MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

AND

PURPOSES FOR LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The American political culture that encourages competition on standardized tests, epitomized by the policy of Race to the Top, oversimplifies students' motivation for learning. This dissertation argues that educational research on student learning and activity engagement should consider motives beyond the pursuit of good grades in the classroom, prestigious college credentials, and going to school because it is what students are supposed to do. In particular, the studies highlight the moral inspirations and cultural habits behind students' engagement in life activities, and how inspiration and habits help to direct learning in life. A case study of an ordinary high school senior articulates a common motive to enroll in college to achieve success in life. Comparative case studies contrast emotional experiences with social responsibilities in order to articulate purposes for learning beyond standardized achievement. Findings suggest that volunteer community service, engagements with family, involvement in religious activities, and working for pay could provide inspiration for students to engage in learning in life.

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CHAPTER 1: MEANING AND MOTIVATION FOR EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

DURING ADOLESCENCE

A high school senior explained why education is important to her: "Getting into

college will lead to freedom, growing up, maturing, and making my own decisions." One

of the reasons she engages in educational activities is that, for her, school leads to a life in

which she is an independent woman with the freedom to do as she pleases. She told me

that she plans to make the most of her freedom after college by attending medical school.

She highly values education, and expresses a purpose for studying, achieving good

grades, gaining acceptance to college, and obtaining multiple credentials.

Do all students value education as much as she does? Almost all (99.4%) of the

1,200 adolescents ages 10–24 sampled for this dissertation reported that educational

activities are at least "somewhat meaningful" to them, and the majority of students (56%)

stated they found educational activities "very meaningful." Why do students engage in

the educational activities? For the purposes of this dissertation, I asked students what

they thought was important in life and why education was important for life after

graduation. My goal is to describe students' purposes for learning and the factors outside

of school that create meaning for engaging in educational activities.

Educators may accept as common sense that it is good to encourage high school

students to idealize college education, and proclaim the importance of educational

credentials to independence in life through career success. However, the utility of

educational credentials and the capacity of credentials to motivate students often go

unquestioned. Educators and students who place unreflective, utilitarian value on

educational activity—with emphasis on completing a standard educational path to

credential and career success—may be unaware of the potential of educational activity to inspire new ways of learning for life. The studies collected for this dissertation describe both adolescents' personal standards for learning and broader purposes for engaging in life's activities. Stories told by a cohort of high school seniors articulate inspiration for life and learning, and provide a student perspective to inform educators and schools about ways to engage all students in meaningful learning for life.

*Purposes for School*

Why do adolescents engage in educational activities such as completing the requirements for a college degree? Many adolescents value the utility of college for career advancement and future financial success (Côté & Levine, 1997). Because they are young, most students ages 10–12 have not thought about why they value education, what inspires them to learn, or how learning in school fits into their life beyond knowing that school is what they are supposed to do. Many adolescents expect to go to college, and say they value education, with little reflection on the capacities and resources needed to obtain a degree. In most cases, students go to middle school because they are told to and because they have not thought about doing otherwise. Their knowledge of school is delimited by the authority figures in their lives, such as the student who explains that she goes to school because "my mom drops me off."

In contrast, students ages 18–20 have had more experience in school and more time to develop reflective understandings of why they learn, study, go to college, attend classes, and engage in activity in their lives. Older adolescents give many reasons for pursuing a college education, including values for social advancement, fulfilling others' expectations, proving their self-worth, contributing to humanitarian causes, and helping

their family (Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006). National studies have reported that almost all adolescents expect to go to college, but when they get older, they do not matriculate to higher education when the opportunity presents itself (Gladieux & Swail, 1998).

What happens to eighth-grade students' high expectations for education when it comes time to apply for college? Studies find that students often have ambitious plans to attend college, but lack full understanding of the competencies and preparation necessary to enroll in and complete college (Schneider, 2003; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). At some schools, counseling practices may not expose students to the breadth and depth of opportunities present in their choices about college (McDonough, 1997). School practices can mold, inspire, and constrain academic identities; shape perceptions of meaningful activities; and determine how students approach learning in school (Davidson, 1996). Further studies are needed to understand how students become competent in school and plan for college, as well as why students are inspired to initiate and persist in learning. Although attendance rates for college in the U. S. have increased significantly since 1980, there has been little increase in college completion rates (Venezia et al., 2003).

Historically, Americans have engaged in the pursuit of educational ideals for purposes of creating democratic citizens, competent workers, and opportunities for social advancement; however, this obsession with educational credentials may undercut efforts to increase learning through formalized educational activity (Labaree, 1997a, 1997b, 2010). In the past two decades, Americans' educational efforts largely have been toward raising standards for core knowledge, performance skills, and college readiness (Conley,

2005; Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2005; Ravitch, 1995, 2010). Today, the U.S. political climate emphasizes standards for academic performance, and is holding educators accountable for achievement of standards through high-stakes testing. Race to the Top epitomizes the competitive drive behind U.S. educational policy, which delimits the arena for competition on standardized tests. By focusing too heavily on improving test scores, educators could neglect developing students' deeper purposes for life-long learning (Damon, 2008). Although schools have improvement plans and achievement targets for adequate yearly progress, it is unclear how these plans mesh with students' ideals, activities, and expectations for life; what students think about democracy, competence, and advancement in society; and how students learn about the deeper purposes for life and learning.

*From Boredom to Engagement*

What inspires American youth to engage in learning? Studies of U.S. schools have found that many students are bored or disengaged from learning experiences (Burkett, 2002). Students participate in robotic tasks instead of genuine learning experiences because their learning is constrained by school grading practices. They are tasked with the pursuit of future success instead of the exploration of authentic interest in school subjects (Pope, 2001). Students often report their school experiences are dull and uninspiring; and only a few report experiencing the state of flow with optimal levels of engagement in school activities (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Larson & Richards, 1991).

Historically, students have had to put up with the drudgery of school (Dewey, 1938). However, international efforts are underway to reclaim students disengaged from

the educational system (Kendall & Kinder, 2005). The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate potential ways to engage more students in educational activities. Through my experiences and observations of students, I have determined that students generally appear to be bored in the classroom, and have little purpose for engaging in school learning beyond completing assignments. Students may complete assigned tasks in order to earn good grades, which they believe will help in gaining admission to college and eventually earning a credential that will lead to professional success. However, the studies presented in this dissertation shine a positive light on students' purposes for learning, so educators can design more meaningful educational opportunities for students.

*Present Study*

Educators could benefit from knowing why students initiate and persist in opportunities to learn, what kinds of activities increase the meaning they derive from educational experiences, and what inspires learning in life. The purpose of this dissertation is to describe the values, experiences, investments, and purposes of students in U.S. classrooms, and to use the words of students to describe their motivations, such as freedom, duty, romance, engineering, civics, and changing one's life completely. The analysis begins with a description of what inspires ordinary students to engage in educational activity and concludes with hypotheses about students' life goals and activities related to higher levels of meaningful educational engagement. Throughout the dissertation, I challenge the reader to question general conceptions about education, learning, and life. The constant questioning about the purposes for learning and life helps highlight students' motives for engaging in learning throughout life; the questioning also

illuminates the reasons why some students value engagement in educational activity more than others.

The dissertation is a critical approach to describe ordinary students engaged in learning for life. These descriptions include motivations and activities that might be beneficial for increasing engagement in learning and education for the general student population enrolled in schools around the United States. Narrative description provides empirical evidence of the nuanced differences among the educational concerns of diverse students. The narratives of life and learning told by students provide insight into the culture of achievement in U.S. schools, and allow for reflection on American ideals of learning and education. The study centers on students' desires, beliefs, goals, and intentions, thus inviting the reader to listen to students' ideas about education, learning, and their purpose in life, so that educational systems might be better oriented to engaging every student in learning for life. For empirical study, students were asked why they want to become engaged citizens, competent workers, healthy human beings, and to obtain educational credentials. The purpose is to inform readers about students' motivation for learning in school – and focus on motivation to persist in learning throughout life, after high school graduation.

Educational research has examined a number of variables of educational activity, school environment, community influences, and student experiences. There are far too many approaches to studying motivation to learn to mention here (for a review, see Stipek, 2001; see also National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004); therefore, Chapter 2 introduces general, motivational concepts that allow research to extend the achievement paradigm of a school classroom into studying purposes for

engaging in learning for life. Expectancy-Value Theory explains how attainment, intrinsic, and utility values provide motivation to engage in educational activity. Personal Investment Theory explains how students engage in educational activity for self-understanding, social commitments, and other life goals. General Purpose Theory focuses on the general intentions of students to engage in activity for life, and how educational concerns about learning fit into students' deeper purposes for life.

This dissertation reports findings from a study of youth purpose, and describes the ideals and activities that motivate students to persist in educational activity and engage in life-long learning. Chapter 3 details the methods for narrative analysis of clinical interviews, which identified students' motivations and sense of purpose; and analysis of surveys, which served to build predictive models for meaningful engagement in educational activity. Chapter 4 begins with the results of narrative analysis and describes students who idealize college achievement plans for career success. Further, the motives for emotional experiences are contrasted with motives related to responsibility. Chapter 5 develops understanding of student motivation by examining family values, religious experiences, and other purposes for engaging in various roles students assume in life. Chapter 6 simplifies understanding of motivation to learn, and highlights students' narratives related to making the world a better place, aspiring to be the boss, and changing one's life completely. Chapter 7 incorporates insights gleaned from narrative analyses collected in Chapters 4—6 to propose five developmental hypotheses for meaningful engagement in educational activity; and reports the results of regression analyses using survey data. Chapter 8 presents the limitations and implications for

further study of meaningful engagement in educational activity while focusing attention

on key findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2: MOTIVATIONAL THEORIES OF MEANING, VALUE,

INVESTMENT, AND PURPOSE

The question "do I want to do this task and why?" (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006, p. 939) is an example of a reflective question a student might ask about educational activity, such as completing a homework assignment, going to a party with friends, attending a church event with family, volunteering in the community, or starting a business venture. Students might reflect on the worth of completing an assignment and expectations of success—along with many other things in order to determine what they are capable of learning—and to weigh the cost of not doing the task against high achievement. Completing the assignment may be part of a larger project, such as completing a college degree, or it could be the result of spontaneous, emotional excitement for the present task. It is common sense to an educator that students have mixed motives for engaging in activities; and educational research may describe these mixed motives as reflective purposes for learning that students use to justify engagement in educational activity. The theories presented in this chapter explain why students want to engage in meaningful activities, and ground the empirical description of students' purposes for learning, both in educational activity and in life after graduation.

The three motivational theories reviewed in this chapter focus on motivational resources students use to engage in educational activity and persist in worthwhile projects throughout their lives. Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994) provides a framework for studying student engagement as subjective task values of students who have expectations for success, beliefs about competence, and achievement

goals related to the activity. The theory explains that students engage in educational

activities because the activities are of interest, importance, and utility. In a similar

fashion, Personal Investment Theory (Maehr, 1984) explains that engagement in an

activity is the result of reflective deliberation by an individual who is capable of

considering his or her goals for the activity. Moreover, the individual must have the

competencies and resources necessary to successfully engage in the activity. The concept

of personal investment permits the study of students' purposes for engaging in personal

projects and life's general activities—beyond their values and expectations related to a

particular activity. General Purpose Theory (Damon, 2008; Damon, Menon, & Bronk,

2003; Dewey, 1938) draws attention to how students develop their intentions to engage in

activities throughout life; how intentions to contribute value to the activity create

additional meaning; and how purposes for learning may help students change their lives.

*Beyond Activity Involvement: Engaging in Learning*

For several decades, researchers have used concepts of student engagement and

involvement interchangeably. I made a nuanced distinction for this dissertation. A

purpose for learning frames engagement in an educational activity but not necessarily

involvement in that activity. *Involvement* has long been used in the work of the Higher

Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, whereas *engagement* has been used at the

Center for Postsecondary Research and School of Education at Indiana University and the

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (compare Astin, 1993 and

Kuh et al, 2005). The distinction between the two terms lies in the definition of *to*

*involve,* which is to roll or wrap, and the definition of *to engage,* which is to pledge.

 Therefore, involvement suggests being caught in the middle, such as becoming

emotionally involved in a relationship or project. A student might enroll in a course or sign up for an activity and successfully learn through his or her involvement. Nevertheless, the activity may or may not be purposeful. The concept of engagement, therefore, suggests the student has an obligation to fulfill, has pledged to attentively participate in the activity, and will pursue the activity with purpose.

Involvement usually refers to the kind and frequency of activities students participate in: curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular, or nonschool. Astin (1993) found that students who participate in more activities on campus feel more committed and better integrated with their college community. Such involvement tends to promote student persistence in formal education. Students with the goal of completing a college degree are more likely to succeed if they reside on campus and avoid full-time work off campus; however, working part time on campus appears to encourage contact with school resources, and adds a subtle psychological factor of greater institutional commitment to the college (Astin, 1993).

Moreover, students who spend more time involved in higher level challenges and on task are more likely to persist in educational pursuits and to enroll in more coursework (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Students who are highly involved in their school and academic communities are often successful. Yet, their underlying motivation may be tied more closely to the quality of student involvement rather than to the quantity of time spent in activities, or the number of activities performed (Pace, 1982).

The term *engagement* is restricted to activities associated with an intentional state that creates meaning for student effort put forth during their involvement in an activity. Students may become involved in an activity out of impulse, which may lead to learning;

yet, to be engaged, they must further reflect on their initial impulses and desires to form an intentional state.  Therefore, student engagement is psychological investment in learning (Newman, 1992), similar to the idea of personal investment presented later in this chapter.

Psychological measures of engagement often have been restricted to survey items that ask how frequently students are involved in activities (e.g., Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).   Survey studies for this dissertation constructed variables for meaningful engagement in activity with standardized metrics for activity frequency and ratings for meaningfulness.  Survey analyses presented in Chapter 7 describe how student engagements in life outside the classroom are related to meaningful engagement in educational activities.  In the interview analyses presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, students' own words help to explain why they believe their engagement in educational activities will influence their lives, and how their purposes for learning integrate with other purposes in life.  According to Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), "Research that takes a qualitative approach to understanding the phenomenology of engagement is needed" (p. 86).  Moreover, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2004) recommended further study of how students internalize academic values and why students are motivated to engage in educational activities and learning for life.

*Subjective Task Values and Expectations*

Expectancy-Value Theory explains that students have desires and beliefs related to what will happen if and when they engage in a given activity.  A value is an attitude toward educational activity, and consists of beliefs/expectations about the activity

integrated with feelings/desires about the experience.  Four subjective task values—attainment, intrinsic, utility, and cost—create meaningful reasons for an individual to engage in an activity (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998).

The first component, attainment value, describes the relative importance of a task for confirming or disconfirming a salient aspect of an individual's self-concept.  For example, a student who has a salient mathematical identity, and is a self-described mathematical wiz, is more likely to place value on studying Algebra problems than a student who does not view math as central to life.  Self-concept is core to the idea of attainment, which requires individuals to value activities as central to becoming the kind of person they want to be (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

The second component, intrinsic value, describes the actual experience of performing an activity.  Intrinsic meaning is derived during the activity and experienced internally (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Harter, 1981, 2006; Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985; Wigfield et al., 1998).  It also is closely related to interest and flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Renninger, K. A., Hidi, S., & Krapp, A. (1992); Schiefele, 1991).  Therefore, attainment and intrinsic values are motivational components that provide meaning to students through sense of self within a reflective framework of subjective task values.  Attainment value is the degree of importance a task that is salient and central to the self has for future achievement; intrinsic value is the experience of an activity, including mental states of excitement, boredom, interest, and flow.

The third component, utility value, is the worth of present engagement in terms of the expected benefits toward another end.  Utility value is determined by how useful a

task is in obtaining a desired end.  For example, a student may complete coursework to obtain a degree that she believes will lead to a higher paying career, and the higher paying career could provide for a family in the future.  This chain of reasoning summarizes the utility values of a student who idealizes the intrinsic emotional experience of providing for a family, and has specific educational goals to attain along her career path.  Implicit in the theory of utility value is individuals' ability to reflect, abstract, retract, and represent the self in order to clarify what is important in life.  Thus, the concept of utility value identifies how meaning is created, and activity may be useful in terms of life goals.

The fourth component, cost, depends on students' ability to imagine possibilities for engagement while negating alternative selves who could have engaged in different activities.  Expectancy-Value Theory is sensitive to developing reflective abilities during adolescence and focuses on motivational components that provide subjective meaning for engaging in an activity.  In the analyses that follow, the dominance of the utility value of educational activity becomes clear as students explain how college credentials lead to better jobs, more respect, and opportunities to advance in life.  Utility is one of many values that contribute to engagement in educational activity, and students can only consider cost – and negate alternative ideals - if they are able to call them to a deliberative table for reflection.  Thus, this dissertation attempts to describe the plurality of values and considered costs that frame student engagement in educational activity.

*Achievement Standards for Engagement*

Subjective task values and expectations describe the values that orient students toward achievement in educational activities.  The values within school culture involve

the interactions between students and educators that create meaning beyond the subjective experience of an activity. For example, instead of striving to attain an A by performing well on an exam, students could develop their skills as critical consumers, spiritual seekers, or moral persons with responsibilities in the world. One student might value the critical thought of the humanities and feel competent in writing; and another might value the innovations of engineering, feel responsible to society, and believe himself to be a bad writer. Who would be more likely to get better grades, work harder on an assignment, learn the objective, and earn a college degree? Such questions are beyond the scope of this study, and instead, the focus was to describe students' plans for college achievement and activities across life to understand their motivations for engaging in educational activity.

Achievement motives generally encompass the need to achieve in activities that have specific standards for performance, such as winning first place in a race. Achievement is defined as striving for high-ability performance (Nicholls, 1984), and includes many motivations for learning, such as goals, self-worth, and competence (for review, see Stipek, 2001). There are many diverse cultural meanings of achievement (Maehr, 2008). An institution could standardize achievement and create college-going cultures targeting specific performance outcomes; and then hold educators accountable for students achieving standard levels of performance. However, such a system would introduce political, cultural, and institutional standards of achievement beyond the scope of an empirical study of individual students with purposes for learning.

The hallmark of an achievement standard is that it gives direction to activity. Standards for achievement help individuals and institutions to regulate educational

activity. Students' motivation for learning becomes restricted when institutions standardize achievement through formal educational activity, because the standards of the institution deem activity not directed toward achievement standards to be less valuable.

Adolescents in the United States live in a goal-oriented culture rife with political agendas, commercial marketing campaigns, and competitive tests for acceptance to college. The U.S. educational policy, Race to the Top, is an ideal that may resonate with elite athletes and corporate executives who are accustomed to aggressive competition— especially compared to the bleeding heartedness of No Child Left Behind. Nevertheless, both policies have targeted specific achievement outcomes for institutions on standardized tests.

When learning is defined by standardized metrics sanctioned by states in order to hold educators accountable for improving student performance, there appears to be little room for encouraging curiosity, open-mindedness, direction seeking, observation, willingness to change, acceptance of uncertainty, and other aspects of learning not addressed by standardized measures of performance. This dissertation challenges readers to reflect on the competitive culture of U.S. schools and presents examples of student learning motivated by curiosity, interest, moral concerns, and other ideals for the world beyond achieving the economic and political goals of competing institutions.

*How Personal Investment Frames Deliberative Engagement*

Personal Investment Theory extends achievement values for activity into an understanding of standards for success in life. These standards are based on an individual's expected returns on investment for engaging in activities for life. The concepts of attaining high standards for performance and expectations of mastery in

school evolve into standards of success for interacting with the world and establishing habits of profitable investment in learning. Investments are expected returns on the effort made to develop as a person, and are different than subjective task values that emphasize the worth of engaging in the activity. Personal investment is a framework for student engagement beyond the scope of attainment, intrinsic, and utility values with expected costs. Thus, investment in educational activity frames a deliberative table for individuals who are faced with opportunities to engage in life—learning in school is one of many options for students.

Personal Investment Theory outlines a student's deliberative table through sense of self, systems of life goals, and situational constraints placed on possible activities (Maehr, 1984; Maehr & Midgley, 1991). Personal investment offers a broader picture of motivation compared to subjective task values because the motivational potential of a sense of self is considered within a reflective framework across time. Attainment and intrinsic values for activity become meaningful due to narratives about worthwhile investments. The sense of self creates meaning by placing the person in the world, and vesting it with competence, autonomy, responsibility, and purposes for engaging in activities.

Additional meaning is created through four systems of life goals: activity, self-understanding, extrinsic rewards, and social commitments. Activity goals occupy a similar conceptual space as the expectations and subjective task values that create proximal meaning specific to the activity. The other three goals extend across time and vary according to the relationship of the person with the world. An example of a goal for self-understanding is learning about the self in relation to others in the world; an extrinsic

reward is seeking pleasure for the self from others in the world; and a social commitment considers the responsibility of self to others in the world. Thus, Personal Investment Theory broadens the scope of a study of motivation to include the engagement of individuals with purposes and responsibilities within the situational constraints of the world. In this way, attainment values for achievement become multiple, diverse goal systems and senses of self across situations in life.

*Social Responsibility as Motivation for Learning*

A student who reflects "will my investment in this activity lead to my future goals?" is considering the value of engaging in an activity to creating the kind of person he or she will become in the future. Reflection on personal investment considers the goals of a person over time as distal and retracted, as opposed to intrinsic, emotional values and expectations. For one person the ideal of loyalty to family, friends, and other institutions may have a distal feel compared to curiosity with proximal and immediate concerns; while another person feels the pull of loyalty that directs professional curiosity. However, both curiosity and loyalty can create meaning and inspiration for students to engage in educational activity; and personal investment in learning need not be reduced to an examination of utility values for attaining educational credentials. Moreover, a theory of motivation for learning could explain subjective experiences of curiosity along with loyalty to and honor for institutions.

A student who reflects "why do I want to engage in this activity?" might find he or she enjoys the activity, feels coerced into doing it, and believes it is the right thing to do—all within the same narrative that justifies engagement. Therefore, I assume students have mixed motives for engaging in activity, and these motives include felt impulses,

reflected life goals, intrinsic values for emotional experience, considerations of expected costs, and other reasons used to justify engagement. To answer a question about personal investment, a student could reflect on his or her sense of self, practical advice from others, and his or her faith that the investment will go according to plan. To answer the question of why, a student must justify his or her actions with motives that form a coherent, convincing narrative that creates meaning for engaging in the activity.

