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Using the Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick et al., 2006), the Trait Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), the present study examined the relationship among purpose, hope, and life satisfaction among 153 adolescents, 237 emerging adults, and 416 adults ($N = 806$). Results of this cross-sectional study revealed that having identified a purpose in life was associated with greater life satisfaction at these three stages of life. However, searching for a purpose was only associated with increased life satisfaction during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Additionally, aspects of hope mediated the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction at all three stages of life. Implications of these results for effectively fostering purpose are discussed.

Keywords: purpose in life; life satisfaction; hope; adolescence; emerging adulthood; adulthood; meaning; subjective well-being

Introduction

Researchers in the field of positive psychology have increasingly focused on the role purpose and hope play in human thriving. A growing body of theoretical and empirical literature suggests that having a purpose in life contributes to optimal human development in a variety of ways. For example, theoretical research identifies purpose as a developmental asset (Benson, 2006) and an important component of human flourishing (Seligman, 2002). Empirical research finds that it is associated with greater levels of happiness (French & Joseph, 1999) and resiliency (Benard, 1991).

Youth with purpose are psychologically healthier than their peers (Shek, 1993), and the same appears to hold for adults (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1967; Kish & Moddy, 1989). Measures of related concepts yield similar findings. For instance, Antonovsky (1987) found that coherence, which measures a global feeling about the comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness of the world, is associated with physical and psychological health. Similarly, Debats (1998) found that higher purpose scores were significantly negatively correlated with psychological distress.

Purpose also appears to play a role in overcoming life's challenges. Victor Frankl (1959) was one of the first psychologists to propose that having a high-level belief system, such as a purpose in life, enabled people to endure life's hardships. With regards to youth, Erikson (1968) reported that purpose helps young people successfully navigate and resolve their identity 'crises'.

Moreover, a strong sense of purpose underscores prosocial moral action and civic engagement. Higher scores on the Purpose in Life test predict altruism (Noblejas de la Flor, 1997; Shek, Ma, & Cheung, 1994) and positive affect (Noblejas de la Flor, 1997), and higher scores on scales of generativity, a related construct, correlate with greater involvement in social and political activities (McAdams, 2001).

Theoretical research points to a possible positive correlation between purpose and subjective well-being. According to Seligman (2002) there are three primary paths to happiness. The first route involves experiencing as many of life's pleasures as possible and results in short-term happiness. The other two routes produce longer lasting, deeper forms of contentment. The second, also called the good life, involves becoming deeply involved in those activities in which one excels and losing oneself in the process, and the third, the meaningful life, involves pursuing a path in which a cause or an institution supplies a sense of commitment to something greater than oneself. In this way, demonstrating a concern for the world beyond the self is required for achieving the most lasting form of well-being. Pursuing a purpose involves aspects of both the good life and the meaningful life, and in this way purpose is indirectly linked to subjective well-being.

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Empirical research further bolsters the claim that purpose and subjective well-being are significantly related. For example, high scores on McAdams' generativity measures (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) have shown that a strong sense of generativity in midlife is associated with subjective well-being. Generativity includes, of course, a strong purpose in establishing and guiding future generations (Erikson, 1950). Similarly, Ryff has shown that high scores on her purpose in life sub-scale are associated with a subjective sense of well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

In each of these cases, the researchers conceive of purpose in a broader way than the present study does. Purpose, as these studies define it, includes both internally-directed as well as externally-directed sources of meaning in life. While we find this conception of purpose useful, we believe a more novel approach to the construct is warranted. Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003) offer a new definition of purpose which conceives of the construct in a slightly different way. According to their definition, purpose is a 'stable and generalizable intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self' (Damon et al., 2003). This definition of purpose includes three important components. First, a purpose represents an ultimate aim toward which one can make progress. Second, a purpose is meaningful to the self. This may sound obvious, but the emphasis on self-meaning underscores the fact that the pursuit of purpose is voluntary and self-motivated. The individual, rather than peers, parents, or others, serves as the driving force behind the intention.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as well as being meaningful to the self, a purpose is meaningful to others as well. In other words, a purpose in life represents an intention to act in the larger world on behalf of others or in pursuit of a larger cause. Personal meaningfulness represents one important component of the construct, but purpose also includes the intention to contribute to matters larger than the self, and this desire to have an impact on the broader world serves as a significant motivational force for purposeful individuals. As such, it represents a central component of the construct. This other-focused orientation distinguishes purpose from some earlier conceptions of the term as well as from meaning. Because meaning represents one of the essential aspects of purpose, examining results from this related construct can, in some cases, be illuminating; however, it is important to keep in mind that purpose also includes a critical beyond-the-self focus which is not captured in the meaning construct. The present study makes use of the Damon et al. (2003) definition for two primary reasons. First, we believe it is valuable to distinguish

purpose from meaning, which this definition does, and second, this externally-oriented conception of purpose includes an important social orientation that other definitions lack.

