

Sources for Features on Purpose

- “Helping College Students Find Purpose,” Robert C. Nash and Michele Murray

On Covid: The rapid transition to online learning left little time for adjustment and increased uncertainty about future career choices and job prospects added to the toxic mix.

- Cao et al. [2020](#);
- Li et al. [2020](#);
- Wang et al. [2020](#)), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/21676968211014080>

Purpose in life is related to feelings of optimism and hope. Vulnerability of college students to depression and anxiety.

- Journal of Medical Internet Research, March 2021

Compared to others, individuals without a purpose in life are more likely to suffer from depression, boredom, loneliness, and anxiety.

- Bigler, Neimeyer, & Brown, 2001
- Fahlman et al., 2009
- Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986

Research also finds that individuals who lack purpose are more likely to abuse drugs

- (Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986
- Nicholson, Higgins, Turner, James, Stickle, & Pruitt, 1994
- Padelford, 1974
- Roos, Kirouac, Pearson, Fink, & Witkiewitz, 2015.

Another purpose-fostering intervention at school targeted students from low resourced communities

- (Pizzolato, Brown, & Kanny, 2011).

A personal sense of higher purpose promotes well-being

- 2019 survey of 1019 people conducted in May 2020 conducted by researchers at the Olin School of Business at the Washington University in St. Louis study

If you feel you have a higher sense of purpose in life — defined as having meaning, a sense of direction and goals — you are more likely to remain healthy and physically strong as you grow older.

- Oct 2017 Harvard School of Public Health published in the Journal of the American Medical Association

Viktor Frankl (1959) believed that most people who sought counseling did so because they lacked a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

A 2019 study in JAMA asked Does an association exist between life purpose and all-cause or cause-specific mortality among people older than 50 years participating in the US Health and Retirement Study? This cohort study of 6985 adults showed that life purpose was significantly associated with all-cause mortality. Life purpose is a modifiable risk factor and as such the role of interventions to improve life purpose should be evaluated for health outcomes, including mortality.

Not “repurposing life at retirement is 2.4 times more likely to lead to Alzheimers

- “Life on Purpose” by Victor Strecher 2016.

A 2018 review of the literature on purpose February 2018 Created by the members of the Adolescent Moral Development Lab at Claremont Graduate University for Prosocial Consulting and the John Templeton Foundation. Found that having a purpose in life is associated with a tremendous number of benefits, ranging from a subjective sense of happiness to lower levels of stress hormones.

A 2004 study found that highly purposeful older women had lower cholesterol, were less likely to be overweight, and had lower levels of inflammatory response, while another from 2010 found that individuals who reported higher purpose scores were less likely to be diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment and even Alzheimer’s Disease.

Among individuals in their teens, twenties, and thirties having a purpose in life is related to feelings of optimism and hope

- Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib & Finch, 2009; Steger & Frazier, 2005.

Compared to others, individuals who lead lives of purpose are also more likely to report high levels of life satisfaction. From adolescence to late adulthood, individuals with purpose report being more satisfied with their lives

- Boyle et al., 2009; Bronk et al., 2009; Steger & Frazier, 2005.

Academic benefits of Purpose

Purpose is related to grit (passion and perseverance for one’s goals), resilience (the ability to bounce back from setbacks), and academic self-efficacy (the belief in one’s academic abilities

- Benard, 1991
- Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2013
- Pizzolato, Brown, & Kanny, 2011

A series of four studies concluded that even just inducing a temporary purpose-mindset improved academic outcomes, including self-regulation, college persistence, grade point average, and the amount of time students were willing to spend studying for tests and completing homework

- Yeagar, Henderson, Paunesku, Walton, Spitzer, & Duckworth, 2014.

Research clearly suggest that compared to others, adolescents with a purpose in life perform better academically and report that their schoolwork is more meaningful

- Benson, 2006
- Pizzolato, Brown, & Kanny, 2011
- Yeagar & Bundick, 2009.

