2021

Purpose and Autonomous Functioning in Emerging Adults

Michelle A. Steffenhagen
Bethel University

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by
Michelle Ann Steffenhagen

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Saint Paul, MN
2021

Approved by

Advisor: Dr. Jessica Daniels

Reader: Dr. Joel Frederickson

Reader: Dr. Christine Osgood

> …do something outside yourself, something to repair tears in your community, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. That's what I think a meaningful life is. One lives not just for one's self but for one's community (Ginsburg, 2017).

Abstract

This study sought to understand the relationship between a sense of purpose and autonomous functioning in young adults. The relationships between the dimensions of purpose (goal orientation, sense of meaning, and beyond-the-self focus) and the dimensions of autonomous functioning (authorship/ self-congruence, interest-taking, and a low susceptibility of control) were also investigated. Further, the results were compared with the independent variables of gender, volunteerism, study aboard interest, and faith community participation. Participants (n = 356) were undergraduate college students at a small private liberal arts Christian institution located in the Midwest of the United States of America. Measures included the Claremont Purpose Scale and the Index of Autonomous Functioning. Pearson correlations were used to analyze the data, and purpose and autonomous functioning were positively correlated. With the exception of the susceptibility of control dimension of autonomous functioning, statistically significant correlations were also found between the dimensions of purpose and the dimensions of autonomous functioning. Women reported higher levels of a sense of purpose and autonomous functioning. Students who were involved in faith communities reported higher levels of autonomous functioning and also were more likely to report a sense of purpose. Finally, volunteerism was only associated with a beyond-the-self focus (one of the dimensions of the Claremont Purpose Scale).

Dedication

For Jason, Mateios, and Michneyder

You inspire me to find meaning and purpose in each new day.

Acknowledgements

While I did not overtly discuss my personal faith in my dissertation, this research project would not have come into existence without my connection to God. My spirituality informs every aspect of my life and gives me a significant sense of meaning. I believe that humans are invited to respond to God's grace by actively participating in the reconciliation and restoration of our relationships and our world. Being in a dynamic relationship with God gives my life purpose and prompted me to learn more about how purpose develops in young people. I am grateful for God's goodness and for the transcendent source of energy I received in order to finish this project.

Jessica, my work allows me the opportunity to hold courage and confidence for people until they are ready to see in themselves what I do. For me, you have been that person. I do not know if I would have begun a doctorate without your encouragement, and I would not have finished without your coaching. I am immensely grateful for the ways you have shown up for me in some of the more challenging times of my life. Your gentle nudges and the enthusiastic dialogues we have shared provided me a path forward and I am thankful for your guidance.

Joel, I could not have imagined a more supportive methodologist. You offered me encouragement, perspective, and flexibility. When I felt overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to finish this paper in the midst of a pandemic, you reminded me that the work mattered and it was much closer to completion than I could grasp.

Your willingness to get into the details and honor my questions with quick responses was a gift.

Christine, I have learned so much from you over the past five years, and I will be forever grateful for the mark you have left on my life. Through our conversations I have come to think more deeply about my own purposes and how I might author my life. I have learned so much about God through our constant conversations about Shalom and wellbeing. Thank you for making an investment in me. You have given me opportunities to consider how my work will make a difference in the lives of young people. You see a future that I am just starting to envision, and I count myself blessed to have you as a mentor and guide.

Jason, our partnership has made my life. There are no words for the ways you have shown up for me in this season. Your belief in me and my potential is unending, and the sacrifices you make to make my dreams reality mean so much. Being self-determined does not come naturally for me and you challenge me to lean in and show up to life authentically. You remind me that my goals have meaning, and together we will continue to make contributions outside of ourselves. Thank you for being the very best father, husband, and thinking partner for me and our boys.

Mateios and Michnedyer, being your mom has taught me much about life, love, and hope. You are courageous boys who embrace the complexities of living with your whole hearts. I cannot wait to watch you grow in self-understanding and self-compassion and live lives that are dripping with meaning and purpose. Along the way, I look forward to more dancing, rollerblading, and water skiing.

To the original six and the twelve that followed, you each make me better. Thanks for entertaining my kids and husband while I went back to school. I love watching the ways you live beyond yourselves, and I am proud to be part of this family. Mom and Dad, you have given your kids and grandkids many opportunities and those are gifts that changed the trajectory of our lives.

To my friends, you were with me throughout this whole experience. The interest you gave my research made this study better. I cannot believe I have friends who marked milestones, provided me with fuel for the journey, and, most importantly, have taught me about how we can influence the world with our time, energy, and resources. I love our longwinded conversations about what really matters (and what doesn't). I know we are transforming and evolving because of our connections, and I would not have it any other way.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

American college students are decreasingly likely to believe it is important to develop a meaningful philosophy of life: in 1968, 85.8% of first-year college students thought it was essential or very important to develop a meaningful philosophy of life compared to 46.5% of first-year students in 2015 (Eagan, Stolzenberg, Ramirez, Aragon, Suchard, & Rios-Aguilar, 2016). Researchers and editorialists are concerned about the number of college students who are not identifying a life purpose (Damon, 2009; Gallup & Bates College, 2019; Mercurio, 2017). Finding purpose is a journey of self-exploration that takes effort (Damon, 2009; Fry, 1998) and is most effectively done in community (Bronk, 2012; Damon, 2009). However, purpose affords the opportunity to:

> Concentrate your talents, skills, thoughts, and energies in an enduring manner. It means finding something that you truly believe in, something so worth accomplishing that you dedicate yourself to it wholeheartedly, without qualm or self-interest. It means devoting yourself to a cause, or to many causes, that you consider noble purposes. (Damon, 2003, p. 5-7)

Living with purpose gives life a deeper sense of meaning (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; Weinstein, Ryan, & Deci, 2012). Although existing research indicates that purpose requires intentionality and effort, researchers still do not fully understand the nature of purpose development (Bronk, 2014; Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Hill, Burrow, & Sumner, 2013).

This study contributes to developmental theory by providing new insights into the relationship between purpose and autonomy. Purpose and autonomy are both developmental aims for adolescents and young adults (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968), and scholars often discuss the influence of one construct on the other (Bronk, 2014; Burrow & Hill, 2011; Hill, Burrow, & Sumner, 2016). Clarity on the distinct nature of the relationship between purpose and autonomy provides direction to parents, educators, and employers seeking to help young people foster purpose.

Statement of the Problem

Adults who have a life purpose are more likely to experience positive feelings of belonging, calm and peace, happiness, connection, pride, confidence, attentiveness, activeness, and enthusiasm (Hill, Sin, Turiano, Burrow, & Almeida, 2018). Adults who have a life purpose are also less likely to experience feelings of restlessness, nervousness, deep sadness, hopelessness, loneliness, fear, frustration, anger, and shame (Hill et al., 2018). In addition to the emotional benefits, having a purpose in life may lead to fewer negative physical health symptoms such as headache, fatigue, and cough (Hill et al., 2018) and mitigate early mortality risk (Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, & Bennett, 2009; Hill & Turiano, 2014; Krause, 2009).

According to prominent developmental theorists, purpose development begins in adolescence and young adulthood (Damon et al., 2003; Erikson, 1968; Loevinger, 1976). Among young adults and college students, having a sense of purpose is associated with general well-being, life satisfaction, more positive emotions, fewer negative emotions (Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2015), and is predictive of overall

happiness (Sillick & Cathcart, 2014). Specifically, among American undergraduate students, life purpose is positively related to grit, defined as approaching long-term goals with perseverance and passion (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Grit is, in turn, positively associated with higher GPAs, higher completed levels of education, and career stability (Duckworth et al., 2007; Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2016).

A leading human development researcher confirmed the value of purpose on optimal youth development, asserting that "[m]ore revealing than any particular behavioral signposts, such as tests passed, prizes won, or popularity gained, or even the general degree of happiness displayed, is the direction and meaning of a young person's efforts" (Damon, 2009, p. 37). When people are able to engage and commit to purpose they are more likely to experience an enduring sense of well-being (Damon, 2009; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2002).

Although research shows the extended benefits of having a sense of purpose for young people, many American adolescents and young adults do not have a sense of purpose (Bronk, 2014; Bronk, Finch, & Talib, 2010; Damon et al., 2003; Moran, 2009). After surveying 1,200 and interviewing almost 300 young people ages 12-26, Damon (2009) found that only 20% of adolescents and young adults reported commitment to a sense of purpose. Fifty-five percent of adolescents and young adults had not made a purpose commitment, some had an idea of what their purpose might be but had not acted on their suspected purpose, and others had explored purpose but had no resolution regarding their specific purpose. However, perhaps most

concerning is that 25% of youth who were disengaged and uninterested in exploring or committing to purpose all together (Damon, 2009).