Similar to purpose, hope also plays a significant role in the positive psychology literature. It has been identified as a character strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and as a cognitive-focused member of the positive psychology family (Snyder & Lopez, 2005). Like purpose, the hope construct represents a focus on significant future aims, and yet it has not been investigated in relation to purpose.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of definitions of hope were offered. One group of scholars defined hope as 'the perception that one's goals could be attained' (Cantril, 1964; Farber, 1968; Frank, 1975; Melges & Bowlby, 1969; Menninger, 1959; Schachtel, 1959). A second group of scholars put forth a two-part definition: 'Hope includes a belief that one knows how to reach one's goals (Pathways) and a belief that one has the motivation to use those pathways to reach one's goals (Agency)' (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2005). In other words, hope involves both *the will* ('Agency') to pursue certain ends and *the way* ('Pathways') to do to so effectively. We believe this latter definition captures the essence of that which is involved in hopeful, goal-directed thought, and at the same time is consonant with our everyday understanding of the term. Therefore, the present study relies on this definition of hope.

The 'will and the way' of hope shares features with Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1997) notion of self-efficacy; however, important differences between the constructs exist as well. As Snyder (2002) pointed out, both self-efficacy and hope theory perceive of goals as central, but the nature of the goals they conceive of differs. While individuals can feel efficacious about any fairly important, situation-specific goal, hoped for aims are 'enduring, cross-sectional, situational, goal-directed, or all three' (Snyder, 2002, p. 257). In self-efficacy thinking, people are posited to analyze the contingencies in a specific goal attainment situation (outcome expectancy); in hopeful thinking, the focus is on self-analysis of one's overall ability to produce workable plans required to reach one's goals. Another important difference lies in the way the individual evaluates his or her capacity to carry out an action. The efficacy expectancy reflects one's perception that he or she *can* act effectively, whereas the hope theory emphasizes one's perception that he or she *will* act effectively. Finally, empirical research confirms that hope and self-efficacy are indeed distinct concepts (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999).

This conception of hope also overlaps with optimism, though these constructs also feature important differences. Both hope and optimism are cognitive in nature and explain behavior across situations

(Scheier & Carver, 1985; Snyder, 1995). However, according to Scheier and Carver (2000), optimism posits that people perceive of themselves as being able to move toward desirable goals and away from undesirable ones. Therefore, outcome expectancies are the primary elicitors of goal-directed behaviors. With hope, however, outcome expectancies are only part of the equation. In addition to believing that an individual is capable of being successful, hopeful individuals also believe they have the means of acting successfully (Snyder, 1995). Empirical differences between hope and optimism have also been found (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999).

The former president of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel (1990), pointed out another important distinction between people's everyday use of the terms hope and optimism. In a statement about hope, he defined the construct as 'a state of mind, not of the world . . . [It] is not the same as joy that things are going well or a willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more propitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper the hope is' (Havel, 1990, p. 181). In other words, hope is not the same as optimism that things will work out for the best, but a belief that some things are worth working toward or fighting for because they are right, regardless of how they turn out.

The present study sought to address three primary questions around purpose, hope, and life satisfaction. First, what is the subjective experience of life satisfaction associated with purpose? Second, does hope influence the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction, and if so how? Third, does the relationship among these variables differ during adolescence, emerging adulthood, or adulthood?

Based on knowledge of the research conducted on purpose, hope, and life satisfaction as well as a broad understanding of human development, the authors of the present study formulated several hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that the present study's conception of purpose would be positively associated with life satisfaction. Since empirical research establishing a direct relationship between the present study's conception of purpose and life satisfaction has not been conducted, our hypothesis was based on findings from related constructs. For example, empirical research on internally-focused conceptions of purpose determined that the construct mediated the relationship between life satisfaction and suicide ideation (Heisel & Flett, 2004). Other research established a positive relationship between internally-oriented conceptions of purpose and life satisfaction (Keyes et al., 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and research on the related construct

of meaning (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988) generated a similar conclusion.

