

# ***SPECIAL ISSUE GUEST EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION Frontiers in Youth Purpose Research***

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*Guest Editors*

Given the increasing array of research on youth purpose development, it is essential that researchers and practitioners of youth purpose establish a cohesive research agenda. In this introduction to the special issue on youth purpose development, we summarize the articles included in this issue and highlight challenges and opportunities in the broader field of youth purpose research. We emphasize future directions in 4 areas: (1) operationalization of purpose, (2) measurement of purpose, (3) developmental science of purpose, and (4) interventions to cultivate youth purpose.

Long before purpose became the focus of research, purpose was understood to be important. Viktor Frankl (1959) implicated purpose as a mediator of survival in the Nazi concentration camps and as a key element in treating psychological disorders. Carl Jung (1984) recognized purpose as a driving force in human life; without it, human beings could not be expected to find psychological well-being. Concepts such as life intention, goal, meaning, direction, reason for being, and the like, reflect a common understanding that humans are purpose-directed entities. Maslow’s hierarchy can be interpreted as defining stages in the development of purpose (1943). More recently, advances in developmental systems theory raise important questions about the connection of purpose to

contexts, both the cognitive-social-emotional state of individuals and the settings and situations in which they find themselves (Lerner & Callina, 2015; Osher, Cantor, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2018; Overton, 2015).

While purpose may be an essential organizer of human development and action, it does not inevitably have to be positive and constructive (noting that even these terms have subjective values attached to them). That is, it does not have an inherent valence. Hence, the need to define purpose in the context of virtues, and provide labels, as William Damon (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003) and Sir John Templeton (2012) have done by identifying “noble” or “positive” purpose as an objective of human growth and development. Taken together, these perspectives point to insights in

our understanding of purpose: developmental, relational, and contextual changes affect opportunities to define purpose, sometimes toward the more optimistic, constructive, and broad, and sometimes toward the more pessimistic, destructive, and constrained.

It is against this backdrop that we have sought to better understand the development of purpose during a key period of time: adolescence and emerging adulthood. Over the past 2 decades, youth purpose research has been situated in the greater context of the positive youth development and positive psychology movements (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesman, 2006; Damon et al., 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which emphasize the investigation of developmental assets. In the decade and a half since Damon et al. (2003) first explicated the rationale for emphasizing purpose development in adolescence, research on youth purpose has grown tremendously (Burrow, Hill, Ratner & Sumner, 2018). There is now a significant body of literature describing youth purpose from qualitative (primarily coded interviews) and quantitative (primarily cross-sectional self-report surveys) perspectives. Purpose has been associated with increased hope and life satisfaction (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009), positive affect (Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010), and academic engagement (Liang et al., 2017). Purpose may also buffer against the risks associated with trauma, poverty, and marginalization (Gutowski, White, Liang, Diamonti, & Berado, 2017; Machell, Disabato, & Kashdan, 2016; Malin, Ballard, & Damon, 2015; Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2018) and with life transitions from early adolescence through emerging adulthood (Hill, Burrow, & Sumner, 2013; Minehan, Newcomb, & Galaif, 2000; Yeager & Bundick, 2009).

Despite this quickly growing body of literature, there remain several theoretical and conceptual gaps as well as methodological challenges to understanding the development of youth purpose in context (Burrow et al., 2018; Linver & Urban, 2018). Furthermore, even with increased interest in purpose

research and purpose cultivation, there is limited research on purpose interventions (Bundick, 2011; Dik, Steger, Gibson, & Peisner, 2011; Koshy & Mariano, 2011). We solicited papers for the current special issue with the aim of understanding where research and practice on youth purpose development is heading. The call for this issue cited Damon et al.'s (2003) definition of purpose 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" (p. 121). The papers included in this special issue represent the broader challenges and opportunities in the field of youth purpose development. The growing interest in youth purpose in both research and practice offers an opportunity to work toward consistency in the: (1) operationalization of purpose, (2) measurement of purpose, (3) developmental science of purpose, and (4) interventions to cultivate purpose. These areas influence each other so that progress in one area will inform next steps in the other areas. In this introduction to the special issue, we reflect on the papers in this issue within the context of the broader youth purpose literature and, as participants in relevant research and practice, use our own observations and reflections to pose questions intended to spur further conversation and inquiry in the field of youth purpose development.