When students reflect on their investments and reasons why, they may not directly ask "what consequences will my engaging in this activity have on others?" This reflective question requires the student to consider the impact engagement in activity will have on others beyond the emotional experiences of the self, self-development, personal investments, and subjective task values. Such a question might orient a student toward the world of productive work, civic engagement in the community, or making socially responsible investments. Students who reflect on questions of personal investment, reasons why, and intended consequences have a more complete understanding of their purposes for engaging in an activity. Students with robust purposes for learning in life have evaluated activity in terms of personal investments, explained why they are engaged, and expect certain consequences to affect others.

The concept of social goals within achievement-orientation is a recent contribution to the study of motivation (see Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Research on adolescents (Yeager & Bundick, 2009) has found students with career goals who consider the consequences to others are more likely to report higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity. A review of research on pro-social development (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006) found pro-social tendencies for activity, such as

helping a classmate and person in need, are related to (a) social responsibility goals (Wentzel, 2002); (b) integrative goals to promote the well-being of others (Estrada, 1995); (c) relational, rather than instrumental, goals (Nelson & Crick, 1999); and (d) collaborative goals in school settings (Cheung, Ma, & Shek, 1998).

Having an awareness of moral events and commitments to pro-social goals during adolescence can have a lasting impact on engagement in the world throughout adult life (Damon & Colby, 1992). The school community may be an effective context for developing civic commitment and the ability to work with peers in a civil manner along with academic goals in school (see Flanagan, Martinez, & Cumsille, 2010). Further studies are needed to connect pro-social goals, moral commitments, and engagement in civic activities with why students engage in educational activities (Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Yeager & Bundick, 2009).

*Defining Purposes to Learn*

A purpose to learn is an overarching framework for educational research that focuses on students' engaging in learning through activity involvement, personal projects, community service, and other experiences in life. Though it might be argued that the purpose of formal educational activity is to encourage student achievement of credentials, creating a competitive race to the top through standardized measures of achievement unnecessarily limits the purposes for involvement in educational activities. Any purpose for activity could create direction for the student engaged activity, and the purpose of winning the race to the top oversimplifies student motivation to learn because it eliminates time for curiosity, emotional experiences, social responsibilities, and any other motives for learning. A purpose to learn may direct students' educational activity toward

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completing coursework, acquiring necessary competencies, performing to standards when tested, and adjusting to life's challenges along the path to earning a credential. However, the purpose of obtaining an educational credential is only one motivator for engaging in educational activity; the overarching framework of a purpose to learn involves a general search for motivations for learning throughout everyday life.

Thus, the concept of a purpose to learn is a developmental outcome of adolescence and provides a framework for educational research that envisions students' experiencing inspiration, curiosity, and sparks that motivate a life-long pursuit of learning. The developmental outcome provides an alternative framework to study standardized measures of achievement in education, such as completion of credentials and comparisons of school performance. Other research could evaluate student performance on standardized tests and attitudes toward testing. A study of purposes for learning describes the motivation students have for learning, achieving high standards of performance, and generally engaging in activities for life. A purpose to learn is an alternative outcome that focuses attention on student projects, engagements, work, goals, ideals, and intentions that provide motivation to learn through educational activity. Doing what one is expected to do may be one purpose for engaging in educational activity, but the broader concept of a purpose to learn encompasses other motives students have for learning and engaging in educational activities throughout life.

General Purpose Theory explains that a purpose to learn is a complex set of ideals and manifestations of those ideals through purposeful engagement in activities. A student's understanding of meaningful engagement may be increased through consideration of three personal orientations within the general understanding of his

purposes for life.  First, self-orientation refers to deriving meaning through intrinsic values and goals, such as the enjoyment of achievement and self-development.  Second, other-orientation refers to attention that is directed beyond the self toward the consideration of others—this could include the values of parents, abstract spiritual ideals, social commitments to life, serving others, and anything else the student defines as having consequences beyond the self.  The other-orientation need not involve a selfless or altruistic intention and is often implicit in the sense of relatedness for self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000), social commitments for personal investment (Maehr, 1984), and everything else an individual considers not to be part of the self (e.g., society, situations, abstract ideals, etc.).  Third, life-orientation toward learning refers to how the student integrates self-meaning, consideration of others, and engagement in learning into the rest of life.

A purpose in life is more general than a purpose to learn.  Both involve a complex self-understanding of experiences and ideals that direct attention toward engaging in activity that is purposeful in life.  The concept of a purpose to learn places the developing, standards-oriented intentions of students at the center of educational research, instead of placing improved engagement and performance on standardized measures at the center.  The concept of life introduces complexity into the study of motivation to learn because it forces the reader to think about learning as applicable to life in general.  A purpose to learn draws attention to the ability of students to recognize the significance of their own learning, and the different kinds of roles students recognize playing within society and their own lives.  A purpose for completing coursework to earn a credential may be a common, and ultimate, purpose for formal activity within the

educational system, whereas the study of purposes for learning searches for motives to explain why students engage in learning for life.

*How Are Purposes Formed?*

Dewey suggested that forming a purpose is a "rather complex intellectual operation" (1938, p. 69). It starts with an "impulse," that is "obstructed from immediate execution" and becomes a "desire" (p. 69). As a person observes his surroundings, he determines a "plan" and "method" that transforms the desire into an "end view" (p. 69). The complex operations to form a purpose may take less than a day or be extended over many years, varying with how attuned students and schools are to observing the significance of purpose amidst the happenstance of activity. A purpose is formed when a student judges the significance of a situation, and begins to execute a plan with a method to accomplish the determined end view for a project.

Students may have a purpose to learn something about nature on a camping trip, meet school requirements in community service, spark anger in political conversation, and spend a romantic night with a significant other—all at the same time, where each purpose provides a unique direction and opportunity for learning. All purposes to learn, especially ones that end in thing such as politics, careers, romance, and educational credentials, become intellectually complex networks of motives that inspire and constrain particular plans and methods to accomplish the students' ultimate ends.

Dewey (1938) stated it was the responsibility of educators and the educational system to help students form purposes for activity, and that activity in school should instill a sense of society's purposes in students. For Dewey, the difference between an impulse and a purpose is that a person with purpose must exercise enough self-control to

reflectively consider multiple plans and methods to achieve the desired ends. Dewey

stated the formation of purpose involves the following:

1. Observation of surrounding conditions;

2. Knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past, a
   knowledge obtained partly by recollection and partly from the
   information, advice, and warning of those who have had a wider
   experience; and

3. Judgment which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see
   what they signify. (1938, p. 69)

Dewey argued that educators are responsible for helping transform the impulses, desires,

and emotional experiences of students into personal projects with plans and methods to

accomplish them.

A purpose for learning is a co-operative enterprise by which educators, mentors,

family, and others help students to identify purposes in life; and then educators and

students teach and learn from one another how to engage in meaningful educational

activity. A purpose for learning is developed, in part, by teaching students about

society's purposes and standards for activity. A traditional educator might feel

responsible for harnessing students' motives for life activities in order to create

opportunities for them to learn to perform to state standards. A progressive educator

might attempt to co-create educational activities that help students accomplish their own

purposes in life. These traditional and progressive views of education are interwoven in

this study of how purposes to learn are formed, so that all readers learn about students'

motivational resources. When challenges are tough, these resources may play

instrumental roles in sparking interest in learning to change, and personal ethics for engaging in educational activity. There is little empirical information about how purposes for learning are formed, how to identify sparks of interest, and how students develop the ability to persist toward ultimate ends of learning.

*Purpose for Learning Amidst Happenstance in Life*

The concept of a purpose to learn focuses attention on how a student co-creates meaningful experiences for learning and life within American culture. The idea follows Appleton, Christenson, and Furlong's (2008) description of the evolution of psychological studies in education,

> Motivational research has progressed from (a) perceiving the student "as a machine" attempting to meet basic needs, (b) to viewing the student "as a decision maker" weighing the likelihood of attainment and value of an outcome, and finally (c) to identifying the student "as creator of meaning" considering causal attributions and the value and purpose of pursuing goals. (p. 378)

A purpose to learn is the coherent, reflective framework of integrated motives that a student uses to justify engagement in educational activity. A purpose to learn draws attention to the motivational potential of the willful intentions of students to fill an empirical gap: "research is needed that differentiates students who become invested in learning from those who do what they are supposed to do" (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004, p. 86). Krumboltz and Levin (2004) suggest that everyday is an opportunity for students to learn to enjoy life, learn on the job, learn from mistakes, and learn to make the most of happenstance in life. The studies collected in this dissertation describe student engagement in learning as the observation of happenstance, exploration of

various avenues and interests, periods of not knowing, the need to discover new things,

seeking advice from authority, and identifying purposes to persist in learning beyond

attaining educational credentials and doing what one is supposed to do.

CHAPTER 3: INTERVIEW AND SURVEY METHODS OF STUDY

This study employed a multiple-method empirical approach to students' purposes to learn and meaningful engagement in educational activity; it combines interview and survey analyses to further understand why students engage and persist in learning for life. The interview portion of this study used an idiographic approach to describe both diverse and common student narratives about learning in life, and the general purposes for engaging in educational activity and learning. The survey portion standardized and quantified meaningful engagement across student activities to describe the relationship of meaningful engagement in educational activity to engagement in other activities and life goals during adolescence. The two approaches offer complimentary perspectives to describe why students engage in educational activity. The interview study and narrative analyses used the words of students to explain why education and learning are important in life; the survey models serve to predict standardized measures of meaningful activity with life goals and activity engagements across a larger sample of adolescents.

Purposes for learning and meaningful engagement in educational activity are psychological constructs central to this study of adolescents. I analyzed clinical interviews to describe how adolescents talk about purposes to learn; and in this study, purpose was defined as a qualitative construct to describe generalized intentions across an individual's life. A purpose to learn is a coherent explanation of learning for life, and reveals motives for engaging in educational activity through narratives about the deeper purposes for life. Purposes for learning may include goals, values, ideals, enlightening experiences, and the understanding of how learning in school fits into life in general.

Purposes for learning provide narrative description of the idiographic meaning created by adolescents who engage in educational activity as a subset of their purposes for life.

Meaningful engagement in educational activity is a second, standardized, composite variable used in the study, and includes a measure of the frequency of student activity and attribution of meaningfulness. Students' life goals, purpose in life, and meaningful engagement in life's activities are used to model levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity. In this study, formal academic activities were used as a dependent variable, and include participating in class, studying, and other items detailed in this chapter. In the following sections, I detail the methods used to build a model that demonstrates how meaningful engagement in civic activities is a stronger, more stable correlate of meaningful engagement in educational activity than are family, religious, and economic engagements during adolescence. This study provides empirical evidence and practical insight to better understand students' purposes for engaging in educational activity, and this chapter attends to the methods of study.

*Research Questions*

The focus of this study was why students engage in educational activity. The studies combine narrative analyses of folk psychology and regression analyses that model meaningful engagement in educational activity. The narratives may imply causal claims through idiographic meaning, and the regression analyses may suggest generalized meaning across students; however, identifying the causal mechanism of general student motivation to learn was not a purpose of this study.

The study of why students are motivated to learn can be theoretically daunting, and may be approached through a variety of empirical methods. Two research questions guided the methodological approach for the interviews and survey analyses:

1. What purposes do high school seniors give for pursuing educational aspirations and engaging in learning for their life? The narratives of high school seniors offer an explanation of why ordinary students engage in educational activity, and the purposes that motivate students to learn for life. The student narrative purposes for learning include (a) utility values for education and social commitments that integrate learning experiences with other purposes in life; (b) reflective frameworks for engagement and standard college achievement plans that are constrained and inspired within students' lives; and (c) motives for achievement, advancement, interests, contributions, and learning for life.

2. How do the relationships between meaningful engagement in educational activity and other meaningful engagements in life change during adolescence? More specifically, how does student engagement in civic, family, religious, and economic activities relate to engagement in educational activity, and how does this relationship of change during adolescence? In this study, survey analyses describe developmental change during adolescence using data from students enrolled in middle school, high school, and college. Then, I built a simple developmental model to hypothesize a strong, positive, stable correlation of meaningful engagement in civic activities with meaningful engagement in educational activity.

This chapter details both the narrative and survey analyses. Chapters 4–6 include narrative analyses of purposes for learning in life that provide examples from General

Purpose Theory to demonstrate how students' efforts to contribute to the community can influence their educational experiences. Chapter 7 reports findings from the survey analyses, including (a) personal projects such as college and career aspirations that provide meaning for engagement in educational activity; (b) life goals that provide direction; (c) gender, race, age, and academic identities that create meaning; (d) the search for meaning and life purpose as predictors of meaning; (e) simple regression models of life goals and engagements in family, religious, civic, and economic activities to predict meaningful engagement in educational activity; and (f) developmental models to predict declining relation with family activities, positive relation with religious activities, negative relation with religious goals, increasing relation with economic goals, mixed relation with work for pay, and strong, stable correlation of volunteer service activities in the community with meaningful engagement in educational activity. The sections that follow provide details regarding sampling, protocols, data reductions, and measures used in these studies of meaningful engagement in educational activity and student purposes for learning.

*Samples Within Samples*

The data were collected as part of the Youth Purpose Project at the Stanford Center on Adolescence from 2006 to 2008. Three subsamples of data collected from the Youth Purpose Project were selected to best suit the needs of the studies for this dissertation. The largest sample consisted of survey responses at Time 1 from 1,211 adolescents. This sample was used to describe the adolescents, and build a predictive model of meaningful engagement in educational activity. The second sample was a longitudinal sample of 550 students that used survey responses at Times 1 and 2 to

described the stability of the relationships between meaningful engagement in educational, civic, family, religious, economic, and other activities. The second sample was useful for insight into the developmental model.

The sample used in the narrative analyses reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 is the smallest; and is a longitudinal sample of 12 high school seniors who graduate high school and attend college. One additional 18-year-old, who was interviewed at Times 1 and 2, but does not persist into a second year of college, helps to define the sample of adolescents enrolling in college in the United States. The case studies from this small sample provide practical examples of meaningful engagement through student narratives of the abstract psychological constructs of purposes to learn. The student narratives describe what students found purposeful and meaningful from their perspectives. In contrast, the larger survey sample of students at multiple schools allowed for creation of simple, standardized models of meaningful engagement in activities.

The students were sampled from one public middle school, one high school, and one college located in each of five communities around the United States. Every student in the sample was enrolled in one of the 15 schools during October 2006 (Time 1). The communities and schools were chosen to represent diverse, ordinary, middle-class American communities. Two were in the San Francisco Bay Area, one was in California's Central Valley, one was in the rural southern United States, and one was in the urban northeastern United States. The differences across communities and within school cultures were not concerns of this study; neither were the effects of the schools on the students enrolled in K–8, middle, or high schools; community colleges; or state universities; or affiliated with additional educational institutions before Time 2. Students

enrolled in special programs, such as off-campus high school vocational training and special day classrooms in middle school, were not sampled. Identification of these students as special cases indicated that they should be excluded from a sample intended to be a diverse representation of average American adolescents enrolled in comprehensive, public schools.

The average age of students in the sample ($N = 1,211$) at Time 1 was 17 years, 2 months. The oldest student was 22, and the youngest was 10. The 12 adolescents interviewed (and presented in the following chapter) were sampled from a cohort of 201 high school seniors from 5 high schools, dubbed the 18-year-old cohort. The group had an average age of 17 years, 6 months. (The oldest was 19, and the youngest was 16 years, 3 months.) The largest survey sample of the study included the 18-year-old cohort ($n = 201$) and 3 additional cohorts: (a) the 21-year-old cohort, which had 407 students with an average age of 21 (age range 20–22); (b) the 15-year-old cohort, which had 198 students with an average age of 14 years, 7 months (age range 13–17); and (c) the 12-year-old cohort, which had 405 students with an average age of 11 years, 9 months (age range 10–13).

The students' socioeconomic status, calculated using the zip code of residence and census track classifications, showed that the sample was predominantly middle class. Specifically, 77% lived in neighborhoods with average household incomes in the $60,000–$79,999 range, 9% in the $40,000–$59,999 range, 12% in the $80,000–$99,999 range, and less than 1% lived in neighborhoods with average household incomes below $40,000 or above $100,000. This was expected because the sample was selected from public schools located in middle-class neighborhoods.

The students living in suburban California tended to live in neighborhoods with higher average incomes than students in the rural southern and urban northeastern communities. The researchers who interviewed students enjoyed a view of the bay from Hilltop High School, listened over traffic at Freeway High, and heard gunshots in the poorest middle class neighborhood. The names of schools, communities, and other locations have been changed to generalized pseudonyms. The sample was not intended to address differences schools and communities, although the critical reader will note differences evident in some analyses that may warrant additional study.

Students in the sample identified their ethnicity as follows: 7% African American, 23% Asian American, 33% Latino, 40% Caucasian, and 25% other (including 2% Native American and 7% Pacific Islander). Students were instructed to select all ethnicities that apply, and 18% of students identified with more than one ethnicity. The overall sample showed greater diversity than most schools in the United States, which are dominated by a single race. For example, 76% of the community sampled in the rural southern identified themselves as Caucasian.

Thus, the schools were chosen for their cultural diversity, but the sample underrepresented Latino and poor students, who constitute a larger percentage of students enrolled in many schools in California (see Table 3.1). In addition, 37% of students lived in homes where a language other than English was spoken, and 59% identified as female. A definition of diversity is beyond the present scope of this study; likewise, creating comparisons among groups of students is not the focus of this research. Nevertheless, it is important to address the difficulty of creating a sample of "ordinary" students, and therefore, attention to diversity is in order.

*Sampling for Ordinary at Two High Schools*

In Chapter 4, a student who calls herself Ordinary establishes a point of reference for the reader to reflect on the general ideals and experiences of ordinary students enrolled in public schools who are inspired by opportunities for career advancement to do well in school. A focus on ordinary allows one to notice the background of attention in the culture of education, and to further question what learning is and why educational activity is worthwhile (see Bruner, 1992). Ordinary is the narrative of a high school senior who enrolls in a state university to obtain educational credentials that will provide her opportunities for social advancement. The presentation of her narrative is intended to demonstrate what educators and educational researchers often take for granted as the life ambitions and career paths of students. The empirical description of an ordinary student depends on the definition of ordinary, and who is included in a sample of ordinary students.

Thus, the following chapters present the narrative of Ordinary as a self-ascribed identity of a student who belongs to the sample of ordinary high school seniors enrolled in U.S. public, middle-class schools. The focus on ordinary students complements studies of purposeful youth exemplars (Bronk, 2008; Damon, 2008; Reilly, 2009), valedictorians (Arnold, 1995), and students enrolled in special programs. Exemplars, valedictorians, and other special groups may be found at ordinary schools and, thus, are unintentionally represented in this sample; however, they are recognized for being out of the ordinary.

The following chapters use the words of 13 students to describe their plans for college, typical days at school, and reflections on learning outside of school. In this

chapter, I present details and critiques of the procedures used to select the student called Ordinary and the 12 others. Data collection at the community and state colleges followed a standard procedure whereby school administrators sent e-mail invitations to all students age 21 who were enrolled at the college. At the middle schools, data collection was slightly different, though it also used a standard procedure whereby the research team partnered with homeroom and P.E. teachers to invite all sixth graders at the school to participate in the study through specific classes that were mandatory for all students.

The average response rate of students who affirmed their willingness to participate in the study was 12% at the colleges; at the middle schools, more than 80% of the students were willing to participate. The samples represented different populations in the same community (12 and 21 year-olds enrolled in a public school). Because it is likely that relatively few students enrolled in the middle school will matriculate to the local community and state colleges, and the younger adolescents are not the same sample as older adolescents, conclusions should not be made about continuous development across adolescence. Identifying dropouts is a challenge for longitudinal research, and is of general interest for educational policy. The potential effects of missing students are discussed generally in this chapter. Chapter 5 includes a case of a student who did not enroll in college to provide the reader with a contrast to the ordinary student in the U.S.

The high schools for this study were selected because they are located in middle-class neighborhoods. Some schools had active student campaigns, such as those raising awareness about violations of human rights around the world. These campaigns and other community events were often topics in the student narratives. Differences were apparent to the researchers who walked across large manicured lawns one day and

through metal detectors the next; and this difference becomes part of story of ordinary students enrolled in public schools in the United States.

An evaluator of education making quantified comparisons among the schools might note that the schools perform near average on standardized tests. The data for two schools in the Bay Area, Hilltop and Freeway High, are reported in Table 3.2. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine why Hilltop has a language arts score of 40 and an algebra score of 9 while Freeway has an average language arts score of 9 and an algebra score of 5. No claims are made about the effects of institutional differences on test performance in the following chapters. However, a reader who assumes a homogeneous cultural environment across all middle-class communities and schools risks drawing false conclusions about how students develop purposes for learning. In other words, I assume Hilltop and Freeway High increase standardized achievement and foster purposes for learning in slightly different ways, and that one may be more effective than the other, but the present studies do not address these potential differences.

Data collection was often integrated into counseling programs and other preparation programs at the high schools. Both Hilltop and Freeway High Schools invited college recruiters on campus and hosted career counseling sessions during the weeks after the interviews and surveys took place. At Freeway High, 18 students were enrolled in special programs such as offsite vocational programs and special day classes for students with severe disabilities. These students were not available, so the invited pool consisted of 107 students enrolled in the traditional curriculum.

The other school, Hilltop High, was structured with small schools within a larger comprehensive school. However, a few weeks before the study began the school lost

funding for its small schools design, and many of the seniors were displaced from their original classes, particularly their homerooms, where the study was to be administered. The available participant pool was from four classes taught by an economics teacher who had been previously affiliated with a homeroom within the small school. The teacher taught two college prep classes and two Advanced Placement classes with a total of 137 students. The sample likely consisted of more students oriented toward academic achievement (i.e., were enrolled in AP courses) than students on noncollegiate educational paths.

A total of 244 high school seniors at the two Bay Area high schools were invited to participate in the study. The students gathered for a 15-minute assembly, where they were told they had been randomly selected to participate in a study about their interests, goals, and opinions and that all information collected would remain confidential. Students who were over 18 could sign their own consent forms; all others needed a parent's signature. All students at each school who returned a consent form, with or without permission, were entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of five $25 gift certificates to Amazon.com, or other local bookstores.

On the scheduled date of the survey, fewer than 25% of students at each school had consent to participate in the study, so the survey was postponed for a week for further recruitment of participants. Students who did not return consent forms were given additional forms in their classes, and up to five attempts were made to follow up with students via phone and e-mail. Students who had permission to participate in the study were excused from class on specified dates to take the survey online in the school computer laboratory.