Second, we expected to find that purpose and hope work in tandem. Both constructs are future oriented, and both reflect a goal orientation. Purpose represents an intention to pursue an ultimate concern while hope represents a belief that one knows how to and has the will to make progress toward that highest aim. Further, at least theoretically, hope seems to play a critical role in keeping purposeful individuals committed to their aims over time. Remaining committed to one's purpose over time, despite setbacks and challenges, would likely be facilitated by a sense of hope. In support of this assumption, Mascaro and Rosen (2005) found that the related construct of meaning was positively related to hope, and Bronk (2005) found that optimism, a virtue that shares features with hope, was a defining characteristic of youth with intense commitments to a purpose in life. Therefore, we expected to find that hope played an important mediating role between purpose and life satisfaction.

Finally, we hypothesized that differences would arise around the relationship among these three variables with respect to age. Unfortunately, empirical research on age related trends associated with purpose, hope, and life satisfaction individually are not particularly useful in forming a hypothesis about the way the three constructs will function together. For example, studies of age-related differences associated with purpose differ based on which measure is being administered. When the Purpose in Life test (Meier & Edwards, 1974; Sato & Tanaka, 1974) is administered, purpose appears to be more prevalent among younger individuals, but when the purpose subscale of Ryff's well-being scales (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) is administered, the prevalence of purpose appears to increase with age. Further, a study of meaning determined that searching for meaning was more common among younger adults while older adults were more likely to have identified a source of meaning for their lives (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). Hope (Snyder, 2000, 2003) and life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1998), however, appear to be more stable across the lifespan. Since these findings shed little light on the way purpose, hope, and life satisfaction together are likely to vary by age, our hypothesis is based more on a general understanding of human development and on a theoretical argument.

We expected to find that identifying a purpose for one's life would be associated with higher life satisfaction scores at all three age points, but that searching for purpose would only be associated with increased levels of life satisfaction at the adolescent and emerging adult stages of life. Searching for purpose during adulthood, we predicted, would be associated with decreased life satisfaction scores. These findings seemed probable given that the search for purpose appears to take place in conjunction with the search for

identity (Erikson, 1968), and the search for identity is largely associated with the adolescent and emerging adult life stages. Also, in the United States searching for purpose is a socially accepted, even expected, activity for adolescents and emerging adults but not for adults, who are expected to have already identified a purpose for their lives. Therefore, the authors posited that searching for purpose at this life stage would be associated with decreased levels of life satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the way the purpose construct functions in the lives of adolescents and young adults. To that end, we believe the findings shall make important scholarly as well as practical contributions to the growing field of positive youth development. The search for purpose in life and how this construct contributes to optimal human development is a topic of increasing interest to positive psychology scholars, and the results of this study shall reveal under what circumstances purpose and hope act as indicators of and contributors to human thriving. Further, the findings shall shed light on the nature of this more externally-oriented conception of purpose, a construct which has garnered increasing attention from positive youth development researchers (see Benson, 2006; Damon, 2009). In particular, the results shall help further distinguish purpose from meaning, and further distinguish purpose from hope. From a practical perspective, results shall provide information regarding how and when to effectively foster purpose. Specifically, results shall reveal much about the subjective experience of leading a life of purpose and of searching for a purpose for one's life, which shall have important implications for fostering and supporting the development of purpose in youth and adults alike.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study included 153 adolescents (Mean age $= 14.0$; $SD = 1.7$), 237 emerging adults (Mean age $= 21.0$; $SD = 2.0$), and 416 adults[1] (Mean age $= 35.5$; $SD = 0.5$) ($N = 806$), all of whom completed the requisite informed consent procedures. This sample was selected because while the contours of a purposeful life may begin to form during childhood, research suggests that it does not crystallize much before adolescence, and indeed, is a project that endures across the lifespan (Damon, 2009). The sample was 47% male and included individuals who either lived or attended college in the Midwest. Representing the ethnic make-up of the Midwest data collection location, the sample was predominantly Caucasian (White/Non-Hispanic $= 86$%; Black/African American $= 4$%; Asian/Asian American $= 3$%; Hispanic/Latino $= 3$%; American Indian/Alaska Native $= 1$%; Other $= 3$%).