### ***DEFINITION AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF PURPOSE***

Damon et al.'s (2003) paper marked a turning point in youth purpose research by articulating a clear, multidimensional conceptualization of purpose. Damon et al.'s (2003) definition of purpose, noted earlier, highlights dimensions that include some combination of: (1) intention toward a stable, future-oriented, and personally meaningful goal, (2) active engagement in working toward that goal, and (3) a beyond-the-self orientation (Bronk, Riches, &

Mangan, 2018; Malin, Reilly, Quinn, Moran, 2014; Moran, 2009). The conceptualizations of purpose described in this special issue demonstrate the range of interpretations of the Damon et al. (2003) framework (Table 1). At one extreme, Quinn, Heckes, and Shea emphasize four dimensions (intention, personal meaning, beyond-the-self orientation, and engagement). At the other extreme, Malin, Liauw, and Remington emphasize only two dimensions (beyond-the-self goal selection and commitment). While many of the papers in this special issue highlight a beyond-the-self orientation as an integral dimension of purpose, not all papers make this distinction. In line with the Kashdan and McKnight (2009) definition of purpose, Nayman et al. (this issue) suggest that a purpose need not include a beyond-the-self aim as long as the goal serves as an organizing and motivating force. This definition allows purpose to be a more developmentally appropriate and applicable construct than if the beyond-the-self element is part of the core definition. As the field moves forward, it will be important to more directly compare different ideas about the dimensionality of purpose so that researchers can settle on a coherent and consistent framework that has empirical, developmental, and theoretical grounding.

The challenges with operationalizing purpose are further complicated by two distinct but related processes that are inconsistently defined as separate domains: searching for purpose and identifying a purpose. In line with research suggesting that searching and committing to purpose are distinct but related processes (Blattner et al., 2013; Burrow et al., 2010), Bronk et al. (this issue) measure search for purpose and identification of purpose with two separate self-report scales. The Revised Sense of Purpose Scale, validated by Sharma et al. (this issue), also accounts for measuring the presence of purpose (“awareness of purpose”) and search for purpose (“awakening to purpose”). However, the other papers in this issue follow the pattern of much of the research in the field by not acknowledging a

distinct process relating to search for purpose. Ignoring the process of searching for purpose may lead to an oversimplified and inaccurate understanding of youth purpose development, particularly because adolescents and emerging adults may engage in searching for purpose and identifying a life purpose in iterative, contextually sensitive ways. Future research on youth purpose should define searching for purpose as process that complements, and is equally important to, committing to a life purpose.

### ***MEASUREMENT OF YOUTH PURPOSE***

Currently, there is a lack of consensus around a specific measure of youth purpose, which creates challenges for interpreting findings across multiple studies. Purpose is often measured through semistructured interviews (e.g., Bronk, 2012; Damon, 2008; Malin, Reilly, et al., 2014; Quinn, 2016) or through youth self-report scales (e.g., Blattner, Liang, Lund, & Spencer, 2013; Bronk et al., 2009; Burrow et al., 2010). Qualitative coding of interviews is resource-intensive and typically uses a protocol that rates dimensions of purpose dichotomously (present or not present). On the other hand, self-report scales are more efficient and require fewer resources. Self-report measures also offer a continuous measurement of the presence of purpose, which may be more helpful for tracking purpose development when compared to the dichotomous characterizations typically coded from interviews. However, there are several limitations inherent in all self-report measures of character (Card, 2017). For purpose, in particular, self-report measures are challenging because the process of committing to a life purpose is deeply internal, connected to developmental processes regarding self-awareness, and subject to social desirability bias.