A total of 123 seniors at 2 high schools took the survey, yielding a response rate of around 50% of the invited sample. A random number generator selected 52 students from the participants who completed the survey (25 at Freeway and 27 at Hilltop). These students were invited to participate in an interview in a private area of the school media center, and received a $25 gift certificate to Amazon.com as compensation.

Two years later, the research team contacted students via e-mail, phone, and postal mail to invite them to participate in the study again. The team was able to reinterview 11 of the 52 students one year after their high school graduation. These 11 students provided the narratives presented in the following chapters. Two additional students completed the sample of 18-year-old students: a white male from the rural southern school, and a black male from the urban northeastern school. Each of the additional students provided examples of purposes and activities not found in the samples collected in the diverse high schools in suburban California. The sampling procedures at the middle schools, and colleges followed the data collection plan more closely. However, the details of the population sampled at the two Bay Area high schools serves to clarify the students whose purposes to learn were considered ordinary.

*Interview Methods*

The interview design encouraged students to explain what is most important in their lives. It included questions about what is important in life, the kind of people they aspire to become, their ideals for the world, and their purposes in life. The interviews were conducted by a team of research assistants from the Stanford Center on Adolescence and usually lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by professionals.

All participants were assigned ID numbers, and their identifying information was removed before transcripts were further reduced to focus on their purposes to learn. In this study, the reduced data are referred to as co-constructive narratives and are presented in the following chapters. The interview methods used an idiographic approach aimed at understanding the individual through his or her own experiences (Colby & Damon, 1992, pp. 319–325).

*Clinical Interview Protocol*

A semistructured clinical interview consisting of four sections of questions facilitated students' reflective thinking. The Youth Purpose Interview encourages adolescents to talk about what is important, inspiring, typical, and ideals in life; and facilitates further reflection on the purposes with which students engage in activities in life (Andrews et al., 2006). The interview protocol incorporated questions for adolescents to discuss general self-understandings (Damon & Hart, 1988) and living ordinary lives of exemplary morality (Colby & Damon, 1992).

The preliminary probe, "tell me a little about yourself," served to develop rapport. Subsequent questions directed students' reflective attention toward (a) identifying a self, (b) considerations beyond the self, (c) integrated narratives of meaning to self and contribution beyond self, and (d) purpose in life. General probes across the four sections elicited further explanations and reasons beyond initial, ambiguous, or brusque responses. Periodic checks allowed the interviewer to focus attention on what is important in life according to the interviewee, including "what is the most important thing in your life?" and "is there anything more important that we have not covered?" The interviewer concluded the interview with a final check and thank you.

The overall structure of the interviews flowed through four sections. The first consisted of questions about the student's identity including "what is really important to you?" "what do you do well?" and "what kind of person are you?" The second section helped participants think about the world beyond themselves and included questions such as "what would you like to be different in the world?" and "describe your perfect place/world?" This section also included questions about progress and plans to meet goals and ideals including "are you doing anything in progressing toward X?" and "how could you work toward making some of these changes?"

In the third section, the interviewer helped the participant construct an integrative narrative of the ideals, values, and goals mentioned in the first two sections of the interview. Specific questions included "previously you have mentioned $X, Y, Z$ as being important to you; how do these fit together in your life?" "why is X more important than Y and Z?" and "how does X influence other goals in your life?" In the final section of the interview, the interviewer directly asked participants about their purpose in life, inquiring "do you have a purpose?" and "what does the concept of purpose mean to you?" If participants were reticent, interviewees were instructed to ask an additional set of general questions including "what are your biggest concerns?" "what are your hopes?" and "how do you define success?"

Interviewers were instructed to repeatedly probe *Why?* and to continually elicit further explanations throughout the interview. In all, there were six types of probes used, each designed with a specific intention as follows:

a. To help determine how central a goal, value, or activity is to the participant's life

    a. "How does X influence your life?"

b. To ask about specific rationale involving the self and other oriented reasons why the participant values something

    a. "How do you feel when you are engaging in X?"

    b. "How does your participation in X affect others?"

c. To help determine how stable the value is in the participant's life

    a. "How long have you cared about X?"

    b. "Do you see your participation in X ending at some point?"

d. To understand challenges and maintenance of purpose

    a. "What were the obstacles and how do you overcome them?"

e. To understand the inspiration and formative experiences of a given activity or value

    a. "How did X become important to you?"

f. Understand what participants expect to do and value in the future

    a. "If you picture yourself at 40 years of age, what will you be doing and what will be important to you?"

    b. "What are your plans in the immediate future?"

When combined with the general questions, the probes created a semistructured interview designed to elicit participants' beliefs about what is most important in life, how these values cohere with one another, and the chain of reasoning behind goals and activities.

*Narrative Reduction of Interview Data*

The interview data were reduced to place the educational inspirations, activities, values, goals, plans, and purpose to learn at the forefront of the student narrative. First, I identified and formatted specific interview questions from the protocol to make sections

of the narrative more accessible. Preliminary analyses identified students who were asked the same questions and differences in structure and probes across age cohorts, location, and interviewers. One reader might identify interviewer effects on the content and structure of the student narratives, and another might expect that people interact and develop rapport differently. It is beyond the scope of this study, but potentially beneficial, to better understand how different interviewers are able to encourage students to explain the intricate details of their lives as an interview progresses. The claims made in this dissertation did not depend on a standardized, structured interview free of interviewer bias. Rather, this study was designed using a semi-structured protocol; the narrative analyses describe meaningful engagement in educational activity and purposes for learning relative to students' purposes in life.

Second, each narrative was arranged into four sections: (a) self-understanding, (b) values and reasons, (c) ideals for the world, and (d) life story. Separate narratives were created for data at Times 1 and 2. The reduction process entailed identifying key elements in each student's story while remaining true to students' words with clarity, coherence, and concision. The process included eliminating interview questions and redundant statements, identifying reoccurring themes, and rearranging the text into a narrative form to match the semistructured interview protocol with integrated narratives, statements of identity, ideals for the world, and purposes in life. At this point, I selected a phrase from each student's narrative that represented his or her purpose in the world. This phrase was used to title each story. In a similar fashion, I chose subtitles from the narrative to represent the students' overarching attitude toward education and their educational concerns.

The final data reduction created a coconstructive narrative for each of the 13 high school seniors and included only a few paragraphs relevant to education and learning. The average reduction of words to the student narrative was 84% less words than contained in the original transcript about purpose in life. These short narratives represented the coherent network of reasons each student gave for engaging in education and learning for life. The coconstructed narratives provided empirical data for comparing and contrasting the meaning students derive from engagement in activity, ideals and standards for successful educational activities, and what students believe to be worthwhile investments in learning within broader purposes throughout life. Chapter 4 presents the titles and subtitles for each student's story to reflect their identity statements and educational concerns. In Chapters 4–6, the students' words and narrative summaries are presented to explain why each engages in educational activity relative to their purposes in life.

*Interview Analysis and the Creation of Standard, Survey Models*

The narrative analyses featured purposes to learn, in order to describe what ordinary, diverse, high school seniors think is expected in life, in terms of educational activity, and with respect to the greater purposes of life. The analyses placed individual students' meaningful engagement in educational activity within the story about their purpose in life. They focus on education and learning as pathways along students' purposes in life - the idiographic approach of the interviews centered on high school students' self-understanding.

The analysis described students' potential motives for engaging in educational activity, including specific activities, life goals, values, identities, and other factors that

create meaning.  In the analysis, I contrast the identity statements and educational

concerns of the students in order to create a general understanding of what is ordinary for

high school seniors.  Through this analysis, the reader will begin to understand slight

variations inherent in the term *ordinary,* and to identify certain students as out of the

ordinary because they do not enroll in college.  Instead of focusing on dropouts that are

out of the ordinary, the study centered on what an average student is trying to do in life.

Narrative analyses of why students engage in educational activity build a

foundation of common-sense stories about learning in life.  This is the foundation of five

developmental hypotheses about meaningful engagement in educational activity during

adolescence presented in Chapter 7.  Surveys collected from 1,211 adolescents enrolled

in public middle schools, high schools, and colleges were used to build a simple model of

meaningful engagement in educational activity.  Regression and pair-wise analyses were

used to describe how student engagement in other life activities, such as community

service, religious practice, work for pay, and time with family, correlate to meaningful

engagement in educational activity.  A simple, standard model that predicts the

relationship between meaningful engagement in educational activity and engagement in

community service, family, religious, and work experiences is explained through student

narratives about participating in student government, teaching others at church,

experiences on the job, and devotion to the well-being of family members.

*Survey Measures*

The survey was designed to study how adolescents develop purposes in life and

engage in meaningful life activities, as well as other positive outcomes for adolescents.

The survey data were collected as part of the Youth Purpose Project, and the analyses in

this dissertation used 22 variables as indicators of adolescent development. The variables included survey measures of meaningful engagement in activities, life goals, purposes in life, thriving, and academic identity, as well as demographic information. Activities and goals were subdivided into domains of education, family, religion, community, and finance. Table 3.3 details the 22 variables by name, number of items, and Cronbach's alpha and provides example items.

Eight variables of meaningful engagement in activity were constructed from responses to two questions about 31 different activities. The first question asked "how meaningful is this activity to you?" Students rated meaningfulness from 1 = *not at all meaningful* to 5 = *extremely meaningful*. A second question regarding activity frequency asked "how often do you do this activity?" with possible responses ranging from 0 = *never* and 1 = *once a year* to 8 = *a few times a week* and 9 = *every day*. A single variable for meaningful engagement was created using the eight variables of meaningful engagement. The variables in each domain were created using 31 items whereby the score for meaningfulness (1–5) was multiplied by 2 and added to the score for frequency of activity (0–9). Then, the items within each of the eight variables were averaged to create a composite variable for meaningful engagement in activity. The score for each scale was standardized for building simple and developmental models.

The outcome variable for the models presented in Chapter 7 is Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity (5 items, alpha = .69). It included activities such as studying, participating in class, student leadership, and academic clubs.
In the preliminary and narrative analyses, three variables for additional formal educational activities were used: (a) Meaningful Engagement in Extra Curricular Arts

Activities (4 items, alpha = .64), which included music, drama, dance, and art; (b) Meaningful Engagement in Sports Activities (1 item); (c) and Meaningful Engagement in Career Preparation (1 item). Factor analyses suggested the items of Extra Curricular Arts factored onto the primary variable used in the study (Academic). Differences between academic and arts engagement emerged after middle school, which is worthy of further study. The scales for sports and career preparation each consisted of one item. The results should be interpreted with caution because alpha levels are low and one item scales may not represent as robust of a construct.

Four additional variables for Meaningful Engagement in Activity included Family, Religious-Spiritual, Volunteer-Service, and Work for Pay. These variables were used as metrics for comparison in preliminary analyses, and as predictors in the creation of the Model for Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity. The details of the scales are as follows: (a) Meaningful Engagement in Family Activities (6 items, alpha = .84), which included items for time with siblings, talking, dinner, holidays, visiting relatives, and talking on the phone with family members; (b) Meaningful Engagement in Religious-Spiritual Activities (6 items, alpha = .93), which included participating in class, prayer, attending services, study, talking, and thinking; (c) Meaningful Engagement in Volunteer-Service Activities (5 items, alpha = .79), which included activities with children, the elderly, the environment, the neighborhood, and others in need; and (d) Meaningful Engagement in Work for Pay (1 item; see Table 3.3).

No items were included in more than one variable, but many of the variables included domain-specific items for participating in class and talking. Items for political and ROTC activities were dropped from the original scale for Meaningful Engagement in

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Volunteer-Service Activities because they did not load as highly as the other items in factor analysis and, thus, the alpha increased.  An item for meditation was dropped from the Meaningful Engagement in Religious-Spiritual Activities because it did not load; the sample mean was also much lower than for the other items in the scale.  These decisions were made in preliminary analyses and could warrant further attention in another study.

The importance students place on life goals was measured according to Roberts and Robins's (2000) research.  Students were asked to provide ratings for questions beginning "how important are the following goals in your life?"  They used a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely important*) to address 6 variables: (a) civic (4 items, alpha = .74), which included items for volunteering in the community, helping others in need, being involved in politics, and becoming a community leader; (b) economic (3 items, alpha = .81); (c) family (3 items, alpha = .63); (d) hedonistic (3 items, alpha = .69); (e) artistic (4 items, alpha = .69); and (f) religious-spiritual (2 items, alpha =.92).

Two variables for purpose were used: searching for meaning and identifying a presence of purpose (Bundick, 2009; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).  Searching for Meaning items (4 items, alpha = .79) asked students to what extent they identify with statements such as "I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life."  Presence of Purpose items (6 items, alpha = .85) included items such as "I am always working toward accomplishing my most important goals in life."

There were three categorical indicators of academic identities, including college major, career, and GPA.  Two open-ended questions on the survey asked participants to provide their intended career and college major.  If a student provided an answer, the item was scored as 1; if the student did not, it was scored 0.  The third item asked "what

grades do you earn in school?" and provided an area for students to self-report a GPA using four categories: A, B, C, and D or below. There were three demographic variables: Age used the four cohorts (12, 15, 18, and 21); Gender used two categories: male and female; and Race used six categories: Caucasian, African, Asian, Latino, Other (includes Native American and Pacific Islander), and Multiple (more than one indicated). GPA, gender, and race were controlled for in the models of Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity.

*Summary of Methods*

This chapter explained that the purposes for life and learning of diverse adolescents were sought by surveying middle schools, high schools, and colleges that represented ordinary schools located in five middle-class communities in the United States. The larger survey samples used standardized metrics of meaningful engagement in activity, importance of life goals, and purposes in life to construct generalized models predicting higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity. The formal hypotheses and survey models are examined in Chapter 7. The next three chapters showcase the narratives of 13 students by highlighting utility values for activity, investments in learning, and standards for success in educational activities. Each student narrative expressed a unique identity statement, personal concern for education, and purposes for learning in life. The narrative analyses provide an artifact that represents common sense to the ordinary student enrolled in ordinary schools in the United States. The narrative analyses presented in the next three chapters provide the basis of the five developmental hypotheses that are examined further in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF NARRATIVE ANALYSES

As presented in Chapter 2, General Purpose Theory explains that students who reflect upon the consequences of their actions become sensitized to an additional source of meaning for engaging in the activity—in contrast with those that reflect upon the activity only in terms of self-development or emotional experience. As students reflect on their purpose for life and learning, they integrate reasons into a personal narrative to create meaning for the self—the narrative often incorporates consequences to others across many activities in life. In this chapter, the narrative analyses articulate individual differences in student reflections on learning in life that describe why they engage in educational activity; and the survey analyses provide quantified metrics of meaningful engagement in activity across each student's life.

This chapter details student reflections on *identity statements* and *educational concerns* (see Table 4.1) to describe how overarching purposes in life provide direction for activity engagement and learning for life. The reflective considerations are described in the context of life and learning for each student, including why they enroll in college, how they plan to earn a credential, how they explore opportunities for career advancement, and how they find purposes of engaging in life in general. The critical description of ordinary students' purposes for learning created an artifact of what is common sense among students. Once this common sense of purpose for engaging in educational activity is established in the next sections, the complexity of individuals' motivations for learning in life is introduced; and the reader begins to understand more generally why students engage in educational activity.

In this chapter, I argue that it is common for high school seniors to be motivated to attain a credential and they believe education is the path to future success; however, students have many motivations in life that could also inspire learning in school and for life after graduation.  Some students articulate moral ideals that inspire their learning, other students are captivated by emotional experiences; some students are fulfilling duties while others are waiting for opportunities; and each student has a unique purpose for learning in life.

<p align="center">*Purposes to Learn*</p>

In this section, the words of thirteen students explain their purposes in life. Student 1, who identified herself as "ordinary," said she plans to "get through school and find out what I enjoy doing and where I want to be."  She explained, "I need to go to college to get a job and start a family" (see Table 4.1).  Student 2, Duty, reported higher ratings of meaningful engagement in activities than Ordinary, including education (4.8), family (5.0), spiritual (4.8), and volunteer service (4.0).  Duty stated she had a "duty to lend a hand" and that "college is the next step in life where I'm gonna get all my education."  With regard to high school, she said she is concerned with "scoring high on my SATs," and in terms of college, she stated that it is "one of the most important things in every person's life."  Student 3 was a self-professed "adrenaline junkie" and reported to be less inspired about life and learning than Duty and Ordinary were.  Adrenaline Junkie said he plans to "graduate high school, get into college, and start to bode the life."  When compared to the sample, Ordinary reported average levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity; Duty reported higher levels of meaningful engagement in education and other activities than Ordinary did; both Ordinary and Duty

tended to rate their activity engagements in education and life as more meaningful than Adrenaline Junkie did (see Table 4.2).

Student 4 stated he wants to be "building bridges." He said, "Everything looks good on college applications" and "I have to get my degree to do what I want to do in life." Student 5 said he is motivated in life because his "parents taught me well." He also stated he "came [to America] primarily for studying and going to Ivy League schools," "hope[s] to get into medical school," and "academic[s] is just one stepping stone to become successful." Student 6 said she is a "hopeless romantic" who is "thinking about going to state college." But, she says, "I'm just really scared that I might not just get into college for some reason." Hopeless Romantic's narrative expresses the most uncertainty about collegiate success, especially compared to the confidence Building Bridges and Parents Taught Me Well expressed in their high career aspirations.

Student 7 aspired to "freedom" because she wants to "do positive things." Freedom stated that she would like to "become an OB-GYN" and that she believes "being educated means knowing that I can provide for myself" and "college will lead to freedom, growing up, maturing, and making my own decisions." The narrative of Freedom best articulates purposes related to independence and self-reliance with confidence and clarity of direction in life. Student 8 said he was "restless" and declared his college major would be "fashion merchandizing." He stated, "School is all about the future," although he said he was not "a big fan of school." Restless also said he was "kinda going with where I get accepted or whatever happens." His narrative is similar to that of Adrenaline Junkie, and he expressed little concern for others in the world and reported little meaningful activity in life and little inspiration for learning. Restless

expressed less interest, confidence, and inspiration for learning in school than Freedom did.

Student 9 stated that she aspires to "do something meaningful" and that she believes "I can make the world a better place once I've got an education." In terms of high school, she said she was concerned her education "could go a lot of different ways," and in terms of college, she stated, "If you don't get a good education these days, there's not much you can do." Something Meaningful's uncertainty in high school was similar to Hopeless Romantic's, and her beliefs about college showed that she had little hope. This concern was similar to Student 13's (see Table 4.1). Something Meaningful's ultimate concern for education, "I can make the world a better place once I've got an education," represented a similar orientation toward others in the world as Student 10, who stated that he intends to "make the world a better place." World said he plans to "use my school for my future, make myself smarter, a better person and community member." His concern in high school was "getting into a good college, so I can get a good job later in life, so I can support myself." His concern expressed a utility value of school as career advancement, similar to Ordinary's. His ideal of self-reliance was similar to Freedom's. Compared with others, World expressed the most active engagements with reflection on the consequences to world: "When I participate in class or discussion, I feel like I make the people in class more intelligent."

Student 11 aspired to "be the boss" and stated, "You could go anywhere if you have education," "If I get to a 2-year college, I am being successful," and "In order to get a good job, you have to be well educated and smart." Be the Boss appeared to engage in meaningful educational activity (3.2) as much as Ordinary did (3.0), but his college

achievement plan was less ambitious than Ordinary's (see Table 4.1).  Student 12 said

that he had "completely changed" and aspires to "have knowledge of everything or

everywhere."  In terms of his concerns about what to do in high school and life, he said,

"I'm really just hoping one morning I'll wake up and I'll just see what direction to go."

In terms of college, Completely Changed said, "I'm in school, but not for the degree right

off the bat. I like learning."  Be the Boss expresses a motive for power and authority

while Completely Changed is a reflection on learning about one's motives in life.

Student 13 said he aspired to be a "respected father" and "I just wanna get out of

the neighborhood."  His ultimate concern for education is as follows: "If you don't

continue your education, you ain't gonna get anywhere in life."  He expressed concern

about not enrolling in college: "Wish I finished college because now you see the true

meaning of it.  My job is good, but I want better."  Father's plan to go to college and

obtain a better job was similar to Boss's and Ordinary's, but Father stopped going to

college and wishes he finished.  Be the Boss's narrative is less academically oriented than

Ordinary's, whereas Completely Changed had a different purpose for learning than

Ordinary's, which was to graduate college in four years and enjoy her time; Completely

Changed likes to learn, and wants to know about everything, everywhere.

Each identity statement described a unique orientation for engaging in life's

activities.  Ordinary's narrative was most similar to the others'.  Respected Father's

narrative represents a departure from engaging in formal educational activity.  The

narratives of Duty, Freedom, and World are robust purposes to learn that define meaning

for self, consider consequences to others, and integrate current concerns for engaging in

educational activity across life's activities.  Completely Changed's narrative is that of a

student who becomes inspired by a purpose to learn in life. These first results of the narrative analysis provide the foundation for further study of unique purposes for life and learning that motivate students to engage in educational activity.

*Ordinary and Standard College Achievement Plans*

Ordinary stated that in high school she worries she is too focused on her future, especially in terms of the amount of time she spends planning for college. After high school graduation, she enrolls in a state university and plans to "graduate in four years and enjoy my time." She joined a sorority that provided her opportunities to make friends while she acquired the marketing tools to make her competitive in the "real world." Ordinary might consider herself an "ordinary college student" who leaves home to attend a state university at 18, but the critical reader will recognize that she is not so ordinary.

In 2007, 65% of high school graduates enrolled in college, and the majority attended community colleges (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Therefore, Ordinary's attending a university and graduating in four years demonstrates an ideal. Educators, academics, and policy makers often are unaware that most American high school graduates are not leaving home to attend college. Some are joining the military and work force, and many are attending local colleges while living at home. Thus, Ordinary is extraordinary in terms of her academic performance, thoughtfulness about her goals and plans, and progress toward gaining admission to a selective state university. The ideal of Ordinary sets a high standard for success in school, compared to those students doing what they are told to do by authority with less educational experience and ambition in school. She is an ideal because she went to college, just as

her friends do, and her family did. She believes everyone should go to college, and does exactly what she thinks is valued and expected by the educational system.