Even though the college experience itself tends to promote changes in students' identity development, it appears collegiate experiences presently have little effect on students' development of purpose: 25% of high school seniors report having a sense of purpose (Bronk et al., 2010; Moran, 2009) compared to 42% of second- and third-year college students (Moran, 2009). In addition, when 2,503 college students were asked to identify their purposes (not whether or not they had explored or committed to purpose), Glanzer, Hill, and Johnson (2017) found that happiness was the number one reported purpose (representing 81.2% of students), while the majority of students did not report that making a difference beyond themselves was one of their purposive goals. A minority of students interested in contributing to the world around them is concerning because recent research suggests that a focus beyond oneself is a vital dimension of purpose (Damon et al., 2003).

Not only do a majority of undergraduate students miss the benefits of purpose, but research on adolescents and young adults and purpose is also limited (Bronk, Riches, & Mangan, 2018; Damon et al., 2003). Purpose research prior to the early 2000s focused on adults (Bronk et al., 2018), and much is yet to be learned about how adolescents and young adults construct purpose (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Bronk et al., 2018; Claremont Graduate University, 2018; Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). In addition, researchers originally designed purpose scales to measure two dimensions, personal goal orientation and meaningfulness, and missed the dimension of purpose

that focuses on a desire to make a difference in the world (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon et al., 2003). The inclusion of a beyond-the-self focus is particularly relevant for higher education. When students perceived their purpose for education as a desire to learn in order to make a positive impact on the world, help others, and contribute to society, high school seniors were more likely to persist to their first year of college and university undergraduates were more likely to persist in learning tasks they found boring (Yeager et al., 2014).

Along with the expansion of the understanding of purpose, researchers have recently suggested that identity and purpose are aspects of one domain instead of two (Sumner et al., 2015). Although not all scholars agree, these researchers asserted that these concepts should be thought of as related, not separate, facets of the self-exploration process. Identity formation is an important developmental task in adolescence and young adulthood and commitments made to one's identity are important outcomes of higher education (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Identity has many components – for college students, autonomy is particularly important as college students develop a newfound sense of volition as they gain independence (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Yet, researchers have not expansively investigated the connection between autonomy and a sense of purpose among college students.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between autonomous functioning and the criteria of purpose, including the beyond-the-self dimension, in

American college students. In addition, four independent variables were included in this research study: gender, volunteerism, study abroad intention, and participation in a faith community. The following research questions were designed to measure the dependent and independent variables:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between the level of autonomous functioning and the likelihood that one will meet the criteria for purpose?

Research Question 2: Which relationships between the dimensions of autonomous functioning and the criteria for purpose, if any, appear to be significant?

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference for criteria met for purpose between males and females, students who volunteer and students who do not volunteer, students who have or plan to study abroad and students who have not and do not plan to study abroad, and students who participate in a faith community and students who do not participate in a faith community?

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference of autonomous functioning between males and females, students who volunteer and students who do not volunteer, students who have or plan to study abroad and students who have not and do not plan to study abroad, and students who participate in a faith community and students who do not participate in a faith community?

Significance of the Study

At a time when young people are increasingly apathetic about finding a meaningful life philosophy (Eagan et al., 2016) and fewer than half of young people reported having a sense of purpose (Bronk et al., 2010; Damon, 2009; Moran, 2009), this study provides new insight into how parents, college educators, and employers can bolster autonomy-supportive environments to foster purpose. Afterall, embracing purpose can change the trajectory of a young person's life and their surrounding community. Daloz-Parks (2000) proposed using the word *dream* to describe such experiences:

> When we shift from just 'being a life' to 'knowing we have a life,' we achieve an undeniably different form of consciousness. New possibilities and responsibilities appear for both self and world. How a young adult is met and invited to test and invest in this new consciousness with its emerging new capacities will make a great difference in the adulthood that lies ahead. The dreams that are made available, embraced, and nurtured, and the promises that are made, broken, and kept, will shape our common future. (p. 6)

Current scholars believe the journey to adulthood emerges slowly and provides young people with developmentally appropriate space to explore identities, values, and dreams before they take on the full responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Prior to the twenty-first century, scholars believed that adolescents moved straight into adulthood, but American society has shifted and now affords young people a prolonged time relying on support systems before entering young adulthood.

However, it is in these "volitional years" (Arnett, 2000, p. 469) when young people have prime opportunity to develop autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968) and purpose (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017).

Parents. The relationship between the parent and child influences both autonomy (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2017) and purpose (Bronk, 2014; Damon, 2009), and the current study provides meaningful information for parents curious about how these development aims influence one another. After a longitudinal qualitative study, Damon (2009) offered reassurance to parents who were concerned about adverse challenges their children might face, suggesting that commitment to a life purpose is the best way to navigate adolescence and emerging adulthood: "[w]hile a parent cannot simply give a purpose to a child, and indeed any too forceful or controlling effort to do so is likely to have adverse repercussions, nonetheless there is much that the parent can do" (Damon, 2009, p. 130). Damon's (2009) advice begins to narrow the gap between purpose and autonomy by cautioning behavior that might thwart self-direction.

Researchers also found that positive parental attachment is associated with youth purpose, and when youth had a higher sense of purpose they more successfully navigated the separation-individuation process, which results from decreased contact with parents and increased life responsibilities (Hill et al., 2016). Parents create environments and expectations for their children which can either support or thwart autonomous functioning (Deci et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Yet, many colleges and universities have reported increasing numbers of parents interfering with students in and out of the classroom (Quealy & Miller, 2019; Reed, Duncan, Lucier-Greer, Fixelle, & Ferraro, 2016). Overly involved parents, sometimes referred to as helicopter parents who hover and intervene on their child's behalf (Quealy & Miller, 2019; Reed et al., 2016) or snowplow parents who proactively remove barriers so their children do not encounter adversity (Miller & Bromwich, 2019), do not empower young adults to self-advocate (Reed et al., 2016). Students of helicopter parents were more likely to worry about college and feel guilty about their successes than students of autonomy-supportive parents (Greene, Jewell, Fuentes, & Smith, 2019). Parents who are overinvolved can stifle college student growth; students report feeling frustrated, confused about how to proceed, and doubtful of their own choices (Cullaty, 2011).

When students go to college, instead of intervening for them, parents can most effectively aid their child's development by supporting them, which facilitates autonomous development (Cullaty, 2011). As American author, Deresiewicz (2014), wrote, "[t]here is something that's a great deal more important than parent approval: learning to do without it" (p. 227). When Bronk and Baumsteiger (2017) summarized the literature on purpose and emerging adults they reported a gap in knowledge regarding what parents can do to support purpose development. More fully understanding the relationship between purpose and autonomy will provide further guidance to parents of young people.

Educators. The premise that college administrators and professors should create environments for autonomous development is well established (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), but educators face more challenges in age of lawnmower parenting (Miller & Bromwich, 2019; Quealy & Miller, 2019; Reed et al., 2016). At the same time, with students less concerned about developing a meaningful philosophy of life (Eagan at al., 2016), college educators wonder how to instill the value of living a purposeful life (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Clydesdale, 2015; Glanzer, Hill, & Johnson, 2017). Developing a sense of purpose is an important element of higher education (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). John Johannes, the provost of Villanova University, stated, "[w]e encourage students to let their intellectual life be guided by their hearts. Students are learning and developing in college for a purpose: that is, to be of service to the world" (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2008). However, concern exists that college educators have abdicated their role in fostering purpose (Clydesdale, 2015; Mercurio, 2017). Mercurio (2017) a contributor to the HuffPost, wrote,

> In an attempt to respond to knee-jerk, recession-induced societal cynicism of the cost of higher education, colleges have contorted themselves to become measured less by the thinking, global citizens they produce, and more by the graduation rates, job placements statistics, and average starting salaries they can advertise in admissions brochure. (paragraph 5)

Criticism from outside of higher education might be expected, but concern within academia also exists. One professor and purpose researcher noted that when colleges

and university educators avoid fostering purpose, upon commencement, it is like "dropping graduates into active earthquake zones without drinking water or a map" (Clydesdale, 2015, p. 204). Clydesdale (2015) continued by warning parents, "[g]ood grades and admission to college are relatively easy to come by; a well-honed sense of purpose, intentionality, and resilience are not- and these are the traits that separate lives of significance and deep satisfaction from lives of self-absorption and resignation" (p. 228). Institutions need to be more proactive in helping students explore and make commitments to purpose.