Qualitative coding has been a preferred methodology for assessing youth purpose (Linver & Urban, 2018). Much of the research

TABLE 1  
Summary of Purpose Frameworks Used in the Special Issue

Authors	Definition	Dimensions	Measurement	Population
Malin, Liauw, & Remington	A stable, higher order intention or goal to accomplish something of consequence to the world <i>beyond the self</i> (Damon et al., 2003).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beyond-the-self orientation</li> <li>Goal commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stanford Assessment of Purpose for Youth (Malin, Damon, &amp; Colby, 2014). Measures <i>beyond-the-self intention</i> dimension of purpose by counting how many beyond-the-self life goals the respondent selected, and the <i>engaged commitment</i> dimension as a continuous indicator of level of commitment to the goals they selected.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eighth- and ninth-grade students (demographics at Time 1, <math>n = 1,304</math>)</li> <li>80.4% Pennsylvania, 6.0% California, 2.6% Idaho, 11.0% Texas</li> <li>49.8% female</li> <li>47.2% African American, 24.2% Caucasian, 16.0% Hispanic, 11.3% Asian American, 0.8% Multiracial/Other</li> <li>65.5% free/reduced lunch</li> </ul>
Bronk et al.	A long-term, forward-looking intention to accomplish aims that are both meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self (Damon et al., 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal meaningfulness</li> <li>Goal orientation</li> <li>Beyond-the-self orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Searching for Purpose measure (Dubon et al., 2019)</li> <li>Claremont Purpose Scale (Bronk et al., 2018) was administered to measure the three dimensions of purpose (personal meaningfulness, goal orientation, beyond-the-self orientation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18- to 30-year-old Internet sample</li> <li>59% female, 40% male, 2% androgynous</li> <li>Caucasian 73%, African American 10%, Hispanic/Latino 8%, Asian 5%, more than one ethnicity 3%</li> </ul>
Quinn, Heckes, & Shea	A long-term intention to accomplish something that is both personally meaningful and of consequence to the world beyond the self (Damon et al., 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intention</li> <li>Personal meaning</li> <li>Beyond-the-self orientation</li> <li>Engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (No measure of purpose. Teachers and students answered questions about practices to support each dimension of purpose)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9 teachers from 3 high schools</li> <li>26 high school students (1 freshman, 11 sophomores, 13 juniors, and 1 senior)</li> <li>Female (<math>n = 22</math>)</li> <li>Black/African American (<math>n = 9</math>)</li> <li>Hispanic/Latino (<math>n = 16</math>)</li> <li>Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino (<math>n = 1</math>)</li> </ul>

Sharma & Yukhymenko-Lescaort	Informed by Bronk's (2014) emphasis of both the presence of and search for purpose as well as Damon et al.'s emphasis on beyond-the-self orientation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of purpose</li> <li>• Awakening to purpose</li> <li>• Altruistic purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised Sense of Purpose Scale. One scale with three subscales: awareness of purpose, awakening to purpose, and altruistic purpose subscale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 681 university students (18 to 25 years old)</li> <li>• 76.4% female</li> <li>• Hispanic or Latino (41.4%), White (28.8%), Asian or Pacific Islander (15.7%), Black or African American (3.1%), and "other" or multiethnic (10.9%)</li> <li>• 115 freshmen (16.9%), 107 sophomores (15.7%), 175 juniors (25.7%), and 171 seniors (25.1%), as well as 102 graduate students (15.0%) and 11 "other" (students pursuing teaching credentials)</li> </ul>
Nayman, Elias, Selby, & Fishman	A personally meaningful and enduring aim that provides an individual with a nonharmful direction in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Classification of purpose types</li> </ul>	<p>Engagement and Classification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coded from student essays about purpose</li> </ul> <p>Commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptation of previous purpose measures (Bundick et al., 2006; Lippman et al., 2014).</li> <li>• Modified "perseverance of effort" subscale of the Short Grit Scale (Duckworth &amp; Quinn, 2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle school students</li> <li>• 79% of students qualified for free or reduced price lunch</li> <li>• Hispanic (44.4%), White (24.2%), Black (21%), Asian (10.5%)</li> </ul>
Stillman & Martinez	Not complete in your lifetime. Pointed outward. Integrates and encompasses all dimensions of your life Motivates and inspires at a deep level. No one has to be "less than" or "wrong" to pursue one's noble goal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue a noble goal is one of eight competencies as part of a larger emotional intelligence framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested measurement: <i>Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Assessment (SEI-YI) Youth Version</i> (Jensen, Dijk, &amp; Freedman, 2012). Provides a profile of the 8 competencies in the Six Seconds EQ model, including pursue a noble goal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not specified (practitioner article)</li> </ul>
Klein, Liang, Sepulveda, & White	Purposeful individuals have long-term aspirations, demonstrate sustained engagement in the pursuit of that aspiration, and exhibit a desire to contribute to the world beyond oneself (Damon et al., 2003).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not specified (practitioner article)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not specified (practitioner article)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban high school</li> </ul>