In the first year of college, Ordinary struggled to balance her academic and social engagements, and through "tough love" she learned new, effective study habits to meet the higher intellectual standards demanded by her coursework. She feels she integrated well into the college community through a sorority, and said she is unaware of any unique purposes she has to attend college, experience learning, or live life in general. All students in the sample have a general knowledge of the different opportunities present in the educational system; and Ordinary represents an ideal for high-achieving, ambitious students trying to succeed in high school so that they can succeed in college and in life.

Ordinary learned to meet the new standards for performance required by her professors and to find balance in life to cope with higher academic standards. Ultimately, she found ways to achieve passing grades in order to progress toward degree completion, and to pursue success in life. The name Ordinary represents three features of a narrative of her engagement in educational activity. First, her concern to "get through school and find out what I enjoy doing and where I want to be" is a general plan for school success, but provides little direction in life. In both high school and college, she engaged in education because she believes doing well in class, attending college, and completing a degree will lead to a better career and general success in life.

Second, Ordinary's survey ratings suggested her engagement in educational activity was close to average (see Table 4.2). Her reported presence of purpose was more than a standard deviation below the sample average. Thus, she is generally motivated to achieve in school but has not indicated a unique, individualized presence of purpose for

learning in life or reported deriving exceptional meaning from an activity in any domain. Third, Ordinary is a reference point to ground further descriptions of American high school seniors who graduate, go to college, and are inspired by many other things in life beyond obtaining a credential.

When Ordinary says, "I need to go to college to get a job," she provides a cultural artifact I call the "standard college achievement plan." Implicit in the plan is the utility value of school, and general reasons for students to engage in school because it will lead to future success. The standard plan is Ordinary's ideal, but for other students interviewed, the plan intersects with vibrant emotional and ethical frameworks, which create additional meaning for life, and for engaging in education, and learning.

Ordinary justifies her investment, engagement, existence, and efforts in educational activity using the standard college achievement plan for career success. She seeks balance for stressful educational activities by enjoying her time in social engagements. The standard plan integrates current concerns for a self that engages in educational activities in high school with future selves that complete college coursework and obtain a job. Ordinary considers it common sense to follow the standard plan and go to college to get a better job. The standard college achievement plan orients Ordinary, and the other students in the sample, toward life in the future with a successful career. Thus, the plan represents a utility value that justifies engagement in educational activity with the general ideal of a better paying job.

Ordinary has the reflective understanding that "there are several ways to get an education" and that school "might not go according to the plan." This was a common reflective statement made by other 18-year-olds; and this may become more apparent if it

were contrasted with the self-understanding often exhibited by 12-year-olds, who do not consider alternative paths in life quite as readily. Ordinary aspires to a specific achievement standard for her college education—to "graduate in four years"—and therefore must adjust to more pressing academic demands for college achievement, conflicting motives to have fun with friends, and attending to her mother's needs.

In college, she integrates a proximal goal regarding the emotional quality of her life, to "enjoy my time," with a distal goal, "to start a family," into her educational plan. Her concerns for education and life in general include balancing the proximal goals for enjoyment with the educational goal of earning a college credential in business marketing. The distal goal, to start a family in the future, inspires her to work hard in school so that one day she will have a higher paying job to support her family. The goal of supporting a family also inspires her social activities, because she dreams of meeting a husband that would support her family and goals in life.

Ordinary also values educational activity because she believes a college degree will lead to a better job. She is able to consider alternative plans, aspirations, and motives in life, but her value for educational activity is primarily justified by the standard college achievement plan, rather than a unique purpose such as contributing something to the world. Ordinary is unique among the other students because her purpose in life is to complete the standard college achievement plan. She considers multiple options for engaging in educational activity with little attention to many of the other things that provide other students with purposes for learning in life.

*Contrasting Responsibility With Emotional Experience*

Duty reported high levels of meaningful engagement in educational activities with a greater presence of purpose in life.  This clearly contrasted with Adrenaline, whose levels of meaningful activity in education and presence of purpose were much lower than the average student's (see Table 4.2).  As a high school senior, Duty aspires to be a nurse and focuses extensively on the college admissions process, but she worries about facing the challenges of studying medicine while helping to support the needs of her family.  Her career aspiration and sense of responsibility to her family create a tension between her proximal duty to her family and her distal selves contributing to the world in the future--both nursing and supporting her family.

In contrast to Duty, Ordinary searches for balance between proximal goals to complete a degree and even more proximal goals for the emotional experience of enjoying her social activities.  The standard college achievement plan is Ordinary's ultimate concern, as well as one of Duty's educational concerns.  However, Duty expresses finding meaning in life beyond taking the "step" of going to college.  She stated, "College is one of the most important things in every person's life."  She also expressed having a responsibility to her family; Duty's concerns in the world are beyond the type of plan Ordinary expressed in her story about life.

Duty has high levels of achievement and a future orientation similar to Ordinary's, but the integration of strong values of family and community service bear closer resemblance to the purposes of another female student, Freedom.  Freedom's clearly identified goal to "become an OB-GYN," and her ideal that "college will lead to freedom, growing up, maturing, making my own decisions," make her different than Duty, whose practical concerns in high school consisted of "scoring a high score on my

SATs" and a general belief that college is "where I'm gonna get all my education." Indicators shown in Table 4.2 suggested Freedom and Duty were similar in terms of their family values and their meaningful experiences with community service. However, differences were evident in their experiences in sports, working for pay, and spiritual activities.

The financial reality not indicated in the tables is that Freedom's family pays for her college tuition, and she looks forward to moving away from a strict father. Duty, on the other hand, struggles to financially support her family, as well as to pay her own bills and to attend to the increased demands of college. Ordinary, Duty, and Freedom are all high-achieving female students with similar plans for educational attainment. They believe college will lead to better jobs and opportunities for family, but only Duty and Freedom have inspiration beyond the standard college achievement plan.

Each student's social identity may be understood in terms of a utility value and social commitment that positions him or her in relation to others in the study. Ordinary belongs to a group, namely a sorority at a university; Duty fulfills a role in her family that constrains and inspires her educational plan to obtain credentials in medicine; and Freedom seeks activity in life that is independent from family in order to positively affect the world through a career in medicine. All three students' autobiographical narratives express a social commitment to others that varies slightly by degree of self-and-other-orientation. The ideal of Freedom is a self-from-other orientation. For Duty, it is a self-to-other orientation, and for Ordinary, it is doing what everyone says she should do in school and life by following the standard college achievement plan.

Other student narratives, such as Adrenaline and Restless, expressed little reflective awareness of the relationship between a learning life and moral life contributing to the world. Something Meaningful said she wants to "do something meaningful" because it is what other people told her to do. Thus, her purpose represents a generic moral ideal to contribute to the world, positioning her toward different ends than Ordinary's plan to "get through school and find out what I enjoy doing and where I want to be." Compared to Ordinary, Something Meaningful has more robust moral ideals for her life. Freedom and Duty represent specific, moral ideals within the world, capable of framing a deliberative table for engagement beyond generic, ordinary standards for meaningful engagement.

In stark contrast to the academic achievement and social-relational identities of Ordinary, Duty, and Freedom, Adrenaline Junkie spends most of his time outside of school involved in extreme sports. With the exception of Respected Father, Adrenaline Junkie is the least focused of the students in terms of a college plan. He stated he is choosing colleges and continuing into the next stage of his life "blind." He aspires to become a helicopter pilot in the Coast Guard or a fireman but is unreflective in his narrative of the role and the social commitment of the professions. He loves the adrenaline rush he gets in his experiences outside of school, but follows a standard college achievement plan and enrolls in academic courses at a state college a few hours from his parents' home.

Adrenaline Junkie does not integrate into the academic or social communities on his college campus and instead spends much of his time pursuing a passion in motocross and other extreme sports. During his first year after high school, he injured himself on

his motocross bike and underwent a series of surgeries while struggling to complete his college coursework.  He did not pass all his classes in the spring semester and transferred into a firefighting program at a tech school closer to his parents' home.  In high school, he aspired to specific careers in firefighting and the Coast Guard, but his strategy to "go in blind" lacked knowledge of his future self, so he was unprepared to meet the challenges of college that Ordinary and Duty were able to tackle.  Therefore, following the standard college achievement plan hindered Adrenaline Junkie in choosing a college path in direct pursuit of his career aspirations.

Adrenaline Junkie's nonchalant attitude toward school was similar to that of another male, Restless (Student 8; see Table 4.1), who expressed little ambition in academics or his plans for college.  However, he showed awareness that he is the kind of guy that needs to keep busy.  In contrast to the attention Ordinary paid to her college plans, Restless's philosophy entailed "kinda going with where I get accepted or whatever happens."  Adrenaline Junkie and Restless were not involved in any college activities outside of formal class activities; both live off campus and find enjoyment spending time with friends somewhere else in the community.

After the first year of college, Adrenaline Junkie transferred from the state college to a tech college closer to his parents' house, whereas Restless continued to live with his parents while he attended a nearby state college.  During his first year of college, Restless declared a major in "fashion merchandizing" because he believes it fits his personal strengths and is practical for preparing him for a future career.  Restless knows he needs to be busy and wants an interesting career.  Adrenaline knows he enjoys exciting things, such as extreme sports, and maintains career aspirations in firefighting, but he is rather

unreflective about the best way to accomplish his goals or his purpose in the world with respect to others.

On the survey, Adrenaline, Restless, and Ordinary appeared to be alike because they reported having little purpose in their lives. The names given to each are statements about their personal identity, whereas the names given to other students relate to the reflective commitments they have to their purpose in life. The identities of Adrenaline Junkie, who dreams of being a firefighter, and Restless, who knows he must do something to keep busy, appeal to emotional experiences, whereas the narratives of Duty and Freedom are reflective of what these students want to contribute to the world and feel responsibility to do with their life.

In the stories that Adrenaline, Restless, and Ordinary tell about life, they reflect little about themselves as moral persons within the world and have little awareness of their potential contributions to the world; however, each narrative shows how education fits into their path to a good life. Such analysis is not to suggest these students are completely ignorant of the impact of their activities on others, or that their daily engagements are somehow immoral. Rather, Ordinary's interests are sparked by the idea of creating advertising jingles to manipulate people to buy things; and Restless knows he is good at helping his friends shop for clothes. In the survey and interview, Ordinary, Adrenaline, and Restless did not indicate having identified a purpose in their lives. Nevertheless, Ordinary reflected much more on her educational plans than the other two did, and she found motivation for engaging in educational activity from the plan itself.

*Ordinary as a High-Achieving Ideal*

All the students in the cohort are similar to Ordinary and plan to graduate high school, enroll in college, and earn a credential that will provide opportunities to advance to better careers. Ordinary's plan and concerns for engaging in education (see Table 4.1) are the most generic and are common among the rest of the cohort. Her plan could be referred to as the standard college achievement plan of high school graduates in 2007. The identity statements and concerns for education given in Table 4.1 are artifacts within a teenage and American culture that values educational credentials. The tables could be interpreted as a class photo that captures the general concerns about education of ordinary seniors enrolled in ordinary high schools.

The narrative of Ordinary is one of practical knowledge and obsession with future planning; it exhibits an advantage over characters motivated by adrenaline and restlessness, whose college plans provide no detailed information as to decisions about engaging in educational activity and progressing along the standard plan. The focus of the narratives of Adrenaline and Restless is on emotional experiences. In contrast, Ordinary focuses on the practical and rational because she plans her experiences in life and focuses on engaging in educational activities to accomplish goals. Table 4.1 introduces the reader to a plurality of educational concerns expressed by 13 students graduating high school and entering college. The students say they engage in activities because they do what they are supposed to do, react to emotional experiences, and feel responsible for engaging in certain activities. Something Meaningful (Student 9) stated, "I can make the world a better place once I've got an education." This represented greater moral concerns and purpose for engaging in activities in life and education than those expressed by Ordinary. The narrative of Something Meaningful exhibited her goal

of having a particular emotional experience with uncertainty about her educational plan, which most closely resembles Hopeless Romantic's and Restless's goals (Students 6 and 8). Something Meaningful stated that her engagements in educational activity and pursuits of a college degree "could go a lot of different ways."

Ordinary stated that she knows she is an ordinary student and a good student who is oriented toward high academic achievement. This awareness was similar to Duty's and Freedom's, as well as other high-achieving students' in the cohort. Ordinary, Duty, Freedom, Bridges, Parents, and World (Students 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 10) are achievement-oriented students in school, and have specifically reflected upon methods and strategies for accomplishing their college achievement plans. They value the utility and attainment of education, expect to complete their college degrees in four years, and have thought about graduate school. These students oriented toward high achievement in school are willing to invest time and energy in studying and participating in class, and to adjust their lifestyles to succeed in school.

The difference between the narratives of Ordinary and the other students in the sample is that Ordinary spoke very little about purposes in life beyond high achievement in education. She mentioned that her college plan is necessary "to get a job and start a family," but when her story is compared to those of students with ideals of duty, building bridges, making parents proud, freedom to do positive things, and making the world a better place, it is apparent that Ordinary does not yet know her potential unique contribution to the world.

*Summary of Findings*

This chapter described identity statements and student concerns for learning in life using the stories students told about doing the important things in life.  In general students have achievement plans to attain college credentials, and utility values for credentials motivate their engagement in school learning.  In other words, the students' plans rest on the belief that school is the pathway to economic advantages in terms of advancing toward careers with power, control, and high social status—this is the story told by the student who called herself Ordinary, and is common sense among the other students in the cohort.  Some of the students invested time learning to contribute competently, uniquely, and purposefully to their formal educational activities.  The student who felt she had duty to lend a hand engaged in school because it was a step toward becoming a nurse; and she worries that her obligations to help support her family may prevent her from completing her degree; she reports a high level of meaningful engagement in educational activity.  The student who identified as an Adrenaline Junkie reported the lowest level of meaningful engagement in educational activity; he believed that college was the path to success in life, but went into the college transition process blind.  Many other purposes for learning were introduced in this chapter, including the story of a respected father who stopped going to college to support his family, a student making his parents proud, one who wants to be the boss, another making the world a better place, and a student who claims a professor completely changed his life.

CHAPTER 5: FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, RELIGION, GENDER, AND CULTURE

Do the adolescents find their time with family meaningful?  On average, the 18-year-old individuals within the cohort that took the survey rated engagement in family activities (3.81 out of 5); this was higher than educational activities (3.06), spiritual activities (2.88), and community service activities (2.88), suggesting that they tend to find family activities, including eating dinner and talking with relatives, more meaningful than other activities, including studying, participating in class, attending religious services, and volunteering to assist those in need.  These are average ratings of indices of meaningful engagement in activity; a particular individual could derive much more meaning from one activity than another, and the influence of each of these activities on engagement in educational activity may vary for different students.

In the previous chapter, a General Purpose Theory was used to describe how students' identity statements, along with their ultimate and current concerns for education, create meaning for their narratives about learning for life. This chapter provides examples of how students' deliberations about personal investments are framed by their life goals, self-understandings, and general purposes for engaging in activities for life. This chapter presents further information about the ordinary student's narrative—goals to obtain educational credentials, and intentions to achieve this goal by sticking to the standard college achievement plan— and details the narratives told by other students who have additional inspirations, challenges, and purposes for engaging in educational activity.

In this chapter, I argue that family creates meaning for engaging in educational activity and life in general, and demonstrate how the relationship of family and education within each student's story can vary significantly.  Family is not the only source of meaning and motivation in students' life, so I also argue that friends, religion, gender, cultural heritages, and service to the community provide additional motives for individual student's to engage in educational activity.  According to Expectancy-Value Theory, the utility, attainment, and intrinsic values of activities create motives for students to engage in activity, and this chapter will show how these values connect with family, friends, religion, gender, culture, and other things students' consider important in life.

*Ordinary and Parental Support*

The student who described herself as  "Ordinary" (listed in the previous chapter as Student 1 in Table 4.2) stated that she values time with her family and reported on the survey that family dinners, celebrations, and other family activities are "somewhat meaningful."  Ordinary's rating (3.5) for meaningful engagement in educational activity is lower than the average for high school seniors (3.81) and much lower than the average for meaningful engagement in family activities for sixth graders in the sample (4.09).  On occasion, Ordinary attends to family affairs and helps her mother, who struggles with what Ordinary calls a "separation thing" when she must deal with her daughter going to college a few hours away.

In college, Ordinary spends most of the time that she is not engaged in formal schooling with friends rather than family members.  She joined a sorority, seeking friendship, social interaction, safety, and community.  She identifies with other girls who are hoping  to find the man of their dreams and enjoy the social interactions that occur

within in the sorority.  In the past, Ordinary might have learned many things from her family; she said that she values her experiences with family members but is currently much more concerned with the opportunities college provides for starting and supporting a future family.  She explores these opportunities with friends.  Her sorority provides her with friendship opportunities that are directly connected to the college.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 in the previous chapter provide the reader with an introduction and reference point for the analyses in the present chapter to complicate.  One reader might prefer the narrative approach of Table 4.1 while another might prefer the quantitative approach of Table 4.2; together, they provide complementary descriptions of the student who calls herself "Ordinary" and her classmates who are also entering college.  The reader learns that Ordinary is not involved in any sports or religious activities and cites no health or spiritual concerns in the story she tells about the purposes of her life.  Ordinary expresses love and respect for her parents and feels that they support her educational aspirations; however, some of the other students express much more devotion and loyalty to their families and cultural traditions than Ordinary does.  This chapter describes participants' plans for education and life, some of which have dimensions that go beyond Ordinary's plan to graduate from college in four years, and describes the role of gender and social, economic, spiritual, romantic, and other struggles in the narratives of students engaging in educational activity to fulfill various purposes.

*Gender and Interconnected Roles*

The critical reader might point out that Ordinary is female, like the majority of students enrolled in undergraduate programs in the United States during 2007 (56%; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).  Analyses of the survey data gathered for this study

reveal that on average, females reported deriving higher levels of meaning from educational activity when compared to males (.16 Bonferroni adjusted pair-wise effect). However, females also rated other activities, including family time (.21) and community service (.19), as more meaningful than males did. Does this suggest that females derive more meaning from life's activities than males do? What would a significant gender difference suggest? It might indicate nothing—and it is not possible to pursue these questions further within the context of this study—but female students graduate from high school and enroll in college at higher rates than their male counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The larger number of females entering college relative to males and the value that female students place on graduating may overshadow the possibility that the college-to-career path may be Plan B for some young women, who primarily seek to become mothers and care for a family. Some female students perceive college as a nice opportunity to find intelligent, hardworking husbands while gaining academic knowledge along the way (see Clydesdale, 2007). Ordinary, and many of the other students, know that not all women want to be mothers but join sororities and other social organizations including church to meet like-minded friends who can help them progress along their paths and lead happy, healthy family lives. The role of gender and family in the narrative is often interconnected with religion, friends, and future career.

The previous chapter introduced two narratives about "Duty to Lend a Hand" and "Freedom to Do Positive Things" (2 and 7 in Table 4.2), who placed high value on the time they spend with family, but as the reader listens to each life story, it becomes apparent that the role family plays differs across narratives. Duty feels an obligation to

fulfill a family need, whereas Freedom seeks independence from the restrictive environment of her family. Duty and Freedom are similar in their ratings for meaningful engagement in family activities compared to Ordinary, Adrenaline, and Restless, who more closely resemble the average adolescent in the sample. The role of family in the lives of students and the influence of family on engaging in educational activity vary considerably across the students in this sample, so the narratives of four new students highlight a few differences in how family interacts with meaningful engagement in educational activity. The difference between Duty and Freedom resides in how each individual understands herself in relationship with her family—Freedom seeks separation from family and Duty has an obligation to family. Nevertheless, both highly value the time they spend with family. The difference between them is highly interconnected with other ideals and the meaning behind other activities, such as intentions to engage in community service, friendship, cultural events, and educational activity.

The next section begins with two narratives of achievement-oriented male students, "Building Bridges" and "My Parents Taught Me Well," who explained that their families shaped their career aspirations and religious beliefs. The section that follows introduces two other students, "Hopeless Romantic" and "Respected Father," who also have strong commitments to loved ones but whose relationships with family detract from meaningful engagement in educational activity. Their stories remind the reader that inspiration and challenges emerge in families outside school that influence the lives of students and their pursuit of learning. More than 80% of the adolescents in the survey sample reported that they feel supported by their families in fulfilling their educational aspirations, but the reader may wonder how many students without supportive families

are included in a sample of ordinary American students. The following narratives help to develop a better understanding of the meaning students derive from family experiences, as well as how grateful many of the students are to have been raised within families that instilled high educational aspirations and ethics in them and introduced them to the greater purposes of engagement in education.

*Instilling Academic Ideals and Habits of Engagement*

"Building Bridges" and "My Parents Taught Me Well" (Students 4 & 5 in Table 4.1 and 4.2) have professional-level career aspirations in engineering and medicine. Student 4 said that he aspires to "build bridges," "likes math," and is pursuing a degree in engineering. In his first year of college, he learned that he would not be able to party whenever he wished because college classes in engineering demand more intense academic engagement and occupy more of his free time than his courses in high school did. Ordinary explained that she had learned the same lesson. Bridges is proud to be on the path to completing a degree in engineering because his education will provide him with an opportunity to make more money than his parents do. Bridges said,

> School's important 'cause I have to get my degree to do what I want to do in life. My mom didn't get her degree in college. She spent a lot of her time working in fast food restaurants and waiting tables and stuff. I wait tables right now and I bartend, and I know that's not what I want to do the rest of my life. I know that I gotta get through school to do what I want to do.

The motive to advance socially beyond one's parents and to do what one desires is a generic ideal for independence that is best represented in the story of "Freedom," who

characterizes her parents as highly successful and restrictive parents who instilled high standards for her career aspirations.

In their survey responses, Bridges, Freedom, Duty, and Ordinary all reported being fully supported by their parents, but Bridges' narrative makes no mention of a desire to contribute to the emotional or financial wellbeing of his family. Ordinary is concerned enough about her mother's separation issues to visit her on special occasions; Freedom maintains relationships with her nuclear and extended families; and Duty helps support the needs of her family. Bridges is grateful to his family teaching him the value of a dollar, and pursues his education in the hope of achieving a better socioeconomic status than his parents. The motive to advance socioeconomically may be common to all 13 students in the cohort. In seeking a nursing credential, Duty intends to far exceed the educational achievements of her parents. Likewise, Freedom aspires to become a medical doctor and economically surpass her parents, who have professional careers. Despite this similarity, the narratives of Duty, Freedom, and Ordinary express more family concerns than that of Bridges. A critical reader may notice that Duty, Freedom, and Ordinary are female. A narrative by a male who expressed more commitment to his family and cultural traditions might better demonstrate how ideals related to family, culture, and education can be integrated into multiple motives for engaging in educational activities with the aim of becoming a professional.