Adolescent and emerging adult participants were recruited by invitation through their middle and high schools, whereas the adults in the study volunteered to participate in a larger study following their trajectory from college graduation. The scales for this study represented a small subset of the full battery of surveys completed by the participants.

Measures

Participants completed three surveys. The Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick et al., 2006) was designed by members of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, including the first author, to assess the prevalence of purpose among adolescents, emerging adults, and adults. The items are based on various measures designed to assess purpose and related constructs, including the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006), the Purpose in Life test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1967), and the purpose in life subscale of Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-being (Keyes et al., 2002); items drawn from these measures were adapted to assess the present study's conception of the purpose construct. As such the scale includes questions that probe one's search for purpose, one's identification of purpose, the engagement of one's purpose, and the relative centrality of one's purpose in life. Repeated use of the survey has revealed that these four components can be collapsed into two subscales: Identified Purpose (15 items, $\alpha = 0.94$), and Searching for purpose (5 items, $\alpha = 0.94$). Participants rated the survey items on a seven-point Likert scale with higher scores indicating greater Identification or more Searching. A sample item from the Identified subscale is 'I have discovered a satisfying life purpose,' and a sample from the Searching subscale is 'I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life'.

The second survey, the Trait Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), assesses participants' confidence that they know how to reach their goals and that they have the ability to do so. As such, like the Revised Youth Purpose Scale, the Trait Hope Scale also consists of two subscales, including: Agency, or one's determination towards a goal or direction (the 'will' component), and Pathways, or one's ability to find ways around obstacles confronted in life (the 'way' component). The hope scale was analyzed as a unitary construct, but also as separate Agency and Pathways subscales because these components point to different aspects of hope, which seemed likely to relate in different ways to the purpose construct. For example, it seems possible that *the will* to pursue one's purpose would differ from knowing *the way* to achieve one's ultimate aims. Participants rated the eight items on a four-point Likert scale[2] with higher scores indicating a greater

sense of hope. A sample item from the Agency subscale (4 items, $\alpha = 0.87$) is 'I energetically pursue my goals'. A sample item from the Pathways subscale (4 items, $\alpha = 0.86$) is 'I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me'.

Finally, participants completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). This scale is designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. Participants rated the five items on a seven-point Likert scale with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. A sample item from the scale (five items, $\alpha = 0.87$) is 'In most ways my life is close to ideal'.

Results

To examine the relationship among purpose, hope, and life satisfaction during adolescence and adulthood, separate statistical analyses were performed for the adolescent, emerging adult, and adult subgroups. Two primary analyses were conducted. First, correlations were run to assess the relationship among purpose and the positive psychology outcomes, including hope (Agency and Pathways) and life satisfaction. Second, multiple regressions tested whether hope mediated the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction.

Correlational analyses

Among the adolescent sample, the Identified and Searching for Purpose subscales were positively correlated. The Identified Purpose subscale was also significantly positively correlated with the Agency subscale, the Pathways subscale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Searching for Purpose was also positively correlated with the Agency subscale, the Pathways subscale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Descriptive statistics and a summary of the adolescent life stage correlational analyses can be found in Table 1.

Results were essentially the same for the emerging adult sample. Among this sample, the Identified and Searching for Purpose subscales were positively correlated, and the Identified Purpose subscale was also significantly positively correlated with the Agency subscale, the Pathways subscale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale. The Searching for Purpose subscale was similarly positively correlated with Agency, Pathways, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Descriptive statistics and the emerging adulthood correlational analyses can be found in Table 2.

Interesting differences arose, however, with the adult sample. Within this subgroup, the Identified Purpose and Searching for Purpose subscales were negatively correlated. The Identified Purpose subscale was positively correlated with the Agency subscale, the Pathways subscale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale, while the Searching for Purpose subscale was negatively related to the Agency subscale, unrelated to the Pathways subscale, and negatively related to Satisfaction with Life. It would appear then, that while searching for purpose during adolescence and emerging adulthood is predictive of life satisfaction, doing so during the early to middle adult life stage is

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses for the adolescent sub-group.