on youth purpose has used qualitative coding of semistructured interviews to assess the extent to which youth articulate specific dimensions of purpose (Damon, 2008). Nayman et al. (this issue) used a similar qualitative coding strategy to identify purpose engagement and type of purpose (e.g., activity oriented, family oriented, and religiously or spiritually oriented) in youth purpose essays. Qualitative coding of interviews or free response writing allows for a more nuanced understanding of purpose than is offered by self-report scales; however, in the essay format, there are no opportunities for clarification that would be offered by semistructured interviews (Nayman et al., this issue). Furthermore, while the qualitative format has been most closely aligned with the theory of purpose (e.g., measuring multiple purpose dimensions), the resources required for this methodology place limits on the sample size and ability to follow youth longitudinally. For these reasons, there has been great interest in developing improved self-report scales to measure youth purpose.

Assessment of self-reported purpose in adolescents and young adults has been limited by instruments that do not align with a specific theory of purpose. As a result, many existing measures have not explicitly aimed to measure the same purpose dimensions that are typically measured in the qualitative research on youth purpose. The lack of connection between theory and self-report measures is a problem that has been identified in the wider character research field (Card, 2017). The papers included in the current special issue demonstrate the range of approaches to addressing this challenge. Three papers in this issue use recently developed self-report measures that were specifically created to more closely align with the Damon et al. (2003) theory of purpose and capture multiple dimensions of purpose in adolescents and emerging adults.

The Claremont Purpose Scale (Bronk et al., 2018), used by Bronk et al. (this issue), measures three dimensions of purpose identification: personal meaningfulness, goal

orientation, and beyond-the-self motivation. The Revised Sense of Purpose Scale (Sharma, Yukhymenko-Lescroart, & Kang, 2018; Sharma & Yukhymenko-Lescroart, this issue) includes three subscales that capture overall purpose, altruistic purpose (prosocial beyond-the-self purpose), and awakening to purpose (search for purpose and recent changes in purpose). By including a scale to measure recent changes in purpose (“awakening to purpose”), Sharma and Yukhymenko-Lescroart (this issue) have aimed to make the measurement of purpose more change sensitive to improve longitudinal and developmental research and intervention studies. Malin et al. (this issue) use a unique self-report measure (Malin et al., 2014) that blends the efficiency of self-report scales with the more nuanced understanding of purpose typically found in qualitative measures. Their measure asks youth to select goals from a list of options, some of which are indicated as beyond-the-self goals, as an efficient way to capture a beyond-the-self goal. The measure then follows each selected goal with questions to assess commitment to that specific goal. In their paper in this issue, Malin et al. used commitment to a beyond-the-self goal as an indicator of purpose. The new measures used in this issue demonstrate improvements in purpose scale development, each aiming to capture more complex and specified aspects of the construct.

Regardless of modality (survey, interview, essay), the reliance on youth report of their own purpose creates challenges because so little is understood about how purpose develops. Developing behavioral measures or reliable methods for others to rate youth purpose is an important direction for the field to explore. A recent mixed methods study by Linver et al. (2018) is an example of triangulating multiple youth-report measures and teacher-reported youth purpose. This is a good model for future work on purpose measurement because the study used different modes of youth report measures and reports from multiple informants. Akin to the measurement of established

constructs in youth mental health (De Los Reyes et al., 2014), the measurement of youth purpose must incorporate a multiple informant approach including youth, parents/caretakers, and teachers.