Student 5 proudly stated, "My Parents Taught Me Well." He planned to earn a medical credential in order to become a surgeon, as his parents would be proud to have a son in the medical profession. His aspiration to become a heart surgeon shifted to a desire to become a plastic surgeon in college primarily because he believed that

technology for plastic surgery was advancing more rapidly and that the demand for plastic surgery clinics was likely to increase around the world.  Owning a clinic, he believed, would be a great way to support his family in the future and live the lifestyle of his choice.  He is loyal to his family—"My parents trained me really well," he said. School is extremely important to him "because my parents emphasized it a lot when I was little."  In his view, the honor and respect he intends to bring to his family are epitomized by the medical credential he seeks.

Parents reflected that his family taught him the value of religion and that his cultural heritage had led him to idealize success in education and career.  He believes that together, each aspect of his life—family, religion, and culture—has positively contributed to his experience and will continue to provide him with motivation for engagement in education.  Parents has a high achievement plan and is pragmatic in a manner similar to that of Ordinary; he is similar to Duty in his commitment to family; and shares ambitious career aspirations related to medicine with Freedom.

The narrative of Bridges expressed motives that more closely resemble those of Freedom than those of a student who pursues the ideals of Parents.  Bridges reports higher levels of presence of purpose, future orientation, and life-goal efficacy than does Ordinary (and the average student in the survey sample).  The extra-ordinary meaning he derives from sports and spiritual activities (as reported in Table 4.2) may be a reflection of the experiences of an ordinary student enrolled in a school in rural America.  He is the only student in the sample who decided to pursue his career interests at a technical school a few hours away from home.

Bridges waits tables to pay the bills, just as he remembers his mother doing while he was growing up, and he finds this work fairly meaningful. Other students derive meaning from work activities, but Parents, who obtained a job during the summer at the airport where his father works, feels that work for pay can become a distraction from important educational activity. A critical reader might note that waiting tables and working at the airport do not involve the direct pursuit of career aspirations in engineering and medicine, and that Bridges aspires to advance beyond the socioeconomic status of his parents while Parents aspires to make his parents proud by achieving a prestigious socioeconomic status.

Despite cultural, geographic, social, and economic differences, Students 4 and 5 tell similar stories about the purpose of life and why engaging in education is worthwhile. Both students believe that education will bring them success by giving them the career opportunities that are available to applicants with professional credentials. Their ideals and plan are similar to the standard plan for college achievement held by Ordinary, though Bridges has additional interests in math and engineering while Parent's interests lie in science and technology. Compared to Bridges, who seeks to surpass his parents, and Ordinary, who described her mother's separation issues, Parents expresses much more loyalty to his family, whom he credits with instilling high academic, career, and political aspirations in him. All three students, however, believe that their families have been important in their lives, teaching them valuable lessons about education. The idea that a student's family in general influences his or her educational ideals and activities is likely to be considered common sense for the educator and concerned citizen. The

narratives of Bridges and Parents demonstrate to the educational researcher that students have inspiration beyond the standard college achievement plan of Ordinary.

*Experiences With Family, Friends, Religion, Politics, Culture, and Community*

Commitment and loyalty to family is the dominant theme expressed in the narrative by the student who stated: "My parents taught me well." His own loyalty became more apparent when he told stories about politics, friendship, and community service at his church. As evident in Table 4.2 from the previous chapter, the level of meaningful engagement in academic, family, and formal community service activities for Student 5, "Parents Taught Me Well," are closer to average when compared to his high level of spiritual concerns, and low meaning derived from extra-curricular activities, arts, sports, and working for pay. Parents stories about learning in life reveal that in his view, extracurricular activities have utility strictly in the context of college applications, while paid work detracts from his time to study and spend with his high achieving friends. Parents may in fact perform more formal community service than many of the other students, but he appears to consider it in terms of a commitment to church and fulfilling the ideals of his community. The reader who understands Ordinary's story must learn more about Parent's purposes for learning beyond academic achievement to appreciate why he is loyal to his family and traditions. When Parents faces challenges in school, conflicts at church, tensions at study group, or trouble finding the right girl, he continues to meet the expectations of his parents, and follow the traditions of his community.

The exceptionality of Student 5, "Parents," becomes more apparent through direct contrast with Student 7, who aspires for "Freedom to Do Positive Things" by earning medical credentials and becoming a doctor. Parents also seeks a career in the medical

profession because he believes that such a career will allow him to meet responsibilities he has to his family and community.  Parents reveals his uniqueness to the reader as he describes his lifelong political goal of representing the members of his community:

> When I look at the political party in Asia, it was started by liberal art people and they're not coherent.  They make arguments that are stupid, and I think it would be better if some scientific people should actually get involved in the political parties.  America have lots of diverse political parties, but then Asia is composed almost 90% all liberal arts people.  Scientific Asians are not getting enough prestige, as they should.  I kind of want to expand the frontiers of those careers and those people.

Parents often talks about his political ideals with his family, friends, and others in his social network, but on the survey, he reported deriving little meaning from his engagement in community service.  He reported performing community service more frequently than many students, but it is unclear why these activities do not offer him the same level of meaning as his educational activities.

Compared to other students, Parents talked much more about the interconnected skills and motivations one must have to support high aspirations in school and life.  He described the social networks that must be navigated to achieve success: "I think social connections are a lot more important than school because, you can go to a school, but if you have connections in the world though, and good social skills, you can live doing whatever you want."  His political ideals and habits of community service provide more specific direction for his engagement in educational activity than they do for other students in the cohort, but they are still aimed toward freedom to do whatever he wants.

His political ambitions, idealized by honor and loyalty, direct his search for meaning toward others in society, whereas the ideals of Freedom to Do Positive Things direct her efforts toward obtaining the skills necessary to "provide for myself" and be "making my own decisions."

Student 5, "My Parents Taught Me Well," also claimed that he has frequent opportunities to "help out at church" that include teaching church members how to speak English, translating documents, and preparing younger students in the congregation to take the SATs. During their senior year of high school, Parents, Ordinary, and other students recognize these kinds of activities as community service. Bridges stated that "Everything looks good on college applications," while Parent's activities are driven by a loyalty and pride not referenced by Bridges, Ordinary, or the other students in their accounts. Parents explained how he feels about academics:

From kindergarten, Asians learn divisions. I mean the moms are racing to make their kids better. It is so stupid, I think, but then they learn really fast. Most people sleep maybe three hours a day, like high schoolers, they don't sleep much. They just study, study, study. The atmosphere around me and people around me and how people are acting around me made me feel that I have to study to fit in.

He enrolls in college and aspires to earn a prestigious degree because he is doing what his parents and his cultural community expect him to do.

At times, it is not easy for Parents to focus on his studies, but he finds inspiration in his academic ideals. He believes that he will achieve success through school, studying independently, working with his study group, and honoring the efforts of his parents who instilled in him a desire for academic prestige, as well as the work ethic to obtain

educational credentials.  Parents searches for ways to cope with competing pressures to

do well academically, and finds comfort in his study group.  Parents searches for freedom

amid obligations to his family:

> My value for school forces me to stay far away from my family and friends.  I
>
> made more friends out there, but school also keeps me busy and helps me belong
>
> to a group that I can maybe find myself with.  It keeps me occupied, but my
>
> family doesn't like it when I go down there to school because they want to see me
>
> around.

Parents identifies with the traditions of his family and aspires to gain academic prestige.

He idealizes correcting political wrongs and making lots of money while coping with the

pressure to succeed and the academic stresses of school by spending time with like-

minded peers at his study group.

Whereas Ordinary stated that she wanted to enjoy her time in college while

completing her degree, Parents said that he genuinely wanted to learn to be successful so

that he could repay his parents for everything that they had given him.  He explained why

he regards attention to learning and grades as important:

> It's not grades that I focus on, but the learning experience.  But if you want to
>
> learn more, the grades matter.  I guess I try to learn to become successful.  I think
>
> it all sums up to being successful in society in the future.  Academic is just one
>
> stepping stone to become successful.

Parents idealizes education as the one and only means of achieving success.  Ordinary

seeks "balance" between academics and social life; and Bridges aspires to a degree in

engineering because it is "enough to be successful and to buy the things I want to buy in

life." Parents believes "Knowledge is really important in the world, and school gives you a reputation and good habits because I have to study a lot. It forces me to be diligent and detail-oriented, and that helps me a lot in life." Parent's narrative extends the meaning of school beyond Ordinary's standard college achievement plan to graduate in four years and Bridges' intention to obtain a career that will enable him to earn a higher salary than his parents. Parents stated that his work ethic is interconnected with his ideals and culture.

*Cultures of Support and Challenge*

The five high-achieving students introduced thus far—Ordinary, Duty, Freedom, Bridges, and Parent—all said that their families support their high aspirations for their education and other aspects of life. This aspect of their experience becomes clearer when they are compared to two students, "Hopeless Romantic" and "Respectful Father," who do not focus on academic achievement and assume very different roles within their families.

Student 6, who identifies herself as a "Hopeless Romantic," stated that she has experienced family problems including an "abusive father," "divorced parents," and a constant feeling of "not knowing" that came from family tension. More recently, "Romantic" has found loving support from her boyfriend, who is another college student from her church; however, she has said that perpetual family conflicts have continued to distract her from her academic pursuits. She is the first in her family to attend college and was pleased to move out of her father's house after graduating from high school. Before long, however, she found that her mother and stepfather had problems of their own.

In college, Romantic continues to look for stable relationships while searching for inspiration and motivation to achieve in school. She finds inspiration in her grandmother, boyfriend, church, and culture. She explained,

> If I get my act together, graduating school would probably introduce me to some Latinos or minorities that have higher positions that I never could think about… Just talking to people that could help you out or trying to influence you. It could do a lot for me in the future. It could straighten my act up right now because I know that I'm not doing very well. I could be doing better, but at this point I really don't care. If people influenced me and helped me out, then, yeah, it'll be a big part of my future.

She recognizes school as the path to higher positions, and understands that networking with mentors has utility, but what is more important to her is maintaining a good relationship with God, and having the opportunity to explore this relationship every week with her boyfriend and grandmother at church. She is uncertain as to why she struggles to the extent she does in school, especially in choosing a major, but she is reassured by the knowledge that love, especially God's love, provides direction in her life.

In high school, Romantic said, "I feel like I am really stupid because I don't get better grades than I know I'm capable of." She perceived her family issues as affecting her academic performance. She stated that others describe her as "funny," but that they were only seeing a mask. "I just don't want to show people that I'm a depressed and sad and scared person," she explained. She may feel down about life in general, but in college, she continues to enjoy her time at school. She offered the following explanation:

I've always been into school, probably because I wasn't at home, and I just really

didn't like going home. I just met people, and I love learning new things and

having an instructor teach me something new or something that will help me in

the future.

Romantic appreciates her educational experience, and believes that "teachers want you to

start growing up and being smart and having a future so you can be a good person and

have a good life and be happy." She is exploring her personal interests in languages,

sports, and arts while taking advantage of opportunities for college counseling, but she

feels that her father's mistreatment of her in the past has prevented her from fulfilling her

potential.

Romantic experiences a low level of support from her parents, and she spends

little meaningful time engaged in standardized measures of family activity; however, she

has strong goals to start a new family in the future that are connected to her religious

identity and ideals. Romantic attends church with the aim of finding a husband and

forming social connections to like-minded people, just as Ordinary has joined a sorority

and Parents attends a study group. Romantic strongly identifies with the values of her

religion, and her church experiences are connected with other positive aspects of her life,

including her relationships with her grandmother and boyfriend. Her religious identity

does not intersect with her engagement in school activities, and she is aware that her

family problems continue to interfere with her schoolwork. In college, Romantic

eventually finds a like-minded group of struggling Latino college students, whom she

meets on occasion at a resource center designed to help Latino students. In both high

school and college, she feels guilty for not following through with advice from the

counselor at the resource center because she knows it is well intentioned. The Latino resource center, along with her church, grandmother, and boyfriend, provide support to Romantic, but she is still scared that she will fail in life, just as she believes her parents did.

The narrative of "Hopeless Romantic" is similar to that of "My Parents Taught Me Well" in its focus on ethnic-group identification and pride, as well as in the belief that family is important for school success. However, the story of Romantic is about losing hope in childhood, yearning for a family to love in the future, and appreciating the presence of God in one's life. Parents speaks with more pride about his identification with the educational values of his family, heritage, church, and study group than does Hopeless Romantic, whose voice lacks confidence. Romantic admitted, "I'm just really scared that I might not just get into college for some reason." Parents said that his family moved to the United States "primarily for studying and going to Ivy League schools" and that he helps other students at his church prepare for the SAT.

In their strong family values, respect for education, and pride in cultural heritage, Romantic and Parents are similar to another student, "Make the World Better," whose family recently moved to the United States and who feels inspired by the learning philosophy that he has derived from his European heritage. In comparison with Parents and World, Romantic lacks an academic ideal and practical plan for learning and education that would enable her to manifest her inspiration to a greater extent outside her pursuit of love and religion. Parents, Romantic, and World all speak at least two languages, and each talked at length about the different ways in which life in an ethnic subculture is different from life in mainstream America. Their experiences of being

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different can be contrasted with the stories told by Bridges, Ordinary, and Respected Father, who may be aware of rural white, suburban white, and urban black categorical identities, but who do not use these characteristics to define themselves within their life stories. Ordinary is white in a diverse community, Bridges is white in a white community, and Father is black in a black community. Romantic, Parents, and World have ethnic identities, spiritual ideals, and families that they view as different from those of "ordinary" students in American schools, and this difference creates new meaning for their narratives of engagement in educational activity and life outside school.

*A Case of Supporting a Student Instead of Enrolling as a Student*

The 12 aspiring adolescent students in this study were selected for the sample to represent ordinary American 18-year-olds enrolled in ordinary public schools. A 13th student with a strong commitment to family and weak academic orientation helps to place these students in perspective. Student 13 said that he wants to be remembered as a "Respected Father." He graduated from high school and enrolled in a community college, but he stopped going to college before completing his first year. When I first interviewed "Respected Father," he was sitting on a couch at a community college—he was 18 years old, expecting a child, and cutting the one class he was supposed to attend that day. He explained that his story of disengaging from school started long before college—he had problems with peers in middle school that were not resolved until his senior year of high school. Respected Father credited a counselor with helping him "get out" and transfer to another school. He had to work extremely hard to make up for lost time, and he takes great pride in graduating from high school. He enrolled in a course on "medical terminology" at the community college, but said that he frequently cut class to

play basketball in the gym.  He did not enroll in a second year of college, and at the time of the second interview, he wished that he had appreciated the value of school "back in the day," referring both to junior high and college.

At age 20, the man who aspires to be a "Respected Father" lives in what he considers a "bad neighborhood" with his girlfriend's family, wishing he had continued on the college path toward a better job that he believes would have led to a way out of the neighborhood.  Instead of enrolling in college, he accepted a job as a security guard to support his "baby girl" and "girlfriend."  His girlfriend has a scholarship to a local private college, and the couple decided that investment in her education was the best route, as he could better serve the family by working for pay.  "Respected Father" loves his family and appreciates all the love he has received, especially that of his grandmother, who provided his life with religious and moral foundations.  The people he "really" considers to be his family have passed on or moved to another state, but he has found new love in his daughter and girlfriend.  Father has a strong purpose in his life—to support his family—but he has little inspiration to pursue academic achievement, though he expressed the recognition that "If you don't continue your education, you ain't gonna get anywhere in life."

The narrative told by "Respected Father" is about disengaging from school because of peer troubles in middle school, and then choosing not to enroll in college so that he could support his family.  This narrative contrasts with that of "Ordinary," who is committed to high aspirations for academic achievement, has a standard college plan to graduate in four years, and believes in the utility and necessity of educational credentials for future success.  At times, Father may view himself as a failure, but he found new

outlets for meaningful engagement in educational activity after his child was born. He now realizes the importance of education:

> Who gonna teach her emergency contacts and how to dial the phone? She needs someone there that's gonna show her how to do everything in the right way because you can't just ask anybody because they could tell you the wrong way. The first person you come to is your parents. So that's what I expect her to do. If she need something, she gotta come to me or her mom about it, and if we not there, she go to the grandparents.

Father's story places the other students' purposes of learning and engaging in educational activity within the context of adolescents in America who are not enrolled in college at age 18.

Determining precisely what Father could have done differently so that he would not be wishing he "finished college" and had a "better job" is beyond the scope of this study. Father told a story of being able to graduate from high school after transferring to a different high school during his senior year. He explained that he worked hard and focused on completing everything he needed to at his new school so that he could graduate. After he graduated, he enrolled in a few courses at a community college, but he cut most classes in order to play basketball. The aspirations of "Respected Father" are not connected to the standard college achievement plan that involves graduating in four years. Father, represented as Student 13 on Table 4.1, is not included in the sample in Table 4.2 because he did not take the survey. His story may be similar to that of another student not in the cohort who wanted to be remembered as an "Honorable Soldier,"

whose love of country and honor of family traditions led him into the military after high school instead of college.

Is Father's story one of success or failure?  This question cannot be answered here, but it is worth noting, as many high school graduates enter the workforce and the ranks of the military without enrolling in college.  Father is working toward an ideal of freedom, fulfilling a duty to family, doing something meaningful, and making the world a better place.  He also indicated that he has completely changed since high school. Father's story could be read as a narrative of success in which he graduated from high school and entered the workforce, or it could be regarded as a narrative of failure in which he dropped out of college.  Father expressed that he wished for things to get better, and he offered the following advice to fellow students:

> Watch the people you meet because when I got into college, I met a little bit too many people, and I started playing basketball more and more, and I just stopped going to class.  That's where I'm really upset with myself.  And I really regret that I started just going to play basketball instead of going to class because I could've did basketball on the side, after I got out of class, and just put the class stuff first. People used to ask me, "Why don't you come to class?"  I be like, "Man, I'll be in gym playing basketball."

Father is the only 18-year-old in the cohort who wished that he had engaged more in his education. He realizes that he did not engage when the opportunity presented itself, and he now regrets no longer having the chance to learn in school.  The narratives of Respected Father and Hopeless Romantic may remind the critical reader of social and historical influences on diverse American students engaging in educational activity.

*Children Grateful for Family, Culture, and Life*

Many of the students said that they are grateful for the lessons their families taught them and hope to instill similar cultural values in their children. Family members can inspire and challenge student success in interconnected ways that go beyond Ordinary's college experience of learning to balance the desire to enjoy her time with the activities necessary to graduate in four years. For Parents, the pride expressed in the statement "My Parents Taught Me Well," the value assigned to scientific prestige, and the loyalty to the politics of his homeland are much different from the experiences of Ordinary. The sociopolitical challenges faced by struggling Latino and African American students seeking to "get out of the neighborhood" may be different from Ordinary's narrative, but they are relatively common in U.S. communities with lower than average household incomes. The intent of this study is to describe many student experiences so that they may become part an overall understanding of the ordinary student enrolled in the ordinary school. The narratives of Parents and Romantic contain accounts of inspiration and struggle that go beyond Ordinary, while the story of Respected Father is not an ordinary narrative about student engagement because when he does not enroll in school. His story becomes one about providing financial and personal support to another student and their daughter.

The characters of Parents and Duty are very clear in their dedication to achievement, which they know will make their parents, grandparents, and families in general proud; however, among the cohort, their responsibility and loyalty to family are exceptions rather than the norm. Ordinary knows her mother has a separation issue; Bridges and Father want to do better than their families; Adrenaline and Restless feel

supported by their families; and Romantic dreams of starting a new family.  Within each

student's story there is a subtle decline of authority granted to and advice accepted from

family.  At this point, the reader should be familiar with narratives concerning the

importance of ethnic heritage—which is often integrated with religious faith, gender-role

expectations, and responsibility to family and society—and how these experiences and

ideals create meaning for engagement in educational activity.  The narrative of Ordinary,

and her plan to graduate in four years while enjoying her time, begins to lack the spirit,

romance, respect, and honor required to accomplish the greater purposes passed down

through cultures, families, and generations in other narratives.

CHAPTER 6: BEYOND ACHIEVEMENT IN EDUCATION—MORAL IDEALS AND

LOVE FOR LEARNING AS PURPOSES FOR LEARNING

A complete explanation of why students engage in educational activity might include the socio-historical context for students' ideals and activities in education. It might also explain why American society values social advancement, professional competence, civic engagement, and the assurance of high standards of quality in education. An alternate study could investigate the situational variables that an experiment or educator could manipulate to achieve optimal results. This chapter uses narrative analyses to describe the ideals and activities of ordinary high school seniors going to college; it also demonstrates how for some students, moral ideals guide their life as well as their engagement in school activities.

The purpose of this study was to situate the educational ideals and engagements of individual students within the ideals and engagements of their peers in order to describe mixed-motives for engagements in life, persistence in educational activity, and focus on students' purposes for learning. In Chapter 4, Table 4.1 provides a collection of statements made by students during clinical interviews including ultimate and current concerns for engaging in educational activity. Table 4.2 further removes each individual's statement of identity from a situational context by displaying standardized levels of meaningful engagement in various activities across life. Indicators included self-reports of frequency and meaningfulness of engagement in education (including academic, arts, and sports) and the rest of life (religious, family, community, job training, and work). The information provided in the tables describes the reasons students give for engaging in educational activity—primarily the pursuit of a college education—and the

domains of life where each student finds meaningful engagement.  In this chapter, I argue that students' purposes for learning and framework to invest in activity help to direct and strategize engagement in life-long learning.

<center>*Reframing Purpose for Learning*</center>

Narrative analyses of family, faith, friends, culture, and community engagements presented in the previous chapter complicated an understanding of engagement in educational activity; and the following analyses simplify the concept of engagement by focusing on learning, and the enhanced meaning some students experience when engaging in purposeful educational activities.  Student 2, Duty, reported high levels of meaningful engagement in activities across the domains of her life, including education; and she feels a high sense of purpose in her life.  Adrenaline Junkie reported much lower levels of engaging in academic, religious, and community activities compared to sample averages, and the lowest sense of overall purpose in his life for the cohort of 12.  The contrast between Duty and Adrenaline Junkie was similar to the contrast between Freedom and Restless, though to a lesser degree.  Freedom's and Restless's concerns for engaging in educational activity more closely resembled those of Ordinary, but every student tried to take a step toward accomplishing the standard college achievement plan.