	Mean	St. Dev.	Identified purpose	Searching for purpose	Hope (Agency)	Hope (Pathways)	Life satisfaction
Identified purpose	73.96	16.15	1				
Searching for purpose	23.45	6.28	0.72***	1			
Hope (Agency)	12.53	1.91	0.44***	0.36***	1		
Hope (Pathways)	12.82	1.99	0.21*	0.17*	0.4***	1	
Life satisfaction	24.25	6.27	0.46***	0.31***	0.45***	0.17*	1

Note: Adolescents completed the Hope Scale using a four-point Likert scale, which is reflected in the mean scores.
$p > 0.1$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses for the emerging adult sub-group.

	Mean	St. Dev.	Identified purpose	Searching for purpose	Hope (Agency)	Hope (Pathways)	Life satisfaction
Identified purpose	81.89	12.87	1				
Searching for purpose	24.78	5.69	0.69***	1			
Hope (Agency)	12.93	1.69	0.46***	0.34***	1		
Hope (Pathways)	12.58	2.51	0.24***	0.13*	0.38***	1	
Life satisfaction	25.79	5.34	0.33***	0.29***	0.41***	0.15*	1

Note: Emerging adults completed the Hope Scale using a four-point Likert scale, which is reflected in the mean scores.
$p > 0.1$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses for the early to middle adult sub-group.

	Mean	St. Dev.	Identified purpose	Searching for purpose	Hope (Agency)	Hope (Pathways)	Life satisfaction
Identified purpose	81.28	13.82	1				
Searching for purpose	21.02	8.28	−0.23***	1			
Hope (Agency)	26.6	3.59	0.67***	−0.16**	1		
Hope (Pathways)	25.61	3.86	0.42***	−0.05	0.65***	1	
Life satisfaction	26.98	5.53	0.66***	−0.23***	0.58***	0.36***	1

Note: Adults completed the Hope Scale using an eight-point Likert scale, which is reflected in the mean scores.
$p > 0.1$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

not. A summary of the descriptive statistics and correlational analyses for the adult sub-group can be found in Table 3.

Mediational model tests

Regressions were performed to assess whether the two hope subscales and the unitary hope scale mediated the relationship between the Identified Purpose subscale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Following the guidelines of Baron and Kenny (1986), this analysis requires one to assess whether the predictor variable (Identified Purpose) predicts the outcome variable (Satisfaction with Life). Second, the predictor variable needs to predict the mediator (Agency and Pathways). Third, the mediator must predict the outcome variable. Finally, if there is a mediator effect, the regression coefficient of the predictor on the outcome should decrease when controlling for the mediator. A full mediational effect would be indicated if the coefficient is no longer significant. If the coefficient remains significant, partial mediation can be assessed using a Sobel test (1982). Therefore, in all, up to five different tests may be performed for the two mediational models; all effects were thus tested against an alpha level of 0.01, in line with a Bonferroni correction.

The Agency subscale mediated the relationship between identified purpose and life satisfaction among all three sub-groups. Among adolescents, emerging adults, and adults, a significant positive relationship emerged between the Identified Purpose subscale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Adolescents: $\beta = 0.42$, $t(130) = 3.71$, $p < 0.001$; Emerging Adults: $\beta = 0.27$, $t(220) = 3.03$, $p = 0.003$; Adults: $\beta = 0.65$, $t(294) = 14.75$, $p < 0.001$), the Identified Purpose subscale positively predicted the mediator Agency (Adolescents: $\beta = 0.45$, $t(129) = 3.99$, $p < 0.001$; Emerging Adults: $\beta = 0.44$, $t(220) = 5.30$, $p < 0.001$; Adults: $\beta = 0.66$, $t(277) = 14.70$, $p < 0.001$), and Agency positively predicted life satisfaction (Adolescents: $\beta = 0.33$, $t(129) = 3.96$, $p < 0.001$; Emerging Adults: $\beta = 0.30$, $t(219) = 4.44$, $p < 0.001$; Adults: $\beta = 0.27$, $t(276) = 4.49$, $p < 0.001$). At each stage, the regression coefficient for Identified

Purpose on life satisfaction decreased (Adolescents: from $\beta = 0.42$ to $\beta = 0.25$, $t(125) = 2.77$, $p = 0.033$; Emerging Adults: from $\beta = 0.27$ to $\beta = 0.13$, $t(218) = 1.50$, $p = 0.14$; Adults: from $\beta = 0.65$ to $\beta = 0.47$, $t(276) = 7.86$, $p < 0.001$) when the mediator Agency was controlled, and the Sobel test of partial mediation was significant at all three age groups (Adolescents: $z = 2.78$, $p = 0.005$; Emerging Adults: $z = 1.92$, $p = 0.005$; Adults: $z = 4.29$, $p < 0.001$).