In response to the dwindling of meaning and purpose conversations within higher education, the Lilly Endowment Inc. offered 88 institutions $2 million grants to implement calling, vocation, and purposive programs (Clydesdale, 2015). When students engaged in purpose exploration programs during college, they experienced "reduce[d] decision anxiety, gain[ed] understanding of their own selves, and appreciate[d] their connections to the wider world" (Clydesdale, 2015, p. 211), perhaps even more important, one year after college, graduates experienced "greater intentionality, more resilience, and broader life satisfaction" (Clydesdale, 2015, p. 211). Yet helping students commit to a sense of purpose requires effort from the entire institution (Glanzer et al., 2017) . Glanzer et al. (2017) asserted that whether the student commits to a purpose that aligns closely with the values of their upbringing or not, opportunities to "[focus] on purpose development cannot be accomplished with a simple one-day seminar: they need to be woven throughout the university experience" (p. 27). Purpose exploration needs to be prioritized within

higher education, and better understanding the correlations between purpose and autonomy will provide new insight into how institutions can incorporate purpose initiatives more holistically.

Employers. Sense of purpose is valuable in both personal and professional settings. In Western cultures, careers are how many emerging adults find and commit to their purpose (Bronk, 2012). Purposeful work is also related to wellbeing: 59% of college graduates who reported purposeful work also reported thriving (Gallup & Bates College, 2019). However, while 80% of college graduates reported that finding purposeful work was very important or extremely important, only 37% of college graduates reported understanding how their work contributes to their life meaning and only 40% reported finding a meaningful career (Gallup & Bates College, 2019). New York Times best-selling author, Pink (2009), wrote that mastery, autonomy, and purpose are researched variables that could transform business environments, allowing employers to maximize motivation techniques. Understanding how autonomy and purpose are related will provide new insight into how employers can help support and develop young professionals.

Definition of Terms

Purpose. Purpose is a personal and overarching intention to contribute something of value to the world (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon et al., 2003).

Autonomy. In the current study, autonomy is defined as self-endorsed behavior that concurs with, and is an expression of the integrated self (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Autonomous functioning. Autonomous functioning occurs over time and is influenced by both biology and social contexts, some individuals embody autonomy to such an extent that they develop dispositional autonomy, believing they are capable of a self-endorsed life (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This quantitative, non-experimental, correlative research study contributes to the research on purpose and autonomy. This researcher investigated the relationship between purpose and autonomy among 356 traditional undergraduate students at a small private faith-based liberal arts institution. In addition, the study investigated how gender, volunteerism, study abroad, and participation in a faith community influences the likelihood that a student will function autonomously or meet the criteria for purpose.

The study is organized into five chapters, the current chapter introduced the problem and explored the significance of understanding the relationship between purpose and autonomy. Chapter Two provides readers with context for this investigation by reviewing of the relevant literature on purpose and autonomy. The methodology for this study, including data collection and data analysis, is provided in Chapter Three. The results of the study are explained in Chapter Four, and the findings and recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Purpose is available to everyone and provides significant benefits to both the individual and their system. Yet, further research is necessitated about how purpose is constructed and the relationships and environments that can foster the development of purpose. Taking ownership of one's life and functioning with autonomy is a well-researched facet of development, and understanding how these constructs overlap and inform one another provides new insight into how fostering autonomy might also foster purpose. The following chapter offers context for the current study by reviewing the variables, purpose and autonomy (and more specifically autonomous functioning) within academic literature. Purpose and autonomous functioning are developmental constructs that are particularly important during emerging adulthood and both have the potential to influence optimal well-being.

Eudaimonia

Many researchers draw from Aristotle when describing the difference between subjective well-being, known as hedonism, and a deeper sense of flourishing, known as eudaimonia (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Aristotle wrote that pleasure and gratification drive hedonism and that hedonism is a vulgar substitution for eudaimonia (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Rather than focusing on the temporary and subjective outcomes of life, eudaimonic psychology, in contrast to studies on hedonism, is interested in the process of how people move toward optimal well-being - congruence with their authentic, true selves (DeHaan,

Hirai, & Ryan, 2016; Huta, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Waterman, 1993). Eudaimonia is a complex construct because of how Aristotle's words have been translated and interpreted (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan et al., 2008; Ryff & Singer, 2008), but at its essence eudaimonia is about exercising agency to intentionally move toward fulfillment, flourishing, and meaning (Huta, 2013; Wong, 2011).

Two significant constructs within eudaimonic psychology are purpose and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan et al., 2008; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Purpose theorists suggest that many people sense a void, they think they desire hedonism, and consequentially, attempt to progress toward temporary happiness through power, consumerism, or unhealthy coping mechanisms (Bronk, 2014; Frankl, 1985). However, sense of purpose and contributions beyond-the-self are what ultimately fill the void and subsequently lead to both happiness and flourishing (Frankl, 1985; Seligman, 2002). Research indicates that eudaimonia influences the likelihood that individuals will invest in their communities, which in turn positively influences personal well-being (Ryan et al., 2008).

Autonomy theorists believe that individuals are motivated toward self-organization and authenticity (Ryan, 1995). Autonomous individuals experience a deeper sense of well-being (Ryan et al., 2008) resulting in congruence between behavior and values, and a sense of purpose (Ryan, Deci, & Vansteenkiste, 2016). Theorists suggest that the relationship between purpose and autonomy may be

bidirectional; autonomy influences purpose and meaning while purpose and meaning support autonomy (Weinstein et al., 2012b).

Emerging adults

Foundational theorists posited the significance of the development period between adolescence and young adulthood and asserted identity formation is an evolving process, not necessarily clear or precise (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). In response to societal trends and changing experiences of young adults, Arnett (2000) argued for a new developmental period, emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is the liminal space between adolescence and adulthood, the time before the individual embraces the responsibilities and tasks associated with adulthood and after a lifetime of (albeit decreasing) dependence on parents (Arnett, 2000; McAdams, 2014).

Societal shifts in Western and industrialized cultures afford many young people the opportunity to spend more time in between these traditional developmental stages (Arnett, 2015). In particular, globalization and a growing economy have increased the value of and pressure to complete a college education, changes in perspectives have made it socially acceptable to engage in sexual intercourse or live with romantic partners prior to marriage, and medical innovations have created opportunities to delay pregnancies and thus the responsibilities of parenthood (Arnett, 2015).

Long before these shifts or the term emerging adults, developmental theorists suggested the value of an extended pause, a moratorium, to allow for exploration around different facets of one's identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Arnett (2015)

suggested that moratorium allows for the autonomous process of socialization, integrating one's beliefs, values, and goals while navigating new roles and responsibilities within social contexts. Emerging adults "have more freedom to choose their socialization contexts and construct their life course than they did before or will again once they enter the roles and responsibilities of young adulthood" (Arnett, 2015, p. 91). However, not all young people would consider themselves emerging adults, able to embrace the fluid and evolving process to adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Some young people encounter the roles and responsibilities (e.g., marriage or parenthood) at a younger age and thus enter young adulthood before their peers are ready to leave emerging adulthood. Yet, many American college students would identify as emerging adults. Emerging adults tend to question the values, beliefs, and worldviews of their youth and think critically about what they want to internalize and integrate into their lives. College experiences can support emerging adults by affording them opportunities to exercise autonomy in their daily choices and move toward a more autonomous disposition.

Student development theory. Erikson (1968), a predominant developmental theorist, proposed that before adulthood individuals should learn to embrace the purest sense of one's identity by acting with volition (also referred to as autonomy) and exploring purpose. Loevinger (1976) suggested that becoming autonomous is the pathway toward an integrated identity. Progression toward identity achievement is more likely in emerging adulthood than childhood because of the development of formal operational thinking, making complex thinking, attention to inner cognitive

dissonance, and recognition of new and different perspectives possible (Erikson, 1968; Loevinger, 1976; Mclean & Pratt, 2006).

Higher education provides students opportunities to interact with diverse groups of people, and as young people learn to see beyond their own perspectives, they grow in self-awareness and move from conforming to external pressures to living conscientiously (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Loevinger, 1976). Engaging in dialectical thinking helps emerging adults become less concerned with the consequences of opposing external standards and more concerned with their values and concordant goals, shifting toward autonomous functioning and living with purpose (Loevinger, 1976).

