knowledge and budding identity commitments, and therefore would be significant predictors of well-being and motivation during adolescence. But in the present sample, and for the meaning-related outcome measures that we chose, these intrinsic, self-oriented intentions do not significantly predict any variance. Rather, it was the connection with the world beyond the self that was indicative of purpose and meaning in life and in school. The present results are limited, to be sure, but they are suggestive that a fertile ground for future identity research might be the intersection between self- and beyond-the-self-oriented reasons for personal goals and strivings. It remains to be seen, however, whether the relationships found in the present study would replicate in other samples and for other measures of well-being, or academic motivation.

Motivation. We predict that purposeful work goals, as we have defined them here, will have an effect on mastery approach and avoidance goals (Cury et al., 2006). When adolescents see their school work as something they are being counted on to learn—whether by the patients to which they will attend to as a doctor one day, or by the clients they will serve as a business owner or a lawyer—they may shift their orientation toward a mastery or learning goal, because it is knowledge, and not the credential, which is necessary for goal attainment. If, on the other hand, schoolwork is a task that they have to complete in order to have the “good life” or achieve the “American dream,” then it is possible that they would be more likely to adopt a performance goal, because the credential is a commodity which can be exchanged for higher status or comfort (Labaree, 1997). Experimental studies connecting academic tasks to either self- or beyond-the-self-oriented reasons for a career might test this hypothesis.

Clarifying meaning and purpose. Finally, this study highlighted the distinction between the concepts of purpose and meaning. Damon et al. (2003) reviewed the empirical literature on purpose and found that most measures and conceptualizations conflated purpose with the related constructs of meaning or personal agency. In the present study, we defined purpose as an intention to accomplish something and defined personal meaning as the sense that one’s life has a direction or as the sense that there is an important part of one’s life that gives it significance. A purpose, in our analysis, is a type of goal, though it seems to have implications for meaning, which is a sense or a feeling (Baumeister, 1991; Steger, in press). Though meaning and purpose were found to be correlates, they were conceptually and operationally distinct. We acknowledge that the present

study did not operationalize the entire construct of youth purpose per Damon et al. (2003) but used a rather simple analytic procedure for addressing one of its core components—the intention. Future studies might test whether other parts of Damon et al.'s (2003) conceptualization of youth purpose, such as engagement, also lead to positive well-being and motivational outcomes.

Limitations

Several features of the study limit the inferences that can be drawn. The study used multiple methods to find correlations between reliably coded interview responses and survey responses on established measures, but both methods were self-report, and no behavioral outcomes were used. This sample, although diverse, comprised a nonprobability sample of American youth—as such, we recognize the current results may not generalize to youth in other cultures or regions of the country. We ignored age differences because we believe that longitudinal studies will be more effective for learning about development. Furthermore, all of the results are correlational and were collected at one time point, and so we cannot make causal inferences. Last, we have focused on only one category of purpose—work—and ignored other potentially purposeful domains (such as family or volunteering in the community). It is possible that the young people who were purposeful about their work goals would have named a different activity as their life's purpose. Nevertheless, the regression models were robust and produced similar results in several different specifications.

Conclusions

One common way adults persuade young people to try hard in school is by telling them it will pay off in their future jobs. Many adults make arguments like this one: “To have a good life you need money, and you get money from having a good job. But to get a good job you need to graduate from a good college, which requires a high school degree—so start studying!” This train of thought is prevalent in America, and yet it seems incomplete. Young people may be energized by additional motives for having a successful career, such as making the world a better place or having a meaningful life. Many young people in the current study explained that the “good job → good life” script did not include all the reasons for their work goals.

Other, previously unexplored motives—such as the chance to make an impact on the world—were important to them. If teachers, parents, and youth workers only sing the praises of the “images of material success” (Oyserman et al., 2006, p. 191) to be gained from a high school and college degree, while neglecting the life meaning to be had from also helping others in one’s future career, they may be leaving some motivational force “on the table.”

Notes

1. Though we see purpose to be an important part of identity, in the current article, we aim to highlight the distinctions between the concepts rather than their commonalities, particularly with regard to the beyond-the-self aspirations.

2. The interview participants in the present study can be considered to be representative of their schools because they were randomly selected, but they cannot be considered to be representative of any larger sampling area due to nonprobability sampling. However, the present sample *resembles* the diverse demographics of Northern California as compared to the Current Population Survey’s (CPS) March 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement estimates of the under-19 population in the 10-county area. A cross-tab of 5 race/ethnicity categories and 2 income categories shows that the present sample was an overall good match, but it had an average of a 10% difference for the marginal distribution for the race/ethnicity categories (Whites and Latinos were underrepresented by 13%, Asians overrepresented by 10%), and the Latinos and Whites in our sample had significantly higher income than expected from the CPS data, although, on average, the sample showed a similar range of income variability. Note that our income measure was relatively imprecise and the race/ethnicity were slightly different, likely leading to some of the discrepancies. More detailed information is available on request from the first author.

3. To measure grades, we asked participants if they get “Mostly As,” “Mostly Bs,” and so on at the end of the survey.

4. An early version of the interview can be found in Damon (2008a). Although the version used in the present study is unpublished, it is available on request from the Stanford Center on Adolescence (for contact information, go to <http://coa.stanford.edu>).

5. Limiting the analyses to only the reasons provided for the *first* work goal mentioned did not noticeably change the regression results or the conclusions of the study.

6. This discrepancy may be due to the way in which the questions were asked differently on the survey compared to the interview. It is possible that being asked directly “What career do you plan to have in the future?” as was the case on the survey, might elicit a different career-related response than the question “What is most important to you in life?” It is also possible that for those who are less certain about their career goals, they may have changed their minds in the short period of time between the administrations of the surveys and interviews.

7. “All names are pseudonyms”

8. Content from some of the interviews led us to predict that children from immigrant families would be more likely to say that they want to have a job to “give back” their family. Though we did not explicitly ask for parent’s birth country in the interview, we did create a variable indicating whether the participant volunteered this information. A chi-square test showed that children from immigrant families were not more likely to say that they want a job to make money to give back to a family or others ($p > .50$).

9. All regression analyses were also run (1) using a fixed-effects model that clustered on the SOC career codes in Figure 1, (2) using the same model from (1), except with only the purposeful reasons included, dropping the other three types of reasons, (3) including all four types of reasons but excluding the SOC career codes as dummy variables, and (4) using a fixed-effects model clustering on school attended. In all models, the purposeful work goals were significant and positive predictors of each of the three measures of meaning, although the effect sizes varied slightly.

10. On a number of survey measures, the 6th-grade respondents provided data that cast doubt on whether they understood the questions in the same way as the high school students. The same concern does not exist for work goals provided in the clinical interview, because the semi-structured protocol allowed for rephrasing and explaining of the questions. In addition, an analysis of 6th-graders' responses to a question in the interview protocol that asked them to define purpose found that they rarely indicated that they understood purpose or meaning in the way conceptualized by the authors (Moran & Damon, 2008). Because the survey questions (but not the interview questions) explicitly used the words *purpose* and *meaning* quite often, the 6th-grade respondents were not included in survey analyses.

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