Next, the Pathways subscale as a mediator of Identified Purpose and Satisfaction with Life was tested. Among adolescents, Pathways was not significantly predicted by Identified Purpose ($\beta = 0.23$, $t(130) = 1.83$, $p = 0.069$) nor did Pathways predict life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.07$, $t(125) = 0.88$, $p = 0.383$). Within the emerging adult subgroup, the mediator Pathways was predicted by Identified Purpose ($\beta = 0.30$, $t(220) = 3.26$, $p = 0.001$), however Pathways did not predict life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.05$, $t(219) = 0.76$, $p = 0.448$). Finally, among the early to middle adult sample, the Identified Purpose positively predicted Pathways, $\beta = 0.44$, $t(278) = 8.08$, $p < 0.001$, and Pathways positively predicted life satisfaction, $\beta = 0.11$, $t(275) = 2.62$, $p < 0.05$. Controlling for Pathways, the regression coefficient for Identified Purpose only decreased slightly when predicting life satisfaction, $\beta = 0.60$ (vs. 0.65), $t(275) = 11.79$, $p < 0.001$. A Sobel test of this partial mediational effect was significant, $z = 2.16$, $p < 0.05$.

Finally, when examining hope as a unitary construct, not surprisingly, the results were roughly the average of those for the separate subcomponents. Identified Purpose predicted Hope for adolescents ($\beta = 0.41$, $t(126) = 5.04$, $p < 0.001$), emerging adults ($\beta = 0.42$, $t(222) = 6.96$, $p < 0.001$), and adults ($\beta = 0.60$, $t(275) = 12.39$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, Hope predicted Life Satisfaction for all three groups: adolescents ($\beta = 0.25$, $t(125) = 2.91$, $p < 0.01$); emerging adults ($\beta = 0.23$, $t(221) = 3.40$, $p < 0.01$); adults ($\beta = 0.20$, $t(274) = 3.66$, $p < 0.01$). Similar to the analyses for the Pathways component, Hope as a unitary construct only served to mediate the relationship between Identified Purpose and Life Satisfaction for adults

($z = 3.52$, $p < 0.01$) and not for adolescents ($z = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$) or emerging adults ($z = 0.667$, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion

The search for purpose, and how this construct contributes to flourishing, adaptation, and a life well-lived, is a topic of increasing interest to the growing field of positive psychology. In the present paper we adopted a model of purpose developed by Damon et al. (2003). This model suggests that searching for purpose and having an identified purpose might lead to differential outcomes depending on when they are experienced during the life-course. Furthermore, we hypothesized that the relationship between purpose and various outcomes might not be a direct one. Having an identified purpose might prove unavailing if one lacked knowledge of how to enact one's purpose or if one lacked the requisite sense of Agency to pursue it. In other words, having the 'will' may be important, but knowing 'the way' may be decisive. Hence the purpose of this paper was to explore the relationship among purpose, hope, and life satisfaction in three age groups: adolescence, emergent adulthood, and adulthood.

Results from the present study point to at least two interesting and theoretically important conclusions regarding purpose at these three stages of life. First, having identified a purpose in life is associated with greater life satisfaction in adolescence, emerging adulthood, and adulthood. Searching for a purpose, however, is associated with greater life satisfaction for adolescents and emerging adults, but not for adults. Second, the Agency subcomponent of hope mediates the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction at all three stages of life, but the Pathways subcomponent and the full hope scale only mediate the relationship during adulthood. These conclusions shed light on the important role purpose plays in healthy human development, and they have significant implications for how and when to effectively foster purpose.

The first finding, that having identified a purpose in life is associated with higher ratings of life satisfaction, supported our hypothesis. Research on internally-focused conceptions of purpose came to the same conclusion, but this is the first study to empirically connect this externally-oriented conception of purpose with life satisfaction. Furthermore, the finding is robust since it appears at all three life stages.