Using Loevinger (1976) as a foundation, Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested seven vectors that frame students' development as they individuate and integrate their sense of self. Chickering and Reisser (1993) included autonomy and purpose as developmental aims in their framework. However, researchers have not consistently defined the term autonomy, and it appears that Chickering and Reisser (1993) used the term synonymously with independence instead of self-endorsed behavior. Although the language may be confusing, throughout the theory the authors infer that the overarching goal is for students to internalize values and behave in accordance (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), which aligns well with the definition of autonomy used in this study (Ryan, 1995).

Current researchers appear to support original development focuses, maintaining that emerging adulthood is a pivotal time to engage in a reflective

exploration process aimed at identity development and volition in adulthood (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2014; McAdams, 2014; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Baxter Magolda (2014) conducted a 27-year longitudinal qualitative research project with emerging adults and studied identity development through the process of becoming the author of one's life, referred to as self-authorship. Self-authorship theory asserts that people learn to live according to internal voices, moving from reliance on external pressures to self-navigation (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2014). As young people experience tension in their lives or pressure from external sources, they can choose to narrate their life's journey and design their way forward (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2014). Self-authorship theory posits that a key developmental task for emerging adults is cultivating one's internal voice, constructing a personal narrative, and committing to a story that gives life meaning (McAdams, 2014).

Purpose

Purpose warrants an important place within developmental psychology and aligns well with positive psychology (Damon et al., 2003). Positive psychology asserts that people are driven by more than their desire for safety and security and may take an "offensive rather than defensive posture" (Damon et al., 2003, p. 120) when searching for meaning and purpose. Frankl (1985), one of the first purpose theorists, held the position that "happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue" (p. 162), suggesting that it is purpose, not happiness, that can be sought after. When purpose is attained, happiness will follow. Positive psychology theorists have extended this

premise to suggest that meaning and purpose can lead to authentic happiness and well-being (Damon et al., 2003; Seligman, 2002).

Purpose theory. After imprisoned by Nazis in a World War II death camp, Frankl (1985) offered the field of psychology a new perspective. Deviating from contemporaries, Freud and Alder, Frankl (1985) suggested that the primary human motivation is "fulfilling a meaning, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts, or in merely reconciling the conflicting claims of id, ego, and superego, or in the mere adaptation and adjustment to society and environment" (pp.125-126). While caring for fellow concentration camp prisoners, Frankl noticed the power of purpose, even in the face of significant suffering or death. Frankl suggested that it is the human's perspective on life that really matters; each person must come to understand that life expects something from them, and these life tasks give life meaning. Frankl borrowed a Nietzsche quote to reframe adversity and resiliency, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how"* (Frankl, 1985, p. 101). Frankl contended that if choosing to live with purpose made a difference to the men in World War II labor camps, exploring and committing to a life meaning had the potential to be beneficial in any environment.

Frankl (1985) asserted that the underlying drive in life is the search for meaning: "a human being is not one in pursuit of happiness but rather in search of a reason to become happy, last but not least, through actualizing the potential meaning inherent and dormant in a given situation" (p. 162). When thwarted, this search for meaning can lead to existential distress, but when fully satisfied offers happiness and

resiliency in the face of suffering. In the 1960s, scholars designed the Purpose in Life test in conjunction with Frankl (Crumbaugh, 1968), and as a result, empirical research on purpose began to increase (Bronk, 2014). However, after a decade, researchers moved on to investigating other constructs and did not return to purpose until after positive psychologists suggested studying the benefits of purpose as opposed to the consequences of purpose deficit (Bronk, 2014).

Historically, psychologists studied pathology, but more recently, positive psychologists have claimed the value of understanding positive growth and development, thus focusing their research on health and well-being (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). They consider purpose and meaning components of thriving (optimal development) and flourishing (positive experiences and feelings about life) (Duckworth et al., 2005; Joseph, Yeager, King, & Damon, 2010).

Seligman (2002) extended Frankl's (1985) work by suggesting that meaning is one of three dimensions that influence an authentically happy life (as opposed to hedonism and the fleeting experience of happiness) (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Seligman, 2002; Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Seligman has received some criticism for suggesting subjective positive feelings as a pathway toward thriving and flourishing (Teschers, 2015). However, Seligman's body of work emphasizes the importance of a life of meaning and engagement beyond oneself for the sake of contributing to society, which leads to the experience of happiness (Duckworth et al., 2005; Seligman, 2002). When we serve others, our life has

meaning (Seligman et al., 2004). Wong (2011) warned about linking meaning and happiness too tightly, "the construct of meaning is much broader and richer. It is much more than being an antecedent or outcome measure of happiness" (p. 69). While purpose may contribute to positive affect, more importantly it may lead to a richer expression of the self and meaningful change in the world (Damon, 2009).

Defining purpose. Understanding purpose is challenging because the definition is not widely agreed upon within academic literature and authors often use it synonymously with meaning (Damon et al., 2003; Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). For instance, even though Frankl (1985) used both terms, it does not appear a distinction was made between the concepts. Currently, thinking of meaning as a broader concept about personal significance is becoming more common; many experiences can give life meaning and help people make sense of their lives, having a sense of purpose is one of them (Bronk, 2014; Bronk & Dubon, 2015; Claremont Graduate University, 2018; Weinstein et al., 2012b). To try to provide structure to the purpose construct, Damon et al. (2003) offered the following definition, "[p]urpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (p. 121). Within this definition, there are three dimensions of purpose, a goal orientation, a sense of meaning, and a beyond-the-self focus (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon, 2003) .

Purpose provides direction, thus not any goal will qualify as a purpose goal (Mcknight & Kashdan, 2009). The purpose goal must be significant and relatively stable because a purpose goal provides the overarching framework from which all

other objectives and action steps arise (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Damon et al., 2003; Mcknight & Kashdan, 2009). Motivation for the goal must be intrinsic and provide personal inspiration (Claremont Graduate University, 2018) therefore, making progress toward the goal provides a sense of meaning (Mcknight & Kashdan, 2009). However, purpose goals do not just provide personal meaning; they also contribute something of value to the external world (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Damon et al., 2003; Frankl, 1985). Moran (2009) argued that being able to understand one's place within systems is necessary and significant in purpose formation:

> Purpose includes recognizing that one's intentions and actions matter to others because people are interconnected in groups and communities. Those gifted individuals who realize – emotionally, cognitively and actively – that they are part of other individuals' "environments" of supports and challenges can better steer themselves toward a more positive aspiration for all. (p.156)

However, worth noting is that the meaningful contribution to the world facet of purpose is subjective (Damon et al., 2003). For purpose, what matters is that the individual is motivated by the potential contribution regardless of whether it would be considered moral by society (Damon et al., 2003). To assist in differentiating between the neutrality of purpose, Damon (2003) offered the term *noble purpose* to refer to purposeful goals that are honorable and moral.

General benefits of purpose. Having a sense of purpose and the resulting benefits are available for everyone, regardless of life circumstances (Damon, 2009;

Frankl, 1985). The benefits of purpose have been researched and supported across the world, in both Western and Eastern countries (Bronk, 2014) and across the lifespan (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992).

Many researchers have sought to emphasize the value of purpose by investigating its relationship with subjective well-being, supporting Frankl's (1985) claim, when meaning and purpose are present, happiness is likely to follow. Across the lifespan, people with a sense of purpose are more likely to be satisfied with their lives (Bronk et al., 2009). Adults with a sense of purpose report more emotions that are positive (Hill et al., 2018; Ryff, Singer, & Dienberg Love, 2004; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) and experience more contentment and self-esteem (Bigler, 2001).

People with a sense of purpose experience fewer negative emotions (Hill et al., 2018; Ryff et al., 2004) and are less likely to experience depression, anxiety (Bigler, 2001), or boredom (Fahlman, Mercer, Gaskovski, Eastwood, & Eastwood, 2009). Bronk (2014) contended that while having a purpose may lead to temporary stress, purpose is more likely to increase healthy coping, social support, and decrease overall stress. In addition, what appears as stress-invoking may not be perceived as stressful if the potential stressor aligns with purpose; unlike stressors that are perceived as purposeless, which can induce stress (Bronk, 2014).

In several studies, researchers suggested a relationship between purpose and mental health (Bronk, 2014; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). Increasing sense of meaning appears to support individuals who are seeking treatment for drug addiction (Noblejas de, 1997). Among recently admitted psychiatric patients, researchers found

that even after accounting for depression, neuroticism, and social hopelessness, purpose and life satisfaction were protective against suicidal ideation (Heisel & Flett, 2004). According to Heisel and Flett (2004), the stronger correlation between purpose and suicidal ideation mediated the relationship between suicidal ideation and life satisfaction, and they suggested this finding as further evidence to support Frankl's theory about the significant value of purpose.