Ordinary expressed a clear achievement outcome to "graduate in four years and enjoy my time."  Freedom integrated educational activity into her ideal of independence—within society, from family, and to engage in activity—in addition to the standard goal of graduating in four years.  Freedom aspires to "become an OB-GYN," plans on graduate school, and will be satisfied with her learning in life by  "knowing that I can provide for myself."  Duty said she struggles to maintain commitments to family,

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work, and education—and worries she will not become a nurse. Hopeless Romantic stated she feels guilty for not following the advice given to her by respected authority figures, as well as hindered by her parents' mistakes and mistreatment; however, she loves learning and finds support for it from her boyfriend and grandmother. Respected Father continued to dream about playing professional basketball, but did not enroll in college for a second year so that he could better support his daughter and girlfriend. Ordinary, Freedom, Parents, Building Bridges, Duty, and other students engage in educational activity as people on the path to becoming what they dream about in life.

The moral commitment to life and learning within the stories of Freedom and Duty was different from that of Adrenaline Junkie, who wants to become a fireman and knows he enjoys helping people, but does not engage in community service, first aid classes, other avenues toward helping people, or any other pre-requisites to the profession of firefighting. In college, his injury delays his training to become a firefighter and left his educational engagements in limbo. He stated that he enrolled in college for a second year primarily because "I'm staying on the parents' health insurance," but said he feels less pressure from his parents to succeed "now, since I actually like what I'm learning." Although the signs of heart and purpose in his career aspirations are admirable, thus far he has not been able to engage in educational activity in order to progress toward professional credentials, fight fires, and help people.

In contrast, Restless has a plan to succeed, but appears to lack heart, inspiration, and purpose to learn. He stated, "School is all about the future." He chose a major in fashion merchandizing, recognizing that it is not a "major thing in the world because it is more like a want than something that you need or something that's gonna help people."

He is uncertain of why he engages in educational activity and life's activities in general, but knows he "needs to do something" to keep busy. So, he persists along the standard college achievement plan. Whereas Adrenaline Junkie and Restless have not yet integrated their potential contributions and services to the world with their ideals for educational activity—beyond ideals for self-development and opportunities to advance their careers—Duty and Freedom learn and persist in educational activity with purpose.

Some students were able to identify subtle moral commitments motivating career aspirations. Such commitments often were integrated with engagements in family and religious activities; some of the social commitments revealed budding awareness of the moral self's potential in the world. The student who dreamed that one day he would be "building bridges that everyone will drive across" recognized the moral significance of a career in engineering beyond the utility value of "if I get good grades, I get money." Building Bridges stated that he seeks social advancement to earn a better living than his mother did, and as he currently does waiting tables. Parents aspires also seeks social advancement, but in a medical career; he also frequently helps people at his church and engages fully in education to make his parents "proud." Both Building Bridges and Parents considered others in their respective career and family aspirations and integrated them into budding moral commitments in life.

The consideration of the consequence to others was subtle for Building Bridges, who used the second person to refer to the interviewer as one of the drivers who would drive across his bridge in the future. Similarly, Parents said he wants to make his parents and community proud, but only knows the path to do so through prestigious credentials and careers. Bridges, Parents, Duty, and Freedom (and others) have standard college

achievement plans inspired by moral purposes in life.  The inspiration and constraints for their college achievement plans formed a unique intermixing of cultural, family, religious, and other values.  Each student has idiographic meaning for learning in life. For students with a moral purpose, learning in life has meaning beyond that of ordinary students who want to graduate in four years and enjoy their time.

Having a moral inspiration to learn may seem far fetched for American teenagers who have the ordinary, practical concern of graduating in four years; however, some of the students' moral ideals and habits of activity became more apparent through the examination of how students frame engagements in their communities.  Duty said she feels responsible for supporting her family and community, whereas Freedom said she aspires to self-reliance and to be independent of her family and community.  World (Student 10 on Table 4.1) most clearly stated the importance of responsibility to the global community by saying he wanted to "make the world a better place."  He reflected on his commitment to a moral life by saying he "will use school for my future … to make myself smarter, a better person and community member."  He referred to the standard college achievement plan for his future along with general ideals for intelligence and self-development, but the focus of his attention was considering how he contributes purposefully to his educational community every day by interacting with his peers and others at school and in the world.

Compared to other students, World reflected extensively on how his participation in class, study group, conversations at the café, and experiences around the world helped others learn.  He said, "I feel like I'm teaching my friends and family new things every day. … I learn from them every day as well. … I'm growing as a person every day."

Education is a moral act for World, whose engagements in activity have consequences for others because he teaches while he learns. He tries to commit moral acts every day. His approach to life and learning is using education as a venue to make the world a better place. World is pursuing a career in business marketing, this is similar to Ordinary. Although other students, such as Completely Changed, loved learning and recognized opportunities to learn in everyday life, World presented a moral aspect to learning when he explained how he educated people through his everyday interactions in high school, college, and the community.

*Reflection as a Life Strategy for Engaging in Purposeful Activity*

Students who are achievement oriented in their academic pursuits demonstrated strategies for learning throughout life and reflective commitments to educational ideals that helped them define their role within educational activity. Ordinary said she has learned to balance academic and social life, and Parents said he researches science on the Internet and teaches SAT prep at church. Duty searches for ways to pay the bills and to continue her education while Respected Father supports his daughter and girlfriend's achievement in education. Freedom demonstrates resilience as she maintains her aspiration to attend medical school and find a school that best fits her needs. She was not accepted to her first choice for college, which disappointed her mother, but Freedom is happy to be independent from her family and continues to pursue her career aspirations at a liberal arts college close to her grandmother. Freedom is reflectively committed to college and career aspirations within further commitments to moral and family life, and she adjusts her original plans to engage in a college community she loves. Each student

reflected on life, and made a practical decision about engaging in activity to achieve educational aspirations.

In his senior year of high school, Restless expressed that he was not as certain of his career path or future college plans as Freedom and Ordinary were. He said he was "kinda going with where I get accepted" and had not thought much about college, though he knew that he "couldn't be a person who sits around and does nothing all day." During his first year of college, Restless reflected on his skills and interests in life and determined his strengths are in his ability to shop because he is good at picking out clothes for family and friends. He decided to pursue a career and to declare a college major in fashion merchandizing. After his first year of college, his reflective purpose for attending college to achieve the standard college plan continues to be disconnected from any moral commitments. He stated his purpose to learn to fashion merchandizing is no "major thing in the world because it is more like a want than something that you need or something that's gonna help people." His declaration of a major anchors his educational activity toward achieving a degree that creates meaning for his life.

After graduating high school, Restless learned something about his character in life, and he identified a college major. However, this decision was not connected to a moral commitment in life. Ordinary also identified a college major, and said she aspires to a specific career in business marketing because she is interested in the "different techniques people use to manipulate the public." She considered the consequences to others of creating advertisements without connecting them to acts of moral good in the world. But she stated she believes an educational credential in business marketing is the most useful method to achieve her practical ends in life.

The absence of moral commitments that intersect with Ordinary's educational concerns became apparent when her story was contrasted with Meaningful's, who said, "I can make the world a better place once I've got an education." Both Meaningful and Ordinary had plans that were evident in their stories. However, Meaningful stated she aims her education and life toward making the world a better place. Therefore, Meaningful's purpose could be considered a "moral achievement plan for education" to enhance the standard college achievement plan articulated by Ordinary. Both Meaningful and Ordinary have direction in their life, and use reflection to evaluate their efforts in educational activity—they express educational plans with different end views.

Meaningful's understanding for how education prepares her to be a moral person is similar to World's. The difference is that Meaningful reflectively aspires to do something that contributes to the world, whereas World actively engages in teaching and learning with other students at his school and purposefully interacts with diverse cultures in the world. Meaningful is less engaged than World:

I can make the world a better place once I've got an education. I want to say that's one of the big reasons I go. I mean, if I had plans and I got everything together, then I probably would end up going to law school or something. It would matter to everybody in my life, and then if I did that, then I'd try to make the city a better place and maybe the whole entire world.

Meaningful has a vague, opaque, unclear moral ideal somewhat similar to Freedom's. Freedom expresses ideals that may be more typical of a traditional American who values achievement outcomes to "provide for myself" and "make my own decisions." On the other hand, students who dream of making the world a better place more closely resemble

the American progressive ideals for society. Freedom's story directly focused on independence, whereas Meaningful stated, "It could go a lot of different ways" and that she hopes to achieve in college because "if you don't get a good education these days, there's not much you can do" (see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4). Therefore, Meaningful's narrative lacked the plan and method for achievement that Ordinary's had, as well as the confidence to learn that Freedom's exhibited, and the engagement in educational activity of World's. Meaningful represented motivation to engage in educational activity directed by moral concerns with little orientation toward academic achievement.

Many of the students expressed strategies they believe will help them succeed in school, but only some stated they have educational concerns that intersect with strong moral commitments in life. Ordinary stated she "plans" for school and learns to "balance" social and academic commitments in life by making "mistakes." In his story, Be the Boss (Student 11) expressed having trouble engaging in educational activity, but said he knows a strategy to succeed: "Remind yourself it will soon pass. It's just right now and do the best you can, but it's only for right now. It's like you know you don't wanna go somewhere a certain day, and the next thing you know the day is over." This reflective strategy lacks concern for learning, morality, and standards for achievement, but nevertheless is a method Be the Boss considers effective for engaging in educational activity.

Building Bridges stated that he chose a career in engineering because he will make more money than his mom did working at a restaurant. But, he stated, he finds that in order to live the style he pleases in college, he needs to work in a restaurant as his mom did. Thus, Building Bridges, Ordinary, and Be the Boss employ engagement

strategies in life to help achieve their dreams.  However, only Building Bridges' story

expressed concern about how he is learning to contribute to the world.  Reflection on

moral ideals, strategies to pursue them, and habits of engagement are most subtle in the

stories told by Building Bridges and Parents, which integrate moral and educational

ideals into purposes to learn.

The story of Restless, that is inspired by ideals for helping friends live fashionable

lifestyles, was contrasted with the stories of Meaningful and World, who stated they

contribute worthwhile services to their educational communities in high school and

college.  World teaches his fellow classmates, and Meaningful seeks purposeful

engagement with more uncertainty in life. In contrast to Restless, Ordinary, and Be the

Boss, and Adrenaline—Freedom feels responsible to reduce her burden to society, and

Duty is conflicted between social commitments.  World assumes some responsibility for

teaching his classmates, and thinks he does it—while Meaningful only reflects about how

she could possibly engage in responsibly in life.

Daily, purposeful community activities in local communities were described in

many of the students' stories about engaging in purposeful educational activity.  A

strategy Duty and Freedom use to engage in life is to participate extensively in

extracurricular activities in high school, and then to continue to find ways to contribute to

their communities in college.  Parents serves the needs of members at his church by

teaching SAT prep and English, but finds engaging in his study group and dreaming

about the money he will make as a surgeon much more satisfying experiences.  World

teaches and learns about culture through everyday interactions on and off campus.

Meaningful continues to dream about becoming a doctor, and opening a free clinic with her cousins while she pursued an interest in politics with an undeclared, prelaw major.

It might seem that these students still have an adolescent understandings of life, but their ability to reflect on the impact their engagements will have on others in the community belies that assumption. Educators might call these engagements community service, whereas individual students would consider them projects for church and school, and part of their family and cultural obligations. These reflections on democratic ideals and engagements in service have motivational potential to inspire purposeful learning for life beyond obtaining a school credential.

*Learning as an Ideal for Advancement, Lifestyle, and Contribution*

How does student engagement in educational activity and purposes to learn change after high school graduation? Traveling the world while seeking diverse perspectives from friends, classmates, and coursework on campus reignited an interest in learning for World. Meaningful, Restless, and Ordinary have honed their career aspirations and identified college majors in prelaw, apparel merchandizing, and marketing. Adrenaline Junkie was injured on his motocross bike and transferred to a technical college to pursue his firefighting aspirations while remaining on his family's health insurance. Freedom was not accepted to her first-choice college or her mother's ideal college, but finds purposeful engagement on her current campus, which is further from her parents and closer to her grandmother. Both Freedom and Adrenaline Junkie maintain career aspirations while changing educational paths to attain them. Such a change is different than the one made by Be the Boss, who switched career aspirations

and college majors from medicine to business as he continued to progress along a standard college achievement plan.

In high school, Be the Boss aimed closer to performing at a B average than Ordinary, who has high aspirations for achievement in education and said she would consider graduate school if the job market is competitive. Be the Boss also is different than Ordinary because he talked about specific career aspirations and college majors without aspiring to a four-year degree, intending to support a future family, and creating a consistent plan to achieve his goals. Over 2 years, his aspirations and major changed from sports medicine to business management with a minor in culinary arts. He planned to enroll in a community college, but instead enrolled in a state college within a faster commute from his parent's house. In both high school and college, Be the Boss had no experience in the fields of medicine, business, and the culinary arts, but he stated that owning a restaurant is a better fit with his entrepreneurial attitude than the opportunities, demands, and likelihood of having future experiences in sports medicine during a big game.

Whereas Be the Boss values the utility of education to advance him to opportunities for a better job in general, World engages in a lifestyle of learning through diverse culture experiences. World reflects upon the consequences of his participation in educational activity as he teaches and learns from other students in class. Be the Boss and Ordinary are inspired by the standard college achievement plan and desire better material lifestyles, rather than being sparked by cultural and ethical interests, or engaging in a lifestyle of learning in the world. Additional differences could be attributed to social class and cultural practices evident in the students' stories. The stories of Be the Boss,

Hopeless Romantic, Building Bridges, and Respected Father were about social advancement beyond the level achieved by their parents. In contrast, World, Freedom, Parents, and even Ordinary recognized the success of their families as they followed the paths of their parents to obtain credentials. Be the Boss is trying to do better than his parents while World is honored to follow the path his parents helped him identify.

The stories of Be the Boss and Ordinary lacked a moral understanding how being the boss and being successful in business would allow them to contribute to the world in their new capacities as leaders. It might seem unexpected that an ordinary teenager would articulate full moral justifications for engagement, but many of the 12 aspiring teens in this study clearly identified moral concerns directly connected with engagement in educational activity. Hopeless Romantic, Respected Father, and Duty face great struggles in life, but have reflective commitments to moral ideals for living and learning. Hopeless Romantic is still searching for better ideals to guide her life. She may find it to be romance, but there is no indication her path will be similar to World's daily cultural interactions of learning, or Ordinary's and Be the Boss's practical route to obtain a higher paying job.

Be the Boss has ambitions for authority, and readily accepts advice from people whom he considers authority figures—mostly family members. He is motivated to engage in educational activity without consideration of his contribution to the world beyond his own social advancement. Freedom is also inspired to have authority in her life, but has higher aspirations in college and for her career than Be the Boss. She is more similar to Duty in her commitment to family and community despite her seeking

independence.  Although there may be gender differences, both Be the Boss and Freedom are inspired by the opportunity to have autonomous authority to make decisions in life.

Be the Boss is further inspired by money, and he explained how it creates meaning for his educational activity: "My mom and family will give me stuff or do something special for me if I'm able to do my grades right."  He is unclear if he thinks his family experiences and career aspirations influence his engagement in education or if his experiences in education influence his career aspirations.  Financial incentives create additional utility for effectively engaging in educational activity, which becomes clear when comparing the story of Be the Boss to Ordinary's and Freedom's.  Be the Boss said, "In order to get a good job, you have to be well educated and smart," but it was not clear how his engagements in educational activity are connected to his aspirations for smart, productive work in the real world.

Ordinary is obsessive about planning, and plans to make certain decisions about life after graduation. In contrast, Be the Boss lacks any knowledge of methods to pursue his dreams that may diverge from Ordinary's standard college achievement plan.  If the story of Ordinary represented the ideal of A students who want to graduate in four years, Be the Boss's more closely resembled the experiences of students with B averages in U.S. schools – both students value engagements in educational activity.  Be the Boss is inspired by the freedom he idealizes within educational opportunity, and his mother taught him he "could go anywhere if you have education, pretty much."  Ordinary's mother taught her a similar lesson.

The students exhibited differences based on gender, social class, parents' occupation, and other factors.  However, the clear difference between Be the Boss and

Ordinary centered on the aim of their college aspirations. Be the Boss defined success as getting into a "2-year college" and said he plans to start a business; Ordinary wants to "graduate in four years and enjoy [her] time" (see Table 4.1). The narratives of Ordinary and Be the Boss were about utility values for education with specific standards for achievement of educational credentials. Ordinary and Be the Boss do not intend to engage in a lifestyle of learning, as expressed in the ideals and narratives of World and Completely Changed.

Except for Respected Father's story, all the students in the cohort followed the standard college achievement plan after graduation, which entails enrolling in college intending to earn a credential in four years. Hopeless Romantic moved from her father's home to her mother's and found different problems. She learned that school is a better environment than home with the family problems it presents. Restless declared a major without awareness of deeper purposes for learning and life. Adrenaline Junkie entered college and started to "bode the life," but an injury brought new meaning to "stay in school [in order to] stay on the parents' health insurance." Adrenaline Junkie transferred to a school closer to home in direct pursuit of his career aspiration, and at a safer distance to the doctor.

Only Respected Father, the nonstudent, regretted his lack of engagement and said, "Wish I finished college because now you see the true meaning of it. My job is good, but I want better." He observed the significance of his situation with little experiential knowledge about being a father or security guard. He has purposes for learning that are out of the ordinary for educational achievement because he is not following the standard college achievement plan. He learns by talking to mentors and peers on the ride to work,

listening to people express their opinions on the radio, and interacting with members of

his community when he takes his daughter to the park. Similarly, Be the Boss observed

the significance of his situation, though he lacks experiential knowledge of his aspirations

in medicine and business. He talks to other struggling students and mentors with college

credentials, and during tough times he reminds himself "it will soon pass" (see Table

4.1). Although Adrenaline Junkie, Restless, and Be the Boss lack a certain degree of

self-awareness, they have persisted into their second year of college in the pursuit of

social advancement, unlike Respected Father who spends his time contributing to his

family, and keeps his community safe in his job as a security guard.

*A Purpose to Change Completely*

Of the 12 college students, only Completely Changed said his outlook on life

changed significantly in the year after high school graduation. Respected Father's life

changed significantly when his girlfriend had a baby, they moved in with her family, and

he stopped being an ordinary college student so that he could support his new family.

Before high school graduation, Completely Changed had little going on in life, said he

wanted to "be there for people," and looked forward to new freedoms the college lifestyle

would offer. Two years later, he reflected on his materialistic ambitions in life, and

admitted he was a "dick" to other people in high school. He said a college professor

opened his mind to the impact humans have on the world, so he changed his ways to

pursue a life of learning.

Although he claimed he changed completely, his budding moral ideals were

evident in high school in his reasons for working for pay: "I want enough money to be

able to start something that's going to help people in the end." He continued:

This high school has been good to me. Maybe I'll do something that I thought

about, this forum thing, like a trip to somewhere. I actually saw it on a TV show.

The school takes students to Darfur and they saw everything that's going on. They

were able to come back with a whole lot more knowledge and spread it with the

students and the whole community. They got problems out there.

His statements reflected his uncertainty of purpose in life. He primarily cited television

as his source of authority on what one could do with life. His strategy to seek more

purposeful engagement was to wait: "I'm really just hoping one morning I'll wake up and

I'll just have to see what direction to go as the time gets closer."

Today, his interest in learning for life is ignited in his role as an assistant manager

at a restaurant near a hotel with international clientele. He loves working at the restaurant

because every day he learns something from the diverse people that he meets and has

opportunities to teach his associates about the practices of business.

I just enjoy the teaching aspect of it because in the café we have a saying that

you're always learning, just be a constant leaner. Every day, I literally learn 10

different things and to be able to see if I could simultaneously travel and teach my

skills about the café to potential employees, café managers, general managers just

to help in that way. . . .

I'm able to learn everything about running a business and eventually maybe a

corporation, a record company, or whatever I want to do. It's given me really

important skills, not really common knowledge, but a lot of knowledge that a lot

of people won't really get this early on. A lot of people say like, "Oh yeah, your

money smarts are incredible," and I'm like, I can thank my family for that because they taught me to save it.

Moreover, his moral purposes in life have become integrated into what he is learning at work.

With my status in the company I should be able to help out less fortunate people. If I ever get my own franchises, I could select a donation, and every dollar that gets put in there, my franchise matches. I'll do the same. That's a choice to match it. But just to have the community donation boxes at my own organization is important.

Completely Changed's and World's narratives were the only ones that extensively reflected on the moral aspects of engaging in learning rather than on the future utility of doing the work necessary to complete the requirements of an educational credential. Completely Changed stated that at work he is "constantly learning different ways to help people" and that he enrolled in a community college "not for the degree right off the bat," but because he really "likes learning." After high school graduation, Completely Changed learned to engage in a lifestyle of learning. He woke up one day, saw the direction to go, and engaged in a moral life of learning that he "never had before."

*Summary of Findings*

This chapter described the reflective strategies students use to engage in lifestyles of learning that are guided by moral purpose, and featured four student narratives. Do Something Meaningful expresses a moral ideal for life with uncertainty about engaging in educational activities and life in general. Be the Boss is an ideal for authority with little recognition of the moral significance of such a position, and little awareness of learning

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within educational activity.  Make the World a Better Place is a narrative about becoming a better citizen, and engaging in educational activity with responsibility to help others learn and challenge them to be more intelligent.  Completely Changed is one student's reflection on finding moral purpose in life, making the most by learning from happenstance, learning beyond doing what is necessary to attain a credential, and engaging in activity with the purposes to teach while learning.  Each student engages in educational activity with different purposes for learning in life, and this chapter demonstrated that some students have moral purpose in life with meaning beyond Ordinary's narrative to obtain a credential in four years and advance to a better career.

CHAPTER 7: RESULTS OF SURVEY ANALYSES

The previous chapters provide narrative analyses of meaningful engagement in educational activity within individual narratives of young people's purposes for engaging in general activities across life.  In some narratives, students are motivated by emotional experiences, such as high adrenaline and restlessness, while other narratives are about students negotiating their responsibility toward others, their duties in life, and their desire to make the world a better place.  The narratives help to explain why a group of ordinary students aspire to advance socially beyond their parents, become working professionals, be the boss, and follow the standard college achievement plan to economic success.  In the narratives, various roles for formal schooling, family, work, and other institutions are introduced as motives of individual students who persist in educational pursuits to make their families proud, live independently away from family members, get away from family problems, and do what they think their parent's want.  In Respected Father's narrative, he decides not to enroll in college in order get a job to support his family.  This narrative raises questions about equal opportunity in education, and departs from ordinary narratives of high school graduates who persist into a second year of college.