### ***DEVELOPMENTAL SCIENCE OF PURPOSE IN YOUTH***

Much of the existing developmental research on purpose has focused on identifying how purpose emerges as fully formed, typically defined as including three to four dimensions of purpose. However, from the limited longitudinal evidence that is available, it seems that purpose development is influenced by life experiences, context, and individual factors that contribute to dimensions of purpose waxing and waning over time (Malin, Reilly, et al., 2014). Malin et al. (this issue) found further support that dimensions of purpose are not stable over the course of adolescent development but, instead, come and go. Thus, rather than being considered a virtue that emerges for some in adolescence or emerging adulthood, purpose may be better understood as an organizing character virtue that manifests differently depending on contextual and developmental factors (see Hatchimonji, Linsky, & Elias, 2017). Specific foundational socioemotional skills (e.g., goal-setting or perspective-taking) and character virtues (e.g., gratitude, optimism) may be necessary to allow for purpose to emerge as an organizing goal. The ability of youth to identify a constructive beyond-the-self life goal, for example, is likely constrained by the development of prosocial reasoning so that this element of purpose would not be expected to emerge until adolescence. Yet, if a more developmental approach is taken to understand purpose, then younger children could be considered purposeful if they have identified personal goals that organize their behavior in specific contexts. This developmental perspective is related to a developmental approach to practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, articulated recently by the Rut-

gers Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab (Hatchimonji, Linsky, Nayman, & Elias, 2019). Unfortunately, because much of the literature to this point has focused on fully formed purpose, there is no clearly articulated developmental theory of purpose. As research continues, it will be important to take on a more developmental perspective that considers manifestations of dimensions of purpose across the age span of young people and identifies building blocks of a fully formed sense of purpose.

In addition to more clearly articulating a developmental theory of youth purpose development, youth purpose researchers must incorporate a more complex and nuanced approach to account for the role of context in purpose development (Linver et al., 2018; Mariano, 2014). In the current special issue, Klein, Liang, Sepulveda, and White et al. make progress in this area by describing a school-based purpose intervention that builds on contextually informed purpose research in marginalized children and adolescents living in poverty (Gutowski et al., 2017; Liang et al., 2016). Considering the role of context in purpose development means examining the implicit assumptions embedded in extant purpose research. Moran (2017) notes that much of the research on purpose development has come from an individualistic American conceptualization, whereas many cultures would identify purpose as a more collectivistic notion that considers what is best for a group. A potential strategy for addressing this concern would be to incorporate broader and more collectivistic constructs into the study of purpose, such as the concept of critical consciousness (see Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011).

Suldo (2016) provides an example of relating two distinct but closely related constructs into a two-factor model. Suldo's work comes from a positive psychology frame and uses assessments of subjective well-being and perceptions of a meaningful life as indicators of purpose. She notes that understanding mental health can be deepened by understanding sense of positive purpose in tandem with psychopa-

thology. This two-factor approach can be extended to understanding the co-occurrence of purpose and related character virtues, linking those to mental health status. Individual differences as a function of age, gender, culture and ethnicity, and disability status all remain to be studied.

### ***IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTIONS TO CULTIVATE YOUTH PURPOSE***

Research on youth purpose interventions has been limited by the difficulties related to defining, measuring, and understanding youth purpose development. Despite the growing interest in youth purpose development and increasing numbers of interventions (Malin, 2018), there has been limited research on purpose interventions (Koshy & Mariano, 2011). The handful of studies that have evaluated purpose interventions have found mixed results (Bundick, 2011; Dik et al., 2011; Pizzolato, Brown, Kanny, 2011). Thus, the current special issue makes a contribution to the purpose literature by describing three unique intervention approaches to fostering youth purpose, offering suggestions for school-based strategies to cultivate purpose, and offering an experimental intervention study to increase purpose in emerging adults.

The MPOWER program is a large-scale school program that aims to promote youth purpose by helping high school students (1) connect to supportive people, (2) identify passion and core values, and (3) identify strengths (Klein et al., this issue). Stillman and Martinez (this issue) emphasize that noble purpose can be developed in schools at multiple levels—student, classroom, and school—as part of an overall emotional intelligence framework. Papers from Malin et al. and Quinn et al. suggest that teachers and schools might improve their ability to support youth purpose development by offering intentional opportunities for students to engage in purpose-related discussion and activities, building an orientation

toward others and a future orientation, and fostering socioemotional skills. Bronk et al. (this issue) demonstrate that emerging adults who participated in two brief online toolkits (targeting purpose and gratitude) demonstrated higher scores in purpose than those who took part in a control activity.