Beyond subjective well-being, individuals who reported a sense of purpose, experienced physical health benefits (Hill et al., 2018; Ryff et al., 2004) and data suggested these individuals live longer (Boyle et al., 2009; Hill & Turiano, 2014; Krause, 2009). Further, in one study, the negative correlation between purpose and mortality remained significant even when accounting for negative symptoms, disability, neuroticism, chronic medical conditions, and income (Boyle et al., 2009).

Purpose and young people. Positive psychology has influenced developmental theorists who have encouraged a more optimistic view of youth development, focusing on strengths instead of deficits (Damon et al., 2003; Joseph et al., 2010). Fry (1998) posited that adolescents have an internal drive to move toward identity development, autonomy, and purpose. However, recently scholars have suggested that while identity development may begin in adolescence (Erikson, 1968), purpose develops throughout, and even after, emerging adulthood (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017).

Bronk (2014) wrote that identity formation is the process of defining oneself, which overlaps but is separate from purpose commitment, the process of deciding

what to do with one's life. In a six-year longitudinal study of 200 young people, researchers collected narratives at ages 17, 19, and 23 and found that when identity exploration began at the age of 19, the young person was more likely to discuss meaning in their narrative by the age of 23 (Mclean & Pratt, 2006). Identity development supports life values, the construction of purpose, and progress toward a self-determined life (Bronk, 2014). However, not only does identity development support purpose (Côté, 2002), but purpose also supports identity commitments (Burrow & Hill, 2011). Hill et al. (2016) reported the predictive nature of sense of purpose on the successful individuation process during emerging adulthood.

How to foster purpose. Childhood experiences influence purpose development (Bronk, 2012). Yet, scholars are still trying to understand exactly how to foster purpose (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Claremont Graduate University, 2018; Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). Even though more remains to be learned, themes throughout the literature provide insight into how parents, mentors, and educators can enhance the development of purpose.

Bronk (2012) followed nine exemplar adolescents with noble purposes over five years and found that personal perspective appeared to influence commitment to purpose; enjoyment, persistence, resilience, awareness of potential contributions, and sense of meaningfulness all enhanced the development of youth purpose. Similarly, Damon (2003) found that purpose commitment requires a purpose that is "absorbing, challenging, and compelling" (p. 67). Beyond these personal perspectives, support from others appears to be of utmost importance (Bronk, 2012; Damon, 2009).

Throughout adolescence and emerging adulthood, parents can provide their child with increasing opportunities to explore, take ownership of their lives, and make meaning in the midst of difficult questions, uncertainties, and doubts (Arnett, 2000; Fry, 1998). Emerging adults who report a sense of purpose also report more positive relationships with their parents, even when controlling for personality traits (i.e., extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness) (Hill et al., 2016). Parents play a pivotal role in helping young people explore and commit to purpose,

> A parent can help a child sort through choices and reflect upon how the child's talents and interests match up with the world's opportunities and needs. A parent can support a child's own efforts to explore purposeful directions, and open up more potential sources of discovery about possible purposes. These are supporting roles rather than leading ones, because center stage in this drama belongs to the child. But while the most effective assistance parents can provide is indirect, it is also invaluable. (Damon, 2009, p. 131)

Many parents find the supportive role counterintuitive and try directing their child's development of purpose, not realizing the invitation to encounter new experiences may be more advantageous (Damon, 2009; Lythcott-Haims, 2015).

In addition to parent support, researchers have found that mentors and peers are also instrumental in the development of purpose (Bronk, 2012; Damon, 2009; Fry, 1998; Glanzer et al., 2017). Nurturing parents, tutors, and mentors help young people

increase their courage to grow in self-awareness and self-reflection, allowing new perspectives to emerge (Fry, 1998). In particular, college students benefit when they are able to engage with peers and mentors in meaningful dialogue that is both honoring to their self-discovering process and accepting of new values and beliefs (Glanzer et al., 2017).

Educators can support young people's development of purpose by helping them set goals, clarify their values, and foster gratitude (Bronk & Dubon, 2015). Institutions of higher education can provide co-curricular service projects that expose students to new ways of contributing to society (Braskamp et al., 2008; Erikson, 1968; Malin, Ballard, & Damon, 2015). Although more research is needed on how university administrators and faculty members can most effectively promote purpose exploration and commitment (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017), purpose development needs to be prioritized and embedded within institutional mission statements (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Glanzer et al., 2017).

Benefits of purpose and youth. Spontaneously discovering purpose might be appealing to youth, but taking steps and making progress toward purpose is essential in the development of purpose (Damon, 2009). When researchers differentiated between purpose exploration and purpose commitment, college students who reported purpose exploration experienced lower levels of subjective well-being than students who reported a commitment to a sense of purpose (Burrow, Anthony, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010; Sumner et al., 2015). Further, Bronk et al. (2009) found that while identifying purpose is associated with life satisfaction across the

lifespan, only during adolescence and emerging adulthood is purpose exploration associated with life satisfaction. Perhaps the seemingly contradictory findings can be understood within the framework of emerging adulthood and developmental theory, which suggest that although identity exploration can be stress-inducing, this moratorium on making commitments to identity (Marcia, 1966) is socially acceptable (Arnett, 2000). College student participation in intentional exploration of purpose programs was associated with life satisfaction, perhaps any challenges of navigating purpose were moderated by the support and encouragement students received from intentional college initiatives (Clydesdale, 2015). In addition to supportive relationships, grit (Duckworth et al., 2007) and resilience (Bronk, 2012) support movement from purpose exploration to purpose commitment.

Although research on sense of purpose and young people is not extensive (Damon et al., 2003), youth purpose is associated with higher self-esteem, achievement (Damon et al., 2003), positive emotions, hope, happiness (Burrow & Hill, 2011), and higher well-being (Byron & Miller-Perrin, 2009). In youth, life purpose is positively related to grit, approaching long-term goals with perseverance and passion, which is positively associated with higher GPAs, higher completed levels of education, and career stability (Duckworth et al., 2007; Hill et al., 2016). Undergraduate students who reported a higher sense of purpose were also more likely to have a higher sense of perceived self-efficacy in college (DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009). Not surprising, high levels of boredom in undergraduate students was predictive of a low sense of meaning and vice versa (Fahlman et al., 2009). A

bidirectional relationship appears to exist between experiencing a sense of meaning and boredom, when students were able to shift one construct, the other was influenced (Fahlman et al., 2009).

In and outside of the classroom, students are exploring various aspects of identity, including spirituality and faith. In one study, researchers found that although a strong faith appeared to influence students' perceived wellness (i.e., six-dimension measure of well-being: psychological, emotional, social, physical, spiritual, intellectual), it was actually the student's sense of purpose, which was fostered by his or her faith, that in turn influenced well-being (Byron & Miller-Perrin, 2009). These results are similar to an earlier study of undergraduate students in which the data suggested that purpose mediated the relationship between religiosity and happiness (French & Joseph, 1999). The mediating role of purpose between faith and well-being is another example of the interconnected nature of purpose and identity.

Identity development in emerging adulthood can be challenging (Arnett, 2000); however, having a sense of purpose appears to have a mitigating effect on unhealthy coping such as drug use (Newcomb & Harlow, 1986; Noblejas de, 1997). In an eight-year longitudinal study, researchers followed high school students into their early twenties and found that in response to psychological distress, the young person's perceived loss of control and resulting sense of meaninglessness were influential in the choice to use drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism (Newcomb & Harlow, 1986). In a second study that appeared to support the inverse relationship

between purpose and drug use, researchers found that a decreased sense of meaning contributed to drug problems (Noblejas de, 1997).

In addition to mitigating the effects of unhealthy coping mechanisms and increasing psychological and educational benefits, youth purpose is also correlated with prosocial behavior (Damon et al., 2003). Researchers surveyed 2,972 youth between the ages of 11 and 19 in Hong Kong and found that having a sense of purpose was correlated with increased prosocial behavior and decreased antisocial behavior (Shek, Ma, & Cheung, 1994). More specifically, having a purpose with goals appeared to be more important to supporting prosocial behavior and determining antisocial behavior than having a general sense of life meaning or satisfaction. In Greece, when young people responded to economic adversity with a purpose aimed at contributing, they had reported higher levels of competence, resilience, optimism, and hope (Bronk, Leontopoulou, & McConchie, 2019). In response to these prosocial benefits of purpose, Bronk (2012) concluded that "a noble purpose in life serves as a beacon guiding youth through the potentially turbulent waters of the adolescent and emerging adult stages of life" (p. 105). Making sense of self is an important part of identity development (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968), but successfully navigating one's place as a global and communal citizen requires purpose.