Every narrative, including that of the student who did not continue college, explains student purposes for formal educational activity to obtain educational credentials. This belief that educational credentials are a means to advance to better careers grounds the pursuit of formal educational activity into a formal future role in society.  In *The Path to Purpose,* Damon (2008) described how exemplary youth learn to test their own limits, find support from family, inspiration from mentors, seek communities of like-minded peers, and advance purposes in their lives—these exemplary

purposes include civic, health, socio-political, and artistic causes. What inspires ordinary youth to advance their purposes and engage in educational activity? The narrative of Ordinary introduced in Chapter 4 expresses a standard college education plan to graduate in four years and qualify for a better job—with the general belief that this is the path to a better life. Ordinary is narrative about life that represents a common ideal for a student enrolled in schools in the United States; it is an American ideal associated with the university, fraternizing with friends, majoring in business marketing, and aspiring to a high paying career.

In this chapter, the ideals of ordinary students engaging in formal educational activity—with career aspirations, college majors, economic goals, and other values—are quantified and standardized with survey measures. Survey analyses in this chapter describe activities and goals that have the strongest relationships with meaningful engagement in educational activity. The survey analyses quantify a reader's understanding of relationships among meaningful engagement in educational activity, life goals, other engagements in life, and purposes in life—these were explained in previous chapters through narrative analyses. The student narratives, along with survey analyses presented in this chapter, provide a foundation of common sense, empirical knowledge to hypothesize a developmental model for meaningful engagement in educational activity. The narrative and survey analyses do not test causal mechanisms within developmental models or motivational theory. Instead, the analyses, as complementary descriptions of ordinary students enrolled in public schools in the United States, are designed to inform further research and pedagogy to increase purposeful engagement in educational activities and determine any casual mechanisms.

The following five hypotheses of a developmental model for meaningful engagement in educational activity were examined in this chapter:

H1: Meaningful engagement in community service activities and civic-oriented life goals will have a strong, positive relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activity during adolescence.

H2: Meaningful engagement in family activities and life goals related to a future family will also have a strong relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activity, even after other variables have been included in a model; however, the strength of this relationship will decline during adolescence.

H3: Meaningful engagement in religious activities will have a positive relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activity during adolescence while placing high value on religious life goals will have a mixed relationship with formal education.

H4: Economic life goals will have a stronger relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activities during late adolescence than earlier in adolescence, and work for pay will have a mixed relationship with educational activity in late adolescence.

H5: In comparison with other meaningful engagements and life goals—including those related to family, religion, and economics—civic-oriented engagements and goals are most likely to have a strong, positive, stable relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activity throughout adolescence.

The five hypotheses form an outline of a common-sense model of adolescent development as one explanation of why American students engage in meaningful

educational activity.  Of course, there are many other ways to explain motivation to engage in learning.  The hypotheses could be illuminated with narratives concerning the purposes of learning, but this chapter uses survey analyses to identify goals and activities that are related to higher ratings for meaningful engagement in educational activity.

*A Credential From College as a Personal Project*

Brian Little (1983; 2008) proposed a personal project analysis to study how people invest time and energy in working toward personal goals that provide meaning for activity, and promote general wellbeing in life.  A *personal project* is a set of activities, ranging from daily routines and household chores to active engagement with the community that reflects a commitment to social justice. A project to learn might focus on self-development, finding satisfaction in life, becoming qualified for a new job, or simply having fun.  An individual might engage in a project begrudgingly or with zealous intensity.  The previous narrative analysis could be reread as a personal project analysis in which the common method of attaining aspirations for educational credentials is the standard college achievement plan.  This survey analysis will use career aspirations, college majors, and previous experiences in educational activity to predict meaningful engagement in educational activity.

Are having career aspirations, identifying a college major, and previously engaging in meaningful activity in education related to higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity?  Survey analyses reveal a slight relationship between career aspirations and meaningful engagement in educational activity across all four age cohorts (Cohen's D .33 for entire sample).  Identifying a college major is only a significant predictor of higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity

for high school seniors (.24).  This slight, positive relationship between career aspirations and meaningful activity in education—and a boost of meaning from a college major during the senior year of high school—could serve as proxy for the relation of the standard college achievement plan with meaningful engagement in educational activity.

A coarse measure of pair-wise correlation of ratings for meaningful engagement in educational activity at Time 1 and Time 2 is .52 for all adolescents in the study, suggesting both change and stability in ratings for meaningfulness and frequency of engagement over a 2-year period during adolescence.  As may be expected in a regression model, students' previous ratings for meaningful activity in education are much better predictors of meaningful activity 2 years later while career aspirations and college majors become insignificant predictors.

It is understandable that a high school senior would be more likely to focus on concerns about college admissions compared to adolescents of other ages, so the inspiration to adopt the standard plan might be proximally inspired for seniors who identify a college major.  The narrative analyses are of high school senior entering college; thus, these narratives may have more inspiration from identifying college majors compared to motivations at other times during adolescence.  The narrative about building bridges involves the choice of a major in engineering, and the narratives about being restless and wanting to be the boss help the reader understand why students might change college majors and career aspirations.  Many of the narratives concern how students learned to meet new academic demands in college; further studies could compare differences between the kinds of projects students find engaging during high school and college.  The simple survey analysis of meaningful engagement in educational activity as

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a personal project suggests that career aspirations and previous levels of meaningful engagement may be helpful predictors of higher levels of meaningful engagement in formal educational activity during adolescence—this was also evident in the narratives.

*Extending Personal Goals and Activities Across Life*

Chapter 4 introduces the story of a student who calls herself "Ordinary." The reader learns why Ordinary stated that the standard college achievement plan creates meaning for her engagement in educational activity, as well as how her plans provide motivation for her life in general. Ordinary explained that she joined a sorority to enjoy time away from academics and looking for a spouse; the sorority allows Ordinary to serve the student body by orienting freshmen to life in college. Sorority social activities serve to balance the pressure she experiences as a result of the high academic demands of school. Ordinary feels secure in the knowledge that she is following a standard college achievement plan that involves graduating in four years because it provides her with more opportunities to enjoy her time in college.

Table 4.2 in Chapter 4 displays quantified indices for meaningful engagement in activities of life to complement the narratives of Ordinary and other students. In comparing the meaningful engagements of Ordinary and her life story with those of other participants, the reader may gain the impression that Ordinary lacks excitement in learning, artistic and spiritual flair, passion for work, civic commitments, and any goals beyond the standard college achievement plan to engage in educational activity and obtain educational credentials. Individuals in other narratives describe life goals and engagements outside school that appear to inspire engagement in educational activity.

The next analysis examines the relationship of family, career, civic, and religious goals and activities across life in general.

Which goals create meaning for activities in life? As seen in Table 7.1, spiritual goals are highly correlated with meaningful engagement in spiritual activities (.85), and artistic goals are highly correlated with art activity (.60). Civic-oriented life goals, including serving the needs of others, have a strong relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activities (.48) and service activities (.55), such as volunteering with children and the elderly. The relationship of civic-oriented life goals and educational activity (.48) is evident when displayed next to correlations with other life goals, including the relationship of artistic (.25), family (.26), and spiritual (.25) goals to educational activity. Table 7.1 indicates how life goals (following Robins & Roberts, 2000), including artistic, civic, economic, family, fun, and religious goals, are correlated with meaningful engagement in education, arts, sports, family, spiritual, service, work, and job training activities (see Chapter 3 for details concerning the measures).

--INSERT TABLE 7.1 HERE --

*Adolescent Development and the Values of American Culture*

Through narrative analyses, the reader is afforded the opportunity to see through the eyes, aspirations, and experiences of students who graduate from high school and enroll in college. The stories told by the cohort of students represent variations of the narratives of ordinary students who graduate from American public high schools, enroll in college, and pursue the American Dream to advance to higher paying careers and higher social positions.

The student who calls herself "Ordinary" identifies with her school and her sorority, and is motivated in general by the plan to graduate in four years while enjoying her time in college. Ordinary's narrative represents both a prominent cultural ideal for education that motivates American adolescents to engage in educational activity in the pursuit of educational credentials, and also a lack of a cultural drive to seek more robust engagement in learning whose purpose goes beyond standardized achievement and educational credentials.

In Chapter 5, the narrative of "My Parents Taught Me Well" explains how the cultural experience of immigration to America can invest a student's engagement with more meaning, as the pursuit of academics becomes a means of honoring the dreams of one's family and the traditions of one's culture. The narrative of "Hopeless Romantic" is about a student who feels a sense of belonging at the Latino Resource Center on her college campus and at her church – she identifies as a struggling, religious, Latino from a bad family. For her, Spanish words come more naturally in discussing the purposes of life and learning. The story of "Respected Father" is about the experiences of a black student who uses the language of his school counselor to explain his life strategies to deal with "peer trouble" and get out of a "bad neighborhood." The students who identify as "My Parents Taught Me Well" and "Hopeless Romantic" say that their family and cultural heritage created meaning and motivation for educational activity, whereas the student attempting to become a "Respected Father," and the one who thinks she is "Ordinary," appreciate the values, lessons, and motivations they have received from their family, but make no direct connection between motivation for learning and specific aspects of their cultural heritage.

The person-centered approach to narrative analysis does not lend itself well to cross-cultural comparison.  It may be clear to a reader that a student who is proud to say "My parents taught me well" and "I want to bring prestige to my people" values his family and culture, but these statements should not be interpreted by the reader as necessarily representing any given culture of people.  "Ordinary students" enrolled in American schools are a diverse group, and the study of purposes for learning and meaningful engagement among students exists within a multicultural educational system. The narratives represent the values and experiences of diverse individuals sampled from American society and should not be taken to represent anything beyond the context of ordinary students enrolled in public schools.

In this section, the term *identify* refers specifically to the action of clicking a bubble on a computer-based survey in response to a query about race, gender, age, or grade point average (GPA).  The categorical identity captured by the survey should not be confused with the reflective commitments to identity that became the titles and themes of the student narratives.

Students who identify with higher grade point averages, described as an "A" on the survey, were more likely to report higher levels of meaningful educational activity (3.20, *SD* .74) than less academically oriented students (2.91, *SD* .85 reporting GPA of B with Bonferroni adjusted effect size of .29; see Table 7.2).  Students in the sample who identify as Caucasian tended to report lower levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity (mean 2.81) than students who identify as African American (3.16 with Bonferroni adjusted pair-wise comparison effect of .35), Asian American (3.09, .33), or Latino (3.09, .27; see Table 7.2).  Male students also reported less meaningful

engagement in family, religious, community, and educational activities than female students; however, gender differences are consistent across domains of activity, while differences between races vary across activities. The race and gender differences may warrant attention in future studies; the relationship between meaningful engagement in educational activity and grade point average might seem to be common sense among educators.

--INSERT TABLE 7.2 HERE --

The final category on Table 7.2 is "Age." Further developmental analyses will use separate models for each age cohort to identify trends. The pair-wise comparisons for age in this section are best thought of as the average meaningful engagement for students enrolled in different grades within the five communities sampled. The average rating in sixth grade is 3.16, in ninth grade is 2.98, in twelfth grade is 3.06, and in the second year of college is 2.87. Conceptualizing the difference in terms of grade level instead of age reminds the reader of potential effects of educational attrition. It is probable that the sample is more representative of 12-year-olds living in the United States—who are legally required to attend the schools that were sampled—than 21-year-olds who applied to and enrolled in the colleges selected for this sample. A sample that includes adolescents on life trajectories other than the standard college achievement plan might offer better insight into other subcultures of American teenagers. Differences in GPA, race, gender, and age are noted here, so the models may identify trends for meaningful engagement in educational activity within American culture.

*Simple Model for Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity*

The survey analyses facilitated the construction of general, standardized models of civic, family, religious, and economic activities and life goals as predictors of meaningful engagement in educational activity. This section presents two simple models demonstrating that a) student engagement in civic-oriented activities and b) student life goals that involve serving the community are stronger predictors of higher levels of c) meaningful engagement in educational activity than are d) family, e) religious, and f) economic-oriented activities and life goals. The simple model describes how the value for life goals and meaningful engagement in life activities predicts meaningful engagement in formal educational activities. The dependent variable includes items for participating in class, studying, and doing homework; the independent variables included more than 21 indicators for life goals, meaningful engagement, and other indicators listed in Table 3.3. Preliminary models controlled for the GPA, race, gender, and age of students and found trends similar to those reported in the simple and developmental models.

Simple Model 1 uses ratings for meaningful engagement in other activities and other life goals to predict meaningful engagement in educational activity. It is simple because the four age cohorts are grouped together. The strongest predictors of meaningful engagement in educational activity are meaningful engagement in community service (with standardized regression coefficient .31) and religious activities (.22), followed by economic (.22) and civic-oriented life goals (.16). Religious goals (-.15), family goals (-.02), and working for pay (-.01) have a negative relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activity (see Table 7.3). The strength of the relation of community service activities and civic-oriented life goals with meaningful

engagement in educational activity becomes clearer in this model.  Both civic engagement and life goals positively predict higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity, but only religious engagement is a positive predictor; religious life goals are a negative predictor within the model.

The simple model quantifies the relationship of activities and goals to describe meaningful engagement in educational activity beyond the standard college achievement plan.  The reader may recall the student narratives about making the world a better place; finding support in religion and trying to make one's parents proud; aspirations to make money and be the boss; and conflicts between duties to support the family and persisting in college.  The narrative analyses can complicate the model because the student who volunteers to help others prepare for the SAT at church said that he derives little meaning from community service, but finds his religious community to be incredibly supportive of his educational engagements.  The student who calls herself a "Hopeless Romantic" and the student who aspires to "Do Something Meaningful" both have strong religious goals and conflicts within their family lives that create meaning and motivation for educational activity.  The narratives about trying to make the world a better place, do something meaningful, and completely changing attitudes toward life are associated with individuals who believe that educational activities are preparing them to be better citizens in the world—both as competent individuals, as well as through affiliations with organizations capable of contributing to the world.  The narratives detail the relationship of civic-oriented life goals with meaningful engagement in educational activity.

Every student narrative positions motivation in relation to a standard college achievement plan that directs educational activity toward opportunities for advancing to

successful, high-paying, high-status careers. In these narratives, obtaining an educational credential is a step toward the outcome of a better career. The survey indicator of life goals for economic success is the most representative of the end-view of the standard college achievement plan. Previous analyses have shown that career aspirations and college majors may matter at certain times more than others, and developmental models will identify further trends with economic goals and activity. Simple Model 1 extends an understanding of meaningful engagement in educational activity beyond the standard college achievement plan for successful careers, describing activity engagements and life goals as predictors of meaningful engagement in educational activity.

Simple Model 2 uses only the 12th-grade survey cohort to describe activity engagement without life goals. The restricted analysis helps to eliminate error due to differences in the middle school and college cultures, as well as different measurement scales for meaningful engagements and life goals. Community service is the strongest predictor of meaningful engagement in educational activity (.35), followed by job training (.21), family (.07), and religious activities (.06; $p > .01$ for each relationship in the model, $N = 183$). Simple Model 2 suggests that meaningful experiences in the contexts of community service, job training, family, and church predict ratings for meaningful engagement in educational activity. Narrative analyses also explain motives for making the world a better place through community service, attaining prestigious and professional career aspirations through real-world experiences on the job, and family and religious cultures of support. A religious connection may not sit well with secular ideals of a public school, and the influence of family may be difficult for policy makers and classroom teachers to address, but job training as vocational training and community

service as avenues for meaningful engagement in educational activity could be considered common sense in terms of the economic and political goals of educators, employers, and concerned citizens.

Family and religious activities may appear to be weaker predictors of meaningful engagement in educational activity compared to community service and job training for high school seniors; however, the simple model oversimplifies what is happening in each student's life in order to identify common motives, aspirations, and experiences related to higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity. The interconnected roles of family, religious, and educational experiences in the narrative of "Hopeless Romantic" show how, for this individual, attending church each week with her grandmother and boyfriend brings positive feeling to her life, but this support does not direct her toward high achievement in school. Her grandmother, boyfriend, and God support her engagements in education in different ways, and all three provide unconditional love as she wanders through academic disciplines, struggles to declare a major, and fails to follow the advice of her counselor. The Hopeless Romantic tries to end the struggle with her parents while being inspired in church by the ideal of starting a new family. The student narrative about making parents proud has a more prominent religious culture of motivation for standardized achievement in school, exemplified when the student teaches SAT prep to younger students at church. Most of the narratives reveal more inspiration for life and learning from experiences with religion, family, job training, and work than the narrative of Ordinary about joining a social organization on campus to counterbalance the new pressures of college-level achievement. The simple models describe how the life

goals and experiences of ordinary students relate to meaningful engagement in educational activity beyond the standard college achievement plan for career success.

*Developmental Model for Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity*

Developmental Model 1 suggests that meaningful engagement in community-service activities is a strong predictor of meaningful engagement in educational activity across age cohorts. The Standardized Beta Coefficient for the relationship between meaningful engagements in volunteer community service for students when they are 12 years old and meaningful engagement in educational activity when they are 14 years old is .35 (SE .06); this Beta is .49 (.09) for 15-year-olds, .58(.14) for 18-year-olds, and .35 (.07) for 21-year-olds ($p > .01$ for all coefficients; see Table 7.4). Engagement in community service is a much stronger predictor than previous engagement in meaningful family activities, with Beta .20 (SE .07) for meaningful engagement in family service for 12-year-olds predicting meaningful engagement in educational activity when they are 14 years old. This Beta is .20 (.08) for 15-year-olds, .27(.12) for 18-year-olds, and .10(.07) for 21-year-olds engaging in educational activity when they are 23 years old ($p > .01$ for all, but for 21-year-olds, see Table 7.4).

Hypothesis 2 from the beginning of the chapter predicts a decline of family influence on educational activity during adolescence. The religious activities that predicted meaningful engagement in educational activity in the simple model are not as strong in the developmental model; this may be due in part to the higher ratings of sixth graders for both educational and religious activities, but Developmental Hypothesis 3 predicts a mixed influence of religious activities and goals. The importance of job

training for meaningful engagement in educational activity becomes evident in the 21-year-old cohort (Beta = .28, SE .07).

The cross-sectional analyses of meaningful engagement in educational activity indicate that older students tend to report lower levels of meaningful engagement—2.87 is the average for 21-year-olds, compared to 3.16 for 12-year-olds (see Table 7.2). Alone, this may suggest a declining value and frequency of participation in educational activity; however, the students' self-reports for meaningful engagement in other activities also decline with age. For example, ratings for family activities are: a) 4.2 for 12-year-olds, b) 3.4 for 15-year-olds, c) 3.6 for 18-year-olds, and d) 3.1 for 21-year-olds. The proxy used to quantify meaningful engagement in educational activity from survey data may not account for the older students having more experience in activity, clarifying values over time, and reflecting on their purposes for engagement in various kinds of activities.

This decline in self-reported levels of meaningful engagement in activity during adolescence could be interpreted as an effect of the identity crisis of adolescence, but a common-sense conceptualization of a crisis as a decline would be inaccurate, and Erikson's (1968) ideas about developmental crises are beyond the scope of the present discussion, so the "crisis" of adolescence refers to the experience of a college student who says her educational concerns and experiences are becoming more "realistic." Both developmental models describe meaningful engagements in educational activity separately for each age cohort, addressing the potential influences of a crisis of identity, reality function, or other variable during adolescence evidenced by lower ratings of meaningful engagements in activity by older adolescents.

Developmental Model 2 shows that students with civic-oriented life goals at time 1, such as wanting to represent the needs of others, are more likely to report higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity on the survey administered 2 years later (Table 7.5). The Standardized Beta Coefficient is .23 (.07) for the civic-oriented life goals of 12-year-olds predicting meaningful engagement in educational activity at age 14 and is .38 (.09) for 15-year-olds, .29(.13) for 18-year-olds, and .39(.07) for 21-year-olds engaging in educational activity when they are 23 years old. The civic goals of the high school seniors do not provide significant predictive value, and the only other predictor to provide significant value in Developmental Model 2 is the economic life goals of 21-year-olds .23 (.07). Hypothesis 4 predicts that economic concerns will have more influence on meaningful engagement in educational activity during later adolescence. The two developmental models support the 5 Developmental Hypotheses, specifically Hypothesis 5 stated in the first section of this chapter as follows: "In comparison with other meaningful engagements and life goals—including family, religious, and economic goals—civic-oriented engagements and goals are most likely to have a strong, positive, stable relationship with meaningful engagement in educational activity throughout adolescence."

*The Presence of Purpose and Search for Meaning in Life*

A final developmental analysis focuses on purpose and meaning in life, and this will complete the survey analyses exploring the predictive value of life goals and other meaningful engagement in activities. What is the relationship of searching for meaning and identifying a purpose in life with meaningful engagement in educational activity for students enrolled in middle school through college? Table 7.6 shows that having a

purpose in life is a positive predictor of meaningful engagement in educational activities for all four of the age cohorts (Standardized Beta Coefficient of .18 for 12-year-olds, .31 for 15-year-olds, .24 for 18-year-olds, and .26 for 21-year-olds), whereas searching for meaning only significantly predicts meaningful engagement in educational activity in middle school and college students (coefficients of .33, .05, .001, and .08). One reader might perceive this as indicative of cultural differences between middle school, high school, and college, while another reader might see it as benefit of developmental crises of identity at certain ages more than others; and yet another reader might worry that it is the result of sampling and measurement error, as many 12-year-olds cannot accurately rate meaning for activity and the importance of life goals. The present study does not make any of these inferences because the aim is only to describe how purposes in life can inspire meaningful engagement in educational activity. The previous sections have identified potential proxies for the standard college achievement plan and evidenced the strength of the relation of civic-oriented life goals and engagements with meaningful engagement in educational activity. The last survey analysis demonstrates the strength of the relationship between identifying a purpose in life and meaningful engagement in educational activity throughout adolescence.