One explanation for this has to do with the sense of intrinsic motivation associated with pursuing a personally meaningful aim. Some have argued that young people who know why they are working hard in school are less likely to feel stressed and more likely to feel excited by the effort; consequently, they are more likely to excel at school

- Damon, 2008

People who lack a sense of purpose in life tend to suffer psychologically. Scientific studies find that compared to others, individuals without a purpose in life are more likely to suffer from depression, boredom, loneliness, and anxiety

- Bigler, Neimeyer, & Brown, 2001
- Fahlman et al., 2009; Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986

Research also finds that individuals who lack purpose are more likely to abuse drugs

- Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986
- Nicholson, Higgins, Turner, James, Stickle, & Pruitt, 1994
- Padelford, 1974;
- Roos, Kirouac, Pearson, Fink, & Witkiewitz, 2015

Discovering a purpose in life is associated with a wide range of positive states, including feeling good about oneself (self- esteem) and one's abilities

- Boyle, Buchman, Wilson, & Bennett, 2009
- Kass et al., 1991
- Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2005
- Steger & Frazier, 2005

Studies examining the relationship between purpose and health have found that individuals who report higher levels of purpose also report a variety of indicators of good health

- Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004

Only about 1 in 5 high school students and 1 in 3 college students reports having a clear purpose in life, and from here, rates drop slightly into midlife and more precipitously into later adulthood

- Bronk, 2013

Although people can discover a personally meaningful aspiration at any stage in the lifespan, if they are going to do so, adolescence represents a particularly likely time because this is the stage of life during which individuals are actively engaged in figuring out what they value, who they are, and what they want out of life. In other words, adolescence is the time most young people establish a sense of identity

- Bronk, 2011

- Damon, 2008
- Erikson, 1968.

Erik Erikson (1968; 1980) was first to recognize the close relationship between purpose and healthy identity development. He proposed that during adolescence young people try out different roles and explore different personalities. They reflect on varied value systems and question political and religious orientations. Following an adequate period of exploration, young people form commitments. They commit to personality characteristics and a personal value system. They also commit to personally meaningful goals. In fact, a key sign of healthy identity development is fidelity to a set of far horizon aims, including vocational, personal, and relational aims. In other words, according to Erikson, discovering a purpose in life represents the healthy outcome of identity development.

An interesting study examined purpose development among adolescents, college aged youth, and midlife adults. It found that having identified a meaningful aspiration was associated with life satisfaction at each of these stages

- (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Finch, & Talib, 2009). However, searching for a purpose was only associated with life satisfaction for adolescents and college aged youth. By midlife, the search for purpose was a less comfortable experience, and this makes sense. In our culture we expect young people to explore what matters most to them, but by midlife, we expect them to have sorted this out. This means that adolescents and college aged youth should be encouraged to consider the things that matter most to them.

Final stage of life beginning in the sixties, reveals that compared to others, older adults who report high levels of purpose tend to be more socially integrated and have stronger, more positive relationships

- Pinqart, 2002

They are more likely to live in private homes and apartments than in nursing homes or institutional settings

- Laufer, Laufer, & Laufer, 1981, and compared to others, older adults with purpose are more likely to be employed, have better health, have a higher level of education, and be married (Pinqart, 2002). Interestingly, consistent contact with family, as opposed to friends, is a stronger predictor

It turns out that adolescents are often more attuned to feedback from outside the family

- Parks, 2011.

Accordingly, mentors can be essential to fostering purpose among adolescents. Mentors can use many of the same strategies that are effective for parents. Modeling purpose, spurring reflections on purpose, and providing practical support are all important ways mentors can foster purpose

- Bronk, 2012

Flow and purpose. Flow refers to a state in which individuals feel completely focused and immersed in a goal-directed activity

- (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Flow states occur when workers are highly engaged and challenged by their tasks. When workers experience flow regularly, the experience comes to be personally meaningful because of the enjoyment derived from it and the personal investment in it. Meaning derived from flow experiences is referred to as vital engagement (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

Faith that majoring in humanities can lead to purposeful work. Recent evidence suggests young people are motivated to pursue goals that align with their values

- Bryan et al., 2016. An intervention more directly focused on “values-harnessing” represents a theoretically-promising, if as of yet untested, approach to fostering purpose.

Purpose in life represents a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once personally meaningful and at the same time leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self

- Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003

A purpose in life represents a subset of sources of meaning

- (Bronk & Dubon, 2016). In other words, meaning is a broader, more inclusive construct than purpose. For instance, researchers have described purpose as just one aspect of the “four needs of meaning” which also include value, efficacy, and self-worth
- Baumeister, 1991