Self-Determination Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory focuses on understanding and explaining human behavior and motivation and posits that individuals need to experience autonomy,

competence, and relatedness. When these needs are met, individuals are more likely to experience flourishing and thriving (Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2017). In particular, when basic psychological needs are satisfied, theorists suggest that individuals will be more likely to experience a sense of purpose, which in turn satisfies the basic psychological needs (Weinstein et al., 2012b).

Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory aligns with positive psychology as theorists for self-determination theory are interested in understanding optimal human functioning, which is held in common with positive psychology as was previously defined. In particular, self-determination theorists are concerned with psychological well-being and eudaimonia, which leads to flourishing and thriving (DeHaan et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2017; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Theorists use the term self-determined to refer to "behaviors that emanate from one's true self" (Deci & Ryan, 1995, p. 35). When individuals are self-determined they experience psychological well-being (Ryan et al., 2008), more self-concordant behavior, and a deeper sense of purpose (Ryan et al., 2016).

Self-determination theory assumes that humans have the propensity to experience eudaimonia and can do so when supported by a social environment that facilitate the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs, autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-determination theorists have been critiqued for being too idealistic, but Ryan and Deci (2000a), the leading scholars on self-determination theory, responded to such criticism noting that their theory does not ignore distress and despair, but the focus remains on growth to

resolve conflict by progressing toward a more authentic life. More specifically, need satisfaction facilitates growth, integrity, and well-being, whereas the thwarting of autonomy, relatedness, and competence "will lead to observable decrements in growth, integrity, and wellness, irrespective of whether they [the basic psychological needs] are valued by the individuals or their cultures" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 10). Fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances eudaimonia.

Outcomes of self-determination theory. As prerequisites for optimal development, autonomy, competence, and relatedness support well-being by fostering intrinsic motivation, vitality, and integration (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Intrinsic motivation, the drive from an internal perceived locus of causality, facilitates self-endorsed and self-determined behavior (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ryan and Deci (2017) wrote that vitality, the "energy available to the self" (p. 256), empowers life ownership and encourages growth. Finally, integration is the outcome of internalizing motivations to such an extent that the true self experiences coherence and congruence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Integration is necessary for eudaimonia (Ryan et al., 2008).

Internalization is essential to the integration process and begins with assimilating (adapting as necessary) and accepting external social practices or values (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001). This process of taking ownership of what was once external is a vital step toward self-congruent living. Self-determined individuals also integrate their emotions through acknowledgement, synthesis, and self-regulation (Ryan, 1995). Essentially, integration is the process of

becoming one's truest self and "develops as one acts volitionally (i.e., autonomously), experiences an inner sense of efficacy (i.e., competence), and is loved (i.e., feels related to) for who one is rather than matching some external standard" (Deci & Ryan, 1995 p. 33). Integration leads to behavioral effectiveness and optimal functioning, and while all of the psychological needs support internalization and integration, autonomy (the self-endorsement of values, practices, and emotions) is vital to the process (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Psychological basic need theory. Psychological basic need theory is a mini-theory within the self-determination framework, which posits that humans have three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-determination theorists use the word *need* to emphasize the universal, essential, and innate nature of these components (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In contrast to fellow well-being researchers who identify that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are aspects or dimensions of wellbeing (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), self-determination theorists posit that these innate *needs* are necessary antecedents, which facilitate well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001).

For a psychological factor to be a need the factor must be measurable, with clear actionable steps, and relevant within all cultures (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). Although people might desire psychological need satisfaction, the individual or cultural preference for (or against) autonomy, relatedness, or connectedness is inconsequential (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is need *satisfaction*, regardless of whether or not the need is valued, that enhances well-being.

To be a basic need, the psychological factor must focus on growth and development (not simply the result of absolving deficits), and when satisfied, the results must be positive; conversely, when thwarted, negative consequences must result (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017; Sheldon et al., 2001). Empirical evidence supported this theoretical criterion: participant need satisfaction across cultures (Belgium, China, USA, and Peru) was predictive of well-being (i.e., life-satisfaction and vitality) and need thwarting was predictive of ill-being (i.e., depressive symptoms) (Chen et al., 2015).

Through empirical research and in cross-cultural settings, self-determination theorists have considered other needs, but the qualifying criteria are rigid (Sheldon et al., 2001). Early on, the data supported self-esteem and security as possible needs, but researchers excluded them because they primarily resolve tension and do not enhance growth and development (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017; Sheldon et al., 2001). The evidence supports three basic needs, relatedness (the sense of connection and belonging and the experience of giving and receiving care), competence (the feeling of efficacy and of being effective when engaging skills and completing tasks), and autonomy (personal endorsement of one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, the sense of ownership and self-determinedness regarding life) (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Within humanity, individual differences exist with regard to the amount of relatedness, competence, or autonomy necessary for satisfaction; however, the theory is primarily concerned with whether or not the needs are fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2017). The data also supports that there is value in having balance of need

satisfaction. When basic needs are satisfied individuals experience higher life satisfaction (Mackenzie, Karaoylas, & Starzyk, 2018; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006; Sheldon, Abad, & Omoile, 2009), fewer negative emotions (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000), fewer negative physical symptoms (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000), more positive emotions (Reis et al., 2000; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006), and higher well-being (Reis et al., 2000; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006). Further, researchers recently reported that when basic needs are met, people are also more likely to experience purpose (Mackenzie et al., 2018)

Autonomy. Although theorists believe the basic psychological needs are interdependent and that satisfaction or thwarting of one will influence the others, they suggest that autonomy supportive social environments are instrumental in fostering all three basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A controlling environment will not only negatively influence autonomy but will also stifle relatedness and competence, and in this way, autonomy appears to be first among equals (Ryan & Deci, 2017). At times, self-determination theorists have referred to autonomy as self-organization, authenticity, volition, self-governance, or behavior that is congruent with beliefs (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The opposite of autonomy is heteronomy, feeling controlled and acting from a place, external or internal, outside of alignment with self (Ryan & Deci, 2006). In the current study, autonomy is defined as self-endorsed behavior that concurs with, and is an expression of the integrated self (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2017).

Critique of autonomy. Important to note is that the construct of autonomy has been criticized from within and outside of the self-determination framework; this

paper will focus on the most relevant criticisms, that autonomy is a gendered construct and not relevant within collectivist cultures (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Early developmental theorists primarily studied males, and in response Gilligan (1982) wrote that the prevalence of independent and individualistic values represented in developmental tasks were not generalizable to females (Ryan & Deci, 2006, 2017).

Similarly, some critics have argued that autonomy is not relevant in cultures that value inter-connectedness over independence. Throughout academic literature, autonomy can be used synonymously with independence and has been critiqued for being a gendered or individualistic construct (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, self-determination theorists argued for a distinction between the terms, autonomy does not infer independence or individualism (Ryan & Deci, 2006, 2017). They suggested that while autonomy may lead to acting independently, it is possible to function autonomously and consent to acting interdependently or dependently (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Further, self-determination theory's conceptualization of autonomy supports, rather than opposes, relational connection; relatedness is an essential human psychological need – both autonomy and relatedness are relevant in all cultures (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Research conducted in cross-cultural settings confirms the universality of basic psychological needs. When researchers surveyed adults in the United States of America and India, basic need satisfaction and vitality were highly positively correlated (DeHaan et al., 2016). In Nigeria and India, perceived autonomy-support and basic need satisfaction were predictive of both academic success and general life-

satisfaction; the researchers suggest that their findings, along with previous studies, support the belief that autonomy, as defined by self-determination theory, "may indeed be important for all people, regardless of their age and cultural origin" (Sheldon et al., 2009, p. 457). These studies are examples to support Ryan and Deci's (2006) claim that upon their review of the research, autonomy is a universal need and evident across cultures.

Benefits of autonomy. When people feel autonomous they are more likely to have energy and move wholeheartedly toward their goals regardless of the environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In distressing situations, although gender and culture may influence the willingness or the degree to which one turns to others for support, across gender and culture autonomously choosing to turn to others for support is beneficial to well-being and mental hygiene (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005).