CHAPTER 8: A MORAL LIFE OF LEARNING

This dissertation describes students' purposes for learning in life, and how life goals and activities relate to higher levels of meaningful engagement in formal educational activity. The narrative analyses in Chapters 4–6 describes the purposes for learning and engaging in educational activity of a cohort of aspiring high school seniors who persisted into a second year of college. The narrative of Ordinary introduced a standard college achievement plan of graduating in four years while enjoying time at school. Her narrative provided a common point of reference to better understand students with motivation to learn inspired by family, religion, work, culture, and other moral ideals. As other narratives were introduced, the prominence of educational ideals with little moral reflection, shown in the narrative of Ordinary, became clear. The narrative of Ordinary expressed little reflective morality about life, but had a strong work ethic for engaging in educational activity. Every student in the sample shared Ordinary's utility value for education as the path to career advancement, but only some considered the moral consequences to the others resulting from their learning. Thus, this study described how moral purposes, work ethics, and everyday activities are integrated with standard college achievement plans and purposes for learning in life—the narratives of diverse students enrolled in American schools provide concrete examples of motives to learn beyond obtaining credentials and winning a race to the top.

The simple developmental models presented in Chapter 7 used life goals and activities to predict levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity. The five developmental hypotheses predicted that meaningful engagement in educational activity would have a stronger relationship with community service activities and civic-oriented

goals when compared to activities and goals for family, religion, economics, and other values during adolescence.  The regression models in the analyses predicted educational activity as the dependent variable, but the research did not identify a causal direction for engagement in educational activity and community service.  As presented in Chapter 2, General Purpose Theory argues that consideration of others and the integration of meaning across life can be effective ways to increase meaningful engagement in any activities during adolescence.  The developmental hypotheses expand our understanding of meaningful engagement in formal educational activity beyond the standard college achievement plan and school practices attempting to increase standardized levels of performance on tests and degrees completed.

The simple and developmental models demonstrate how educational research could consider motivation for learning beyond personality traits, and manipulations of classroom environments, in order to identify patterns of meaningful engagement in life's activities that predict higher levels of meaningful engagement in educational activity.  The purpose of this dissertation was not to provide a complete causal theory of motivation, or to identify specific mechanisms to manipulate student behavior.  Rather, survey analyses complement individual narrative purposes to learn, by identifying the significant relationships of civic-oriented goals and activities with meaningful engagement in educational activity.  The survey models and narrative analyses provide critical description of student-motivation to learn throughout life.  The description of engagement in educational activity, high school graduation, pursuit of educational credentials, and standard college achievement plans for success are contextualized within moral purposes for learning in life.

*Customary and Reflective Morality*

This dissertation described the reflective morality of individual students within a culture of high standards and achievement plans for college success. Dewey and Tufts (1908) argue that there is a difference between morality based in custom and one based on reflection. Customary morality includes habits of meaningful activity and traditions followed by society, whereas reflective morality considers and critiques the habits, traditions, situations, potential problems, previous experiences, expected consequences, and purposes for activity. Both customary and reflective morality are part of functioning as a student in life, because following cultural customs makes everyday life manageable while reflection helps individuals to assess whether or not their everyday lives are moral. It may be customary and beneficial to advise all students to work toward college credentials, but students need to further reflect on how engagement in educational activity will help them accomplish deeper moral purposes in life.

As each student narrated their autobiography, the reflective purposes and customary practices of everyday life were revealed. Parents stated, "I've never missed school in my life" and "I go to school all the time." These exemplified customary explanations for engaging in everyday educational activity, which students integrate with cultural customs, ideals, and reflective purposes for life. Alone, these statements do not articulate reflective moral purpose for activity. Going to school every day may or may not be a moral act. Going to school because one goes all the time is not a reflective purpose for engaging in educational activity beyond customary thinking. The benefits and inertia of cultural customs explained in Parents' narrative showed how a student can

avoid encountering many problems, conflicts, and dilemmas common to other students, simply by doing what he is supposed to do.

The diverse customary practices of American students were apparent in the contrast between the narratives of Parents and Respected Father.  Respected Father had to choose between enrolling in college and working to financially support his family.  Both narratives included a reflective morality for life, but it remained indeterminate whether one student has greater reflective abilities, a better work ethic, or more substantial moral purposes than the other.  Instead, the narrative analyses showed how Respected Father's reflective morality to support his family did not fit as well with the customary practices of schooling for standardized achievement.  In contrast, Parents' narrative of loyalty to family better integrated with the standard college achievement plan to obtain educational credentials, and advance to a prestigious career in medicine.  The common features in the narratives of Parents and Father were represented by Ordinary and the standard college achievement plan.  The narrative of Ordinary exemplified the customary moral practices within the U.S. educational system, whereas the other narratives showed how students reflect on moral purposes for learning and engaging in educational activity.

*Purposes for Learning in Life*

*Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed-Out, Materialistic, and Mis-Educated Students* (Pope, 2001) raises critical questions about the practices of the U.S. school system.  In *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Race in American Education*, Labaree (1997a) argues that the focus on credentials is inefficient, undercuts learning, and reinforces social inequities in society.  The efforts of U.S. education reformers to increase standardized levels of performance,

regulate the structure of college preparation, and focus on completion of credentials may be well intended, but the efforts alone are in danger of overlooking student engagement in learning, and ignoring deeper purposes for learning in life.

This dissertation looks beyond the effects of school practices and reform efforts to ask students how engagement in school prepares them for life, and why students go to school and learn in the first place. Dewey (1938) places "emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process" and criticizes the education system for "its failure to secure the active co-operation of the pupil in the construction of the purposes involved in his studying" (p. 76). The educational policy of Race to the Top oversimplifies student motivation for learning in life, neglects to secure the active co-operation of students, and may be in danger of mis-educating students. Too often, students learn to succeed in school by performing on tests and obtaining credentials with little reflective purpose for directing the learning process outside the classroom and after graduation.

In the studies collected for this dissertation, students expressed multiple purposes for engaging in both formal educational activity and learning that they consider important in life. In *Someone has to Fail*, Labaree (2010) raises critical questions about school reform that intends to raise standards for school learning— he suggests educators are misguided in efforts to help students master the formal school curriculum because it is unclear if this mastery actually leads to better economic advantages for both society and individuals. Labaree reminds the educator that students are competing for jobs with their peers not their parents, "For the educational consumer, getting more credentials than the competition does indeed pay off in the job market. But keeping ahead of the pack is not

easy, when everyone else is jockeying for position in the same job queue" (p. 212). Labaree argues that credentials provide an indicator for employers to quickly assess applicants' trainability, and that the non-curricular activity engagements of American students have the potential to enhance their ability to contribute to society. Volunteering in the community and working for pay are excellent ways for adolescents to learn how to function on the job, network, compete, lead, and make the most of opportunities to learn in life. This dissertation focused attention on moral experiences, volunteering in the community, opportunities to work for pay, and other non-curricular activities in life where students learn to contribute to society.

This dissertation describes learning as an aspect of students' general purposes for life. The population studied represents a diverse sample of students enrolled in U.S. public middle schools, high schools, and colleges. This approach to studying engagement in learning encourages reflection on the purposes, practices, and assumptions of the educational system. The narrative of Completely Changed provided an example of how educational activity—specifically a college professor in environmental ethics—had the potential to change the way a student interacts with the world. The student who said he completely changed was open-minded in high school, and then learns to engage purposefully in teaching and learning at both college and work. Duty's story articulated a motive for service to others in the world, and Freedom's story explains a motive for self-reliance within a liberal democracy—many of these narratives become intertwined with values for family, church, and culture. The student who told the narrative Make The World a Better Place demonstrated a motive for students' engaging in activity intended to

educate others.  World's narrative was similar to the one about completely changing, but World engaged in learning with moral purpose before entering college.

Do Something Meaningful's narrative was also about aspiring to change the world, whereas Be the Boss's narrative centered on aspirations for power, control, and authority in the world; both Be the Boss and Do Something Meaningful express aspirations in life without full engagement in life's activities.  Adrenaline Junkie's and Restless's narratives explained the motivational potential of emotional experiences without reflective commitments to responsibilities in the world.  Hopeless Romantic's and Respected Father's stories were about family challenges that hindered engagement in education.  Building Bridges' and Parents' narratives introduced budding reflective, moral commitments to work in the world, which provided direction for engagement in educational activity.  Each narrative had unique features, and together the narrative analyses described motivations for learning beyond a competitive race to the top.

The narrative of Ordinary articulated a standard college achievement plan that was common across all 13 students.  The diverse narratives introduced complexity in human development and cultures of learning into the study of student-motives beyond achievement of educational credentials.  The five developmental hypotheses presented in Chapter 7 encourage educators to reflect on ways to increase meaningful engagement in formal educational activities, by integrating school learning with engagements across activities in life.  The narrative and survey analyses highlight the relationship of service oriented goals and activities in the community with meaningful engagement in educational activity.  Further research could test the hypotheses with design research or field experiments related to community service, family activities, religious experiences,

and work for pay. Thus, this dissertation is a preliminary step to move theory, research,

and pedagogy beyond motivation to race to the top of standardized measures of

performance; and to consider motivation for learning as a moral experience.

TABLES

Table 3.1
*Percentage of Each Race Represented Within Four Samples*

| Ethnicity | Sample | Hilltop High | Freeway High | CA high school average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Latino | 16 | 25 | 57 | 49 |
| Caucasian | 34 | 47 | 16 | 29 |
| Asian American | 23 | 15 | 10 | 8 |
| African American | 7 | 4 | 11 | 7 |
| Pacific Islander | 7 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Native American | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Multiple | 12 | 4 | 1 | 3 |

Table 3.2
*Percentage of 11th-Grade Students at or Above Proficient in 2006*

| Test | Hilltop High | Freeway High | CA high school average |
|---|---|---|---|
| English Language Arts | 40 | 29 | 36 |
| Algebra  II | 9 | 5 | 10 |
| Biology | 18 | 28 | 34 |
| U.S. History | 46 | 34 | 35 |

Table 3.3
*Variables Used in Survey Analyses*

| | Variable | Items | Alpha | Example items |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Meaningful engagement in educational activities | 5 | .69 | Studying; participating in class, student leadership, or academic clubs; spending time with mentor |
| 2 | Meaningful engagement in family activities | 6 | .93 | Spending time with parents and siblings talking, at holidays, or at dinner; visiting relatives |
| 3 | Meaningful engagement in religious-spiritual activities | 6 | .93 | Attending religion class or services; praying; studying, talking about, or thinking about religion |
| 4 | Meaningful engagement in volunteer-service activities | 6 | .79 | Volunteer with children or the elderly; improving the environment or neighborhood |
| 5 | Meaningful engagement in arts activities | 4 | .64 | Participating in music, drama, dance, or art |
| 6 | Meaningful engagement in sports activities | 1 | | |
| 7 | Meaningful engagement in career preparation | 1 | | |
| 8 | Meaningful engagement in work-for-pay activities | 1 | | |
| 9 | Civic life goals | 4 | .74 | Volunteering in the community, being involved in politics, becoming a community leader, |
| 10 | Economic | 3 | .81 | |
| 11 | Family | 3 | .63 | |
| 12 | Hedonistic | 3 | .69 | |
| 13 | Artistic | 4 | .69 | |
| 14 | Religious-spiritual | 2 | .92 | |
| 15 | Searching for meaning and purpose | 4 | .79 | Seeking a purpose or mission for life |
| 16 | Presence of purpose | 6 | .85 | Working toward accomplishing the most important goals in life |
| 17 | Intended college major | 1 | | |
| 18 | Intended career | 1 | | |
| 19 | Grade point average | 1 | | A, B, C, or D or below |
| 20 | Race | 1 | | Caucasian, African-American, Asian-American, Latino, Other, Multiple |
| 21 | Gender | 1 | | Male, Female |
| 22 | Age | 1 | | 12, 15, 18, 21 |

Table 4.1.
*Purposes for Life and Learning of Aspiring Adolescents*

| | Identity statement | Ultimate concern for education | Current concern for engaging in education | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Senior year | Two years later |
| 1 | Ordinary | Get through school and find out what I enjoy doing and where I want to be | I need to go to college to get a job and start a family. | Graduate in four years and enjoy my time |
| 2 | Duty to Lend a Hand | College is the next step in life where I'm gonna get all my education. | At the moment is scoring a high score on my SAT's | College is one of the most important things in every person's life. |
| 3 | Adrenaline Junkie | Graduate high school, get into college, and start to bode the life | Go to college; decide what I want to major in | I definitely need to stay in school right now because I need to stay on my parent's health insurance. |
| 4 | Building Bridges | I need it for becoming the person I want to become in my career. | Everything looks good on college applications. | I have to get my degree to do what I want to do in life. |
| 5 | My Parents Taught Me Well | Academic is just one stepping stone to become successful. | I came here primarily for studying and going to Ivy League schools. | Hope to get into medical school |
| 6 | Hopeless Romantic | Thinking about going to State College | I'm just really scared that I might not just get into college for some reason. | Trying to get my general education so I can transfer to State College |
| 7 | Freedom to Do Positive Things | Being educated means knowing that I can provide for myself. | College will lead to freedom, growing up, maturing, making my own decisions. | Become an OB-GYN |
| 8 | Restless Fashion | Not that I'm a big fan of school, but if it's gonna help me, then I'll do it. | Kinda going with where I get accepted or whatever happens | School is all about the future. |
| 9 | Do Something Meaningful | I can make the world a better place once I've got an education. | It could go a lot of different ways. | If you don't get a good education these days, there's not much you can do. |

| 10 | Make the World a Better Place | When I participate in class or discussions, I feel like I make the people in class more intelligent. | Getting into a good college so I can get a good job later in life so I can support myself | Use my school for my future; make myself smarter, a better person and community member |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Be the Boss | You could go anywhere if you have education. | If I get to a 2-year college, I am being successful. | In order to get a good job, you have to be well educated and smart. |
| 12 | Completely Changed | Have knowledge of everything or everywhere | I'm really just hoping one morning I'll wake up and I'll just see what direction to go. | I'm in school, but not for the degree right off the bat; I like learning. |
| 13 | Respected Father | If you don't continue your education, you ain't gonna get anywhere in life. | I just wanna get out of the neighborhood. | Wish I finished college because now you see the true meaning of it. My job is good, but I want better. |

Table 4.2.
*Ratings for Meaningful Activity of 12 Aspiring Adolescents*

| | | Meaningful activity | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Education | | | Career/work | | Life | | |
| | Student | Academic | Arts | Sports | Prep | Paid | Family | Spiritual | Service |
| 1 | Ordinary | 3.0 | 2.4 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3.5 | 2.0 | 3.2 |
| 2 | Duty to Lend a Hand | 4.8 | 3.0 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 5.0 | 4.8 | 4.0 |
| 3 | Adrenaline Junkie | 2.0 | 2.4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3.3 | 1.0 | 2.0 |
| 4 | Building Bridges | 3.2 | 1.6 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4.0 | 4.5 | 1.6 |
| 5 | Parents Taught Me Well | 3.6 | 2.0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4.0 | 4.2 | 2.4 |
| 6 | Hopeless Romantic | 3.2 | 3.8 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3.2 | 4.0 | 3.4 |
| 7 | Freedom to Do Positive | 3.4 | 2.2 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 5.0 | 2.5 | 4.0 |
| 8 | Restless Fashion | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| 9 | Do Something Meaningful | 2.8 | 3.2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4.3 | 5.0 | 3.4 |
| 10 | Make the World Better | 3.2 | 3.2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3.8 | 1.2 | 2.8 |
| 11 | Be The Boss | 3.2 | 2.0 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3.2 | 4.2 | 2.0 |
| 12 | Completely Changed | 3.4 | 3.8 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4.3 | 1.2 | 2.6 |
| Sample Average (*n* = 1211) | | 3.0 | 2.8 | 3.5 | 2.8 | 3.4 | 3.9 | 2.9 | 3.0 |

Green indicates greater than 1 standard deviation above sample average.
Yellow indicates greater than 1 standard deviation below sample average.

Table 7.1.
*Correlations of Life Goals With Meaningful Engagements in Activities*

| | | | | Activity engagements | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Life goals | Education | Arts | Sports | Family | Spiritual | Service | Work | Job training |
| Artistic | 0.25 | 0.60 | 0.16 | 0.17 | 0.18 | 0.24 | 0.06 | 0.12 |
| Civic | 0.48 | 0.31 | 0.23 | 0.36 | 0.32 | 0.55 | 0.11 | 0.18 |
| Economic | 0.33 | 0.13 | 0.31 | 0.22 | 0.11 | 0.07 | 0.30 | 0.18 |
| Family | 0.26 | 0.14 | 0.18 | 0.45 | 0.25 | 0.28 | 0.20 | 0.16 |
| Fun | 0.28 | 0.28 | 0.28 | 0.33 | 0.09 | 0.19 | 0.21 | 0.16 |
| Spiritual | 0.25 | 0.13 | 0.12 | 0.24 | 0.85 | 0.24 | 0 | 0 |

*Note.* All relationships sig. at < .0001 except 0.

Table 7.2.
*Group Means for Meaningful Educational Activity*

| Category | Mean | SD | N | Z | Effect |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GPA | | | | | A |
| A | 3.20 | 0.74 | 463 | 0.23 | |
| B | 2.91 | 0.85 | 534 | -0.13 | 0.29 |
| C | 2.91 | 0.83 | 166 | -0.12 | 0.29 |
| D | 2.40 | 0.76 | 18 | -0.75 | 0.8 |
| | | | | | |
| Race | | | | | Caucasian |
| Caucasian | 2.81 | 0.84 | 379 | -0.24 | |
| African | 3.16 | 0.79 | 70 | 0.18 | 0.35 |
| Asian | 3.14 | 0.78 | 251 | 0.15 | 0.33 |
| Latino | 3.09 | 0.83 | 184 | 0.09 | 0.27 |
| Other | 3.19 | 0.76 | 207 | 0.19 | |
| Multiple | 2.93 | 0.85 | 119 | -0.09 | |
| | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | Female |
| Male | 2.93 | 0.86 | 524 | -0.08 | 0.15 |
| Female | 3.08 | 0.77 | 668 | 0.08 | |
| | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | 12 |
| 12 | 3.16 | 0.76 | 405 | 0.17 | |
| 15 | 2.98 | 0.84 | 198 | -0.04 | 0.18 |
| 18 | 3.06 | 0.81 | 183 | 0.06 | |
| 21 | 2.87 | 0.85 | 407 | -0.18 | 0.29 |

*Note.* SD = standard deviation, *N* = sample size,
*Z* = standardized score, and Effect = Bonferroni-
adjusted pairwise comparisons.

Table 7.3.
*Simple Model Predicting Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity With Other Meaningful Activities and Life Goals Across All Four Age Cohorts*

| Life goals | B | SE | Beta |
|---|---|---|---|
| Civic | 0.16 | 0.03 | 0.16 |
| Economic | 0.22 | 0.03 | 0.22 |
| Family | -0.02 | 0.03 | -0.02 |
| Religious | -0.15 | 0.04 | -0.15 |
| Meaningful activities | | | |
| Community service | 0.31 | 0.03 | 0.31 |
| Work for pay | -0.01 | 0.02 | -0.01 |
| Job training | 0.14 | 0.02 | 0.14 |
| Family | 0.11 | 0.03 | 0.11 |
| Religious | 0.22 | 0.05 | 0.22 |
| Constant | 0.00 | 0.02 | |

*Note. N* = 1211, Adjusted R-squared = 0.43

Table 7.4.
*Regression Model Predicting Meaningful Educational Activity With Other Meaningful Activities of Four Adolescent Cohorts*

| Age | 12 | | | 15 | | | 18 | | | 21 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Activity | B | SE | P | B | SE | P | B | SE | P | B | SE | P |
| Service | 0.35 | 0.06 | * | 0.49 | 0.09 | * | 0.58 | 0.14 | * | 0.35 | 0.07 | * |
| Work | 0.01 | 0.05 | | 0.04 | 0.08 | | 0.14 | 0.12 | | 0.04 | 0.08 | |
| Job Training | 0.10 | 0.05 | | 0.15 | 0.08 | | 0.06 | 0.14 | | 0.28 | 0.07 | * |
| Family | 0.20 | 0.07 | * | 0.20 | 0.08 | * | 0.27 | 0.12 | * | 0.10 | 0.07 | |
| Religious | 0.07 | 0.05 | | 0.06 | 0.09 | | 0.16 | 0.11 | | 0.13 | 0.08 | |
| R-sq / Adj. R-sq | 0.32 | 0.30 | | 0.49 | 0.47 | | 0.61 | 0.56 | | 0.39 | 0.37 | |

*p < .01.

Table 7.5.
*Regression Model Predicting Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity with Life Goals of Four Adolescent Cohorts*

| Age | 12 | | | 15 | | | 18 | | | 21 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | SE | P | B | SE | P | B | SE | P | B | SE | P |
| Civic | 0.23 | 0.07 | * | 0.38 | 0.09 | * | 0.29 | 0.13 | * | 0.39 | 0.07 | * |
| Economic | 0.12 | 0.07 | | 0.06 | 0.08 | | 0.27 | 0.12 | * | 0.23 | 0.07 | * |
| Family | 0.06 | 0.06 | | 0.15 | 0.09 | | 0.13 | 0.14 | | -0.05 | 0.07 | |
| Religious | 0.06 | 0.05 | | 0.16 | 0.09 | | 0.15 | 0.13 | | 0.13 | 0.08 | |
| Artistic | 0.18 | 0.06 | | 0.08 | 0.08 | | 0.21 | 0.14 | | 0.03 | 0.07 | |
| Fun | 0.03 | 0.06 | | 0 | 0.10 | | 0.28 | 0.19 | * | 0.12 | 0.07 | |
| R-sq / Adj. R-sq | 0.23 | 0.21 | | 0.34 | 0.31 | | 0.46 | 0.38 | | 0.33 | 0.30 | |

$*p < .01.$

Table 7.6.
*Regression Model Predicting Meaningful Engagement in Educational Activity with Searching for Meaning and Identifying a Presence of Purpose in Life*

| Age | 12 | | | 15 | | | 18 | | | 21 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | SE | P | B | SE | P | B | SE | P | B | SE | P |
| Searching | 0.33 | 0.03 | * | 0.05 | 0.04 | | 0.001 | 0.05 | | 0.08 | 0.03 | * |
| Identified | 0.18 | 0.23 | * | 0.31 | 0.04 | * | 0.24 | 0.05 | * | 0.26 | 0.03 | * |
| R-sq / Adj. R-sq | 0.35 | 0.28 | | 0.29 | 0.26 | | 0.24 | 0.22 | | 0.28 | 0.27 | |

$* p < .01.$

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