Next, we had expected to find that searching for purpose was positively related to life satisfaction during adolescence and emerging adulthood and negatively related during adulthood. The results supported our hypothesis on each of these points, except that the relationship between searching for purpose and life satisfaction was not significant. According to Erikson (1968), the search for identity, of which purpose may

serve as a central component, is the main task of the adolescent and to a lesser degree the emerging adult stage of life. As such, in this culture it is a normative experience for adolescents and emerging adults to be actively involved in searching for a life purpose. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that doing so is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction. However, we expect that by the time people reach adulthood they have resolved (at least to a some degree) this search for identity, and with it discovered a purpose for their lives. Not surprisingly, the search for purpose during adulthood then is not associated with increased levels of life satisfaction.

It is interesting to compare these first two results to those reported by Steger et al. (2006), regarding their development of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire with undergraduate samples. They report a two-factor structure similar to the Youth Purpose Scale, with two subscales that measured the 'presence of' or 'search for' Meaning in Life. Similar to our results with the Identified Purpose subscale, they found that the presence of meaning was linked to greater life satisfaction. However, searching for meaning was negatively related to life satisfaction in their emerging adult sample, whereas we evidenced a positive relationship between searching for purpose and life satisfaction in our emerging adult sample. We believe this discrepancy speaks to two related points. First, as previously stated, personal meaningfulness represents one important component of purpose, but purpose and meaning are not synonymous. Purpose also includes a significant concern for individuals or causes beyond the self. Second, further research is needed to examine the complex relationship between meaning and purpose, and moreover how these constructs differentially predict outcomes throughout the lifespan.

The next noteworthy conclusion is the consistent presence of hope among individuals with purpose. While we cannot tell from the present study which comes first, purpose or hope, it is interesting to note that at all three stages of life aspects of hope were significantly related to purpose. The present study found that the Agency component of hope mediated the relationship between identified purpose and life satisfaction, for adolescents, emerging adults, and adults. In other words, people who have identified a purpose for their lives report feeling content when they feel motivated to work toward their ultimate aim. Not only is having identified a purpose for one's life associated with greater life satisfaction, but feeling confident that one has the will to progress toward his or her ultimate aim, is also associated with greater life satisfaction.

The findings around the Pathways subscale and the full hope construct are somewhat more complex, but they point to another interesting finding with possible developmental implications. For adolescents and

emerging adults, believing that one knows how to achieve his or her ultimate aim does not mediate the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction; however, for adults it partially mediates this relationship. These findings suggest that adolescents and emerging adults need only to feel they have the will to reach their ultimate aim (they do not need to believe they know how to go about doing so) in order to feel satisfied with their lives. By young adulthood, however, the relationships between purpose and life satisfaction is mediated by the belief that one has the will and knows the way to reach his or her ultimate aim.

While our results are novel and need further examination, these developmental differences warrant theoretical speculation. It is possible that during adolescence and emerging adulthood, individuals are not as concerned with having a 'means' to achieve their goals, but rather are focused more on the mere identification of these goals. Such an interpretation is supported further by our results regarding searching for a purpose, as this construct was positively related to life satisfaction during these two developmental periods. However, by adulthood, it becomes more important to not only have a will but a way for achieving one's goals in life. Again we believe such results are in line with Erikson's (1950, 1959, 1968) lifespan theory. During adolescence and emerging adulthood, individuals are focused simply on defining 'who they are'. By young and middle adulthood, though, individuals shift their focus to social and occupational productivity. Given such a shift, it is unsurprising that, for adults, life satisfaction was more closely tied to having commitments (such as an identified purpose) and having found strategies by which to achieve their goals (i.e., Pathways).

Implicit in this discussion of purpose, hope, and life satisfaction is a strong individualistic bias. An individual discovers the purpose for his or her life along with the means and motivation for achieving that aim in order to feel content. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that in less individualistic cultures the nature of the relationship among these variables would look quite different. One might expect that in a collectivistic culture, for example, an individual may feel as though the purpose for his or her life was bestowed upon him or her as a result of social roles and responsibilities, and that discovering the means and motivation for achieving that purpose might not be up to the individual, but instead up to a higher being or a social group. A study of meaning uncovered interesting differences between the search for meaning and the identification of a source of meaning in life between an individualistic and collectivistic culture (Steger, Kawabata, Shimai, & Otake, 2008). However, as previously mentioned, while meaning is an important component of purpose, it does not capture the other-oriented aspect of the purpose construct. As such,

future studies should further explore potentially significant cultural and contextual differences around the relationship among purpose, hope, and life satisfaction. The results of this study also continue to underscore that purpose and hope, while related, are distinct constructs. With the possible exception of the adult sample, the correlations between these constructs were strong, but clearly not of the magnitude one would expect if they were synonymous.