College students reported better days when their need for autonomy was satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Students are also more likely to experience commitment to their degree completion and to their institution when they have their basic needs satisfied (Davidson & Beck, 2019). In a series of studies, researchers conducted experiments with undergraduate students to understand how choice influences ego-depletion, the expenditure of energy resulting in temporary but limited capacity for autonomous functioning (Moller, Deci, & Ryan, 2006). After giving students various degrees of choice regarding speaking or cognitive experiences, researchers found that when students feel pressured, coerced, or seduced they are

more likely to experience ego-depletion than when they feel volition and are able to make their choice free of pressure (Moller et al., 2006). Emerging adults in Belgium were more likely to experience well-being (i.e., satisfaction with life, vitality, and fewer distress and depressive symptoms) when they were able to exercise volition regarding their housing situation (i.e., it mattered less if they lived independently or with their parents, and more if they felt they were able to function autonomously when making the choice about where to live) (Kins, Beyers, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2009).

In romantic relationships, feeling autonomous is associated with happiness and adaptability (Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990), and feeling less defensive and more understanding during conflict, which results in more relational satisfaction (Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005). Research also suggests that when one partner is functioning autonomously, the partner experiences positive outcomes (Knee et al., 2005).

Autonomy supportive environments. Basic psychological need theory suggests that social environments can either support or thwart need satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In particular, autonomy supportive cultures not only facilitate autonomy but also promote relatedness and competence. Instead of controlling, manipulating, or pressuring an individual, supportive environments honor the autonomy of the individual, consider his or her perspective and offer personal choice (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

Self-determination theorists have proposed that extrinsic motivation is dangerous to optimal functioning and can lead to a misalignment of behaviors and values resulting in a lack of authenticity (Ryan & Deci, 2006). In a meta-analysis of 128 studies, researchers studied the value of autonomy supportive environments and the potential detriment of controlling environments on children and college students (Deci et al., 1999). Researchers found that tangible rewards, regardless of outcome, encourage extrinsic motivation. Social systems that used rewards were controlling and included tactics like surveillance, evaluation, and competition to motivate young people - all of which negatively affected intrinsic motivation, personal responsibility, persistence, performance, and well-being. In education, extrinsic rewards may include grades, consequences, and public praise (Ryan & Deci, 2006). In families, extrinsic motivation stems from parental conditional regard for the child and the withholding of love or affection. In these types of controlling social settings, individuals struggle more with self-esteem, shame, feelings of rejection, intrinsic motivation, and integration (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

Autonomy supportive environments using positive feedback instead of external rewards fostered increased introspection and self-governed choice (Deci et al., 1999). In one study, researchers investigated the relationship between supportive environments and identity integration, particularly attending to identities that may cause internal conflict (Weinstein, Legate, Ryan, Sedikides, & Cozzolino, 2017) . When asked by researchers to reflect on the identity that causes the most tension in their lives, participants reported more acceptance of, ownership of, and integration

with the conflictual identity when they experienced autonomy supportive environments; in response, researchers suggested that autonomy support could be important for psychological health and well-being (Weinstein et al., 2017).

As children transition to college, autonomy-supportive parenting can be beneficial to emerging adulthood experiences (Cullaty, 2011; Niemiec et al., 2006). Parental autonomy support influences the young adults' ability to function autonomously in emerging adulthood, which was correlated with higher well-being (Kins et al., 2009). In a grounded theory study, Cullaty (2011) interviewed and analyzed journal reflections of 18 undergraduate students and found that when parents transitioned their approach and treated their college children as adults, relinquished control, and encouraged responsibility and choice students were more likely to develop as autonomous persons.

In one study among undergraduate students at a Midwestern university, researchers found that autonomy supportive parenting could be particularly important for women (Pedersen, 2017). Female college students with autonomy supportive parents were more likely to be satisfied with their college experience than female students with more controlling parents, this finding was not consistent for male students. However, across gender, college students with autonomy supportive parents are less likely to worry about their college experience or feel guilty about doing well in school (Greene et al., 2019) and report higher levels of perceived competence (Reed et al., 2016).

Autonomy supportive environments can also enhance the student experience in higher education. To support autonomy, educators can "promot[e] diverse assignment topics and encourag[e] debates to promote feelings of structured autonomy…so [students] are able to exercise their capacity for choice while maintaining the necessary learning requirements" (Goldman & Brann, 2016, p. 13). When students experience autonomy support while in college, they are more likely to create goals representative of who they are and what they value and experience goal satisfaction and persistence (Koestner, Powers, Milyavskaya, Carbonneau, & Hope, 2015).

In a three-year longitudinal study, researchers found that when law students experienced their instructors as autonomy supportive (e.g., providing choices, acknowledging feelings, and accommodating preferences), they experienced more need satisfaction (Sheldon & Krieger, 2007). As a result of having their basic needs satisfied, students reported higher well-being (i.e., higher positive affect and satisfaction with life), received higher grades during school, and, upon graduation, the students had better bar exam results and higher motivation for their job search (Sheldon & Krieger, 2007).

Autonomy orientation. Although contested, autonomy is a complex construct with multiple aspects – theorists have suggested that autonomy is both a need and a disposition (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Central to the psychological basic need theory within the self-determination framework is the premise that autonomy refers to

a basic psychological need (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and over time need satisfaction may influence temperament (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

A second and connected mini theory within the self-determination framework is the causality orientations theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which suggests that as a result of social contexts satisfying or frustrating needs, people learn to orient themselves to their environments (Ryan & Deci, 2006, 2017). Unlike psychological basic need theory, causality orientations go beyond having needs met within specific contexts and are more broadly focused on the person's disposition across various contexts or times (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The culminating effect of environment and personality influence self-determined motivations to such an extent that individuals employ different levels of autonomous motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Individuals high in autonomous motivation orient themselves toward their internal and external environments and possible choices with a sense of curiosity, theorists refer to these individuals as *interest-taking* (Ryan & Deci, 2006, 2017). Interest-takers tend to view themselves as self-regulated (Deci & Ryan, 1985), operate with a sense of volition (Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2012), and function optimally (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In emphasizing the value of this motivational disposition, Ryan and Deci (2017) wrote:

> The autonomy orientation is the causality orientation most associated with positive motivation, health, and wellness outcomes. When so oriented, people have the vitality and vigor associated with intrinsic motivation and are more

> ready to act in accordance with integrated values and interests. A strong autonomy orientation reflects their success in satisfying the three basic psychological needs. (p. 218)

Further, individuals' autonomous orientation will influence how they perceive social contexts and may account for why individuals may experience the same environment in different ways, autonomy supportive for some and controlling for others (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

People with an autonomous orientation are more likely to view themselves as self-determined, capable of acting in a self-organized manner, regardless of circumstance. In two different studies, researchers found that individuals with dispositional autonomy were more likely to report basic need satisfaction (Weinstein et al., 2012a) indicating a possible bidirectional relationship between the psychological need for autonomy and the development of autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). People with high autonomy encounter new environments expecting to exert their volition (Weinstein et al., 2012a), which may be why basic need satisfaction for autonomy, relatedness, and competence increases.

Originally, researchers designed vignettes to measure causality orientations, and found that autonomous orientation was correlated with positive sense of self, ego development, and self-actualization (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In one study, researchers exposed undergraduate participants to a film depicting distressing images from World War II and found that students with an autonomy orientation more effectively processed their negative emotions and self-regulated their emotions, resulting in

higher well-being and energy (Weinstein & Hodgins, 2009). In another study among volunteers at an animal shelter, a researcher found that an autonomous disposition was more significantly related to prosocial engagement than the presence of autonomy support (Gagné, 2003). The researcher found similar results in college students, an autonomous orientation was more strongly associated with prosocial behavior (i.e., volunteering, making monetary and clothing donations, voting, signing petitions, recycling, participating in food drives, donating blood, activism, helping in emergencies) than autonomy supportive parents was related to these prosocial engagements. An autonomous disposition supports integration and the embodiment of one's true-self, and researchers hypothesize that this experience allows for more openness for growth and development (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Weinstein & Hodgins, 2009).

Autonomous functioning. Weinstein et al. (2012a) referred to dispositional autonomy as autonomous functioning and suggested three dimensions: authorship/ self-congruence, interest-taking, and a low susceptibility to control. People who function autonomously feel as though they are authoring their lives instead of someone else writing their narrative, they live with self-congruence and alignment between their values and beliefs (Ryan et al., 2008; Weinstein et al., 2012a). Individuals with an autonomous orientation are reflective, becoming more aware of their emotions, interests, values, and experiences, and use this knowledge and insight to guide their self-determined goals (Ryan et al., 2008; Weinstein et al., 2012a). Finally, dispositional autonomy is negatively correlated with susceptibility to control

because behavior derives from the integrated self rather than responding to internal or external pressure (Weinstein et al., 2012a).