Overall, the intervention approaches described in this special issue add to the growing evidence that youth purpose can and should be supported by the communities and individuals surrounding youth. The high proportion of youth purpose development interventions that take place in schools represented in this special issue aligns with current emphasis on schools in the larger purpose field. In a recent book, *Teaching for Purpose: Preparing Students for Lives of Meaning*, the author posits, “What if purpose were the purpose of education?” (Malin, 2018, p. 2). Focus on the school setting, particularly in connection to movements on improvement school climate and socioemotional learning (e.g. Jones & Kahn, 2017) will be important for future research and intervention development. Regardless, whether interventions are short-term or multiyear, it is essential that they are placed explicitly in a developmental and contextual frame, with an eye toward understanding the varied trajectories that purpose seems to follow across childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood.

### ***CONCLUSION***

The proliferation of research on youth purpose development over the last decade and a half suggests that youth purpose is an important topic to understand. Given the growing research in the area of youth purpose development and the challenges facing the field, we set out to create a special issue to speak to the current challenges and offer inspiration for new directions in research and practice. We found that there remain ample opportunities to clarify the definition of purpose, improve measurement of purpose, and use developmental sci-

ence to inform research and intervention development. It is time for researchers and practitioners of youth purpose to pause and establish a cohesive research agenda.

Moving the field of youth purpose research forward requires simultaneous attention to developmental theory (Elias, Linsky, Nayman, & Hatchimonji, in press; Hatchimonji et al., 2019) and consensus around the operationalization and measurement of purpose. As Burrow et al. (2018) suggest, youth purpose researchers should hold each other accountable to test implicit assumptions about purpose development and consider alternative hypotheses before settling on an agreed upon understanding of youth purpose development. In summary, we suggest the following priorities for purpose research:

1. *Operationalization of Purpose.* Consensus must be reached around what dimensions are essential to the operationalization of purpose. In particular, it is important to empirically examine whether the “beyond-the-self” goal is a necessary component of purpose and/or how it will be addressed developmentally. It is also important to further explore the relationship between searching for purpose and commitment to purpose. As part of the process of answering these questions, it would be most useful to compare different frameworks to see what is demonstrated empirically.
2. *Measurement of Purpose.* A consensus around valid and reliable measures of self-reported purpose that map on to operationalization and developmental theory of purpose will be essential to research in all areas of youth purpose. In addition, more studies using mixed methods and multiple informants will be critical to establishing the validity of measures and improving the accuracy of purpose assessment. Recent advances in measuring purpose with multidimensional measures (e.g., Bronk et al., 2018) and using

mixed methods and multiple reporters (e.g., Linver et al., 2018) are promising directions.

3. *Developmental Science of Purpose.* Researchers must create a cohesive theory about how purpose develops from childhood through emerging adulthood that takes into account the complex interplay of individual, culture, and context. Specific attention should be paid to the different experiences of youth purpose depending on developmental stage and context (Burrow et al., 2018) and the influences of trauma, adversity, and marginalization (Sumner et al., 2018).
4. *Interventions to Cultivate Youth Purpose.* More research is needed to identify effective purpose interventions in various settings (school, family, other organizations) for youth of different developmental stages. Schools are a particularly promising as a context for purpose development interventions (Malin, 2018). Yet, it must be recognized that youth purpose development is a longitudinal project, and claims about the impact of interventions must be leavened with that knowledge. Gathering information about effective practices to cultivate youth purpose across various periods of childhood and adolescence and contexts, will inform the developmental theory of purpose development.

The field of youth purpose research has made much progress in recent years, and yet, there is far to go. The manuscripts in the special issue well depict the current state of the field, its promising forward movement and its remaining challenges. It is our hope that their inclusion into the greater literature, along with our suggested priorities above, will help to inform and guide future purpose research toward the goal of improved understanding of the operationalization, measurement, development, and cultivation of youth purpose.

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