As with all studies, this one features certain limitations. For example, information on participants' socio-economic background was not gathered. Given the possibility that resources available for pursuing one's goals may have an impact on hope and life satisfaction, future studies on the topic should include these data. Also, given the broad age range (from roughly 11 to 35 years of age) it is possible that a cohort effect explains at least some of the differences around the prevalence of purpose, hope, and life satisfaction at these different age points. At a minimum, the participants experienced very different social, political, and economic worlds which may have influenced their views of purpose and hope. Therefore, there are limitations of the cross-sectional nature of this study that could have been accounted for with a longitudinal design.

Differences in levels of educational attainment present another possible limitation of this study. Research has yet to be conducted which examines the role educational attainment plays in the formation of life purposes, but it seems logical that it could play an important role. The present study attempted to minimize the effects of educational differences by including participants who were college bound, in college, or college graduates; however, it is possible that differences pertaining to the adult sample can be explained at least in part by their higher level of educational attainment.

Despite shortcomings, we believe the present study offers useful guidance to researchers and practitioners interested in fostering purpose and life satisfaction. Clearly we believe that the differences around purpose, hope, and life satisfaction are significantly influenced by what the culture says is acceptable and expected at different life stages. Therefore, one route to improving adult's life satisfaction would be to alter the social and cultural norms around the expectations for identifying a purpose for one's life. Rather than expecting that by adulthood individuals should have discovered a purpose for their lives, social norms could emphasize that the pursuit of purpose is a lifelong process. Just as we consider learning to be a lifelong endeavor, our culture could conceive of purpose as an enduring aim. Or social norms could emphasize the satisfaction that comes from searching for, rather than only from identifying, a purpose for one's life. Large-scale changes in social norms do happen, but they tend to

be slow to take place. Therefore, on a less sweeping but perhaps more immediate level, another route to improving life satisfaction might be to be more attentive to the timing and types of supports for purpose offered during the life-course.

Convinced of the positive role purpose plays in healthy development, researchers have increasingly begun to call for fostering purpose among young people (see Benson, 2006; Damon, 2009). Findings from the present study have important implications for the type and timing of support that is likely to be most effective. This study suggests that different types of interventions are more likely to be effective at different stages. For example, during adolescence and emerging adulthood, young people may benefit most from being encouraged to search for purpose as this will help them achieve a sense of satisfaction with their lives. Adults, however, need to have identified a purpose in order to achieve that same sense of satisfaction. Therefore, the ideal time to actively engage with individuals around the issue of purpose may be during late childhood or early adolescence. Supports designed to help young people discover inspiring life purposes and to determine how to work toward them should be offered throughout adolescence and emerging adulthood. The results of this study do not necessarily suggest that finding purpose after emerging adulthood is impossible, but they do conclude that the subjective experience of searching for purpose after this point is likely to be an uncomfortable one. Of course, many worthy pursuits in life are uncomfortable. That does not mean they are not worthwhile, however, it does suggest that fostering purpose at this stage of life may be more challenging than doing so at an earlier stage. Therefore, the best time to intervene with a program designed to foster purpose may be from late childhood through emerging adulthood.

The findings from the present study also suggest that the type of support that is most effective changes during these different stages of life. During adolescence and emerging adulthood young people need to be encouraged to engage in a broad and varied search for purpose, and they should also be encouraged to focus on how they plan to make progress toward their purposes in life. Exploring both the content of their purpose as well as the different ways in which they could effectively work in pursuit of it would increase the likelihood of maintaining their respective purposes over time. By emerging adulthood individuals need to be encouraged to begin to hone their search, and assistance narrowing down options should be offered. Again, these young people should be encouraged to consider not only what they hope to accomplish in their lives but also how they are going to go about working toward their ultimate aim. By early to middle adulthood, support should take the form of helping individuals maintain and expand or redirect their purposes in life as fostering purpose at this point is likely to be more challenging.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The mean age of this group was 35 years of age. According to Erikson (1959), 'early adulthood' ends around 35 years of age and 'middle adulthood' begins at this same age. Since this group is between these two stages, we refer to them as 'adults'.
2. The adult sample completed this survey using an 8-point Likert scale.

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