Autonomous functioning is correlated with many factors that influence health and well-being (Weinstein et al., 2012a). Researchers found that adults with high autonomous disposition were more likely to experience daily need satisfaction and higher levels of daily well-being (measured by vitality, positive affect, lower levels of perceived stress, and lower levels of negative affect) (Weinstein et al., 2012a). Weinstein et al. (2012a) also found that among college students, dispositional autonomy was positively correlated with curiosity, self-awareness, mindful attention, positive affect, self-esteem, vitality, life satisfaction, sense of life meaning, and personal growth. In these same students, autonomous functioning was negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, negative affect, and contingent self-esteem, self-esteem not rooted in the true-self. In addition, the students repeated the surveys six-months later reporting similar results, indicating the stability of the autonomous trait and consistency of the associated well-being indicators.

Further, college students with high levels of autonomous functioning reported that in interpersonal relationships they experienced more closeness, more openness (to experiencing closeness to people different from them), and increased happiness and life meaning following the interactions (Weinstein et al., 2012a). In a follow-up study, researchers invited students to participate in a collaborative project and found that when university students were functioning autonomously, they were more likely to engage in a prosocial manner, expressing empathy, engaging in the relationship,

and acknowledging the partner's strengths and contributions (Weinstein et al., 2012a). This research indicates that individual autonomy can benefit others and the findings are consistent with a study that investigated the influence of personal autonomy on group dynamics. Researchers found that individuals high in autonomy were beneficial to the health of the group by engaging in thoughtful reflection on past negative experiences and promoting collective empathy, guilt, integration, and unconditional positive regard (Legault et al., 2017). In close relationships, partners who are autonomously motivated are perceived as autonomy supportive (Weinstein, Rodriguez, Knee, & Kumashiro, 2016)

Student development theory and autonomy. Self-determination theory, while not widely referenced in college student development, shares many themes with predominant student development theories which emphasize the process of developing autonomy and moving toward integration. Even though different conceptualizations of autonomy can frustrate intellectual dialogue, student development theorists value the essence of self-authorship theory's autonomy construct. Chickering and Reisser (1993) proposed that students will become more self-organized, interdependent, purposive, and integrated. Self-authorship theory posits that emerging adults will exercise personal agency, learn to narrate their life stories, make meaning, and find purpose (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2005). Self-determination theory appears to provide parallel conceptualizations and encompassing language that may be useful when considering the developmental journey college students take toward autonomy and

integration. The literature supports a connection between autonomy and purpose in emerging adulthood, but a closer examination of the relationship is warranted.

Relationship between Purpose and Autonomy

Perspectives vary on how to conceive of the relationship between purpose and autonomy. Scholars have suggested that purpose and autonomy are both dimensions of eudaimonic well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In response, theorists have argued that autonomy is an antecedent of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001), which facilitates meaning (Weinstein et al., 2012b). While well-being is often associated with purpose, one can be purposive without experiencing well-being (Damon et al., 2003; Weinstein et al., 2012b), yet some researcher hypothesized that purposes supporting basic psychological needs are more likely to support well-being (Weinstein et al., 2012b). Nevertheless, both autonomy and purpose are associated with factors of wellbeing.

Lifespan theorists have suggested that purpose and autonomy are both dimensions of optimal development and are fostered during adolescence, emerging adulthood, and young adulthood. Perhaps purpose and identity are separate but interconnected developmental aims (Bronk, 2014; Burrow & Hill, 2011; Hill et al., 2016; Mclean & Pratt, 2006). Both processes tend to be enhanced by supportive communities and self-exploration (Damon, 2009; Fry, 1998). Some authors contend that it is the sense of volition experienced by an autonomous individual that supports purpose and meaning exploration (Fry, 1998; Weinstein et al., 2012b). Many scholars discuss becoming autonomous as part of optimal development, so to note

that researchers have found that purpose promotes identity development is useful (Burrow et al., 2010). Recently researchers have posited that because identity and purpose are both bolstered by self-exploration (Damon, 2009; Fry, 1998), perhaps rather than distinct factors they are parts of the same process (Sumner et al., 2015, p. 50).

Purpose and autonomy influence one another throughout the lifespan. Frankl (1985) believed that humans are full of potential and "self-determined" (p. 157); life meaning is determined by personal choice not environment. Further, Frankl (1985) suggested that purpose is human's "primary motivational force" (p. 121) and when we serve and contribute to something greater than ourselves, we are able to fully embrace ourselves. Functioning autonomously means living in accordance with one's true-self, perhaps manifested by purpose: "When a purpose is fully formed, it reflects both the genuine aspirations of the self and the practical needs of the world beyond the self" (Damon, 2009, p. 161). Purpose provides clarity and direction so the autonomously functioning person can continue to live a self-determined life (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Mcknight & Kashdan, 2009). Whether purpose and autonomy are separate constructs or closely linked in a bidirectional relationship, in an attempt to better understand how to foster purpose, understanding the specifics of how they are associated is worthwhile.

Demographic Variables

Purpose and autonomy are both influenced by environmental contexts and social supports. To better understand the relationship between purpose and autonomy,

it is useful to consider how different life experiences may influence each construct. In the current study, gender, volunteerism, study abroad experiences, and participation in a faith community, were all investigated to determine how they may support sense of purpose and autonomous functioning.

Gender. While the research on volunteering, study abroad experiences, and faith communities provide rationale for potential relationships to purpose and autonomy, the research on gender differences is not as clear. Several researchers have identified that no difference exists between gender and sense of purpose (Meier & Edwards, 1974; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987). Among Chinese young adults, women reported a higher sense of purpose than men (Wu, Lei, & Ku, 2013) and Spanish women reported higher levels of vital goals and purpose than men (García-Alandete, 2014). One researcher compiled the results of purpose research using the Purpose in Life scale between 1964 and 2011: nine studies found no significant difference between gender and purpose, five studies found that women scored significantly higher than men, and four studies found men scored significantly higher than women (García-Alandete, 2014). It should be noted that the Purpose In Life scale does not include the beyond-the-self dimension. College women in the United States are more likely to report higher levels of Ethic of Care and charitable engagement (Astin et al., 2011a), which may influence the likelihood that there will be a significant difference between gender and purpose when purpose is operationalized to include contribution beyond oneself.

In some reports, women have reported a higher sense of locus of control (a construct similar to autonomy that measures sense of life control), but some authors suggest this might be due to response bias (Reker et al., 1987). Self-determination theory posits the universality of the need of autonomy (across culture and gender) and the importance of social environment in supporting that need (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, it is likely that the social context will influence whether or not there is a significant difference between autonomy and gender.

Limited empirical data exists to support a significant difference between autonomy and gender among emerging adults. Although college men and women report experiencing similar amounts of helicopter parenting, women who experience maternal helicopter parenting report a more significant decrease in their sense of autonomy (Schiffrin et al., 2019). Although helicopter parenting is certainly a concern for autonomy development, the social context of higher education is influenced by a gender gap (or reverse gender gap) (Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006). Women are more likely to attend college and persist toward graduation, a shift that has likely been influenced by many social changes in the past century (Goldin et al., 2006). One study described the pressure many college men experience to conform to masculine norms which negatively influences their college performance (Marrs, 2016). Another study identified the different mindsets that college men and women have about their own college pursuits (Kleinfeld, 2009). Men often attend college because it is a natural extension of high school (either because his parents went to college or because of family expectations) or because college represents a

dream for a better future. In contrast, women often have a specific intention to attend college so they can gain the experiences necessary to make a particular contribution to the world. This study also found that women genuinely enjoy school more than men do. Previous research did not provide much data to support whether a gender difference exists among emerging adult college students, and concerns evident regarding college men and autonomous functioning were worth further investigation.

Volunteerism. It appears volunteering and contributing beyond oneself "can grow from an ecumenical worldview-a feeling of oneness with the universe; seeing oneself as part of the weave, the fabric, of all life; an individual's sense of self in full integration with all humanity" (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011a, p. 64). "Finding meaning in times of hardship" (Astin et al., 2011a, p. 50) is likely to improve and grow for students who volunteer and participate in other charitable work while in college. When students give of their time, they also increase the likelihood that they are "seeking…a better understanding of who [they] are, why [they] are here, and how [they] can live a meaningful life" (Astin et al., 2011a, p. 28). This growth is particularly likely when students simultaneously participate in some type of self-awareness or reflection activity.

Across United States colleges and universities, while students are at college they increase their Ethic of Caring, which "reflects [their] sense of caring and concern about the welfare of others and the world around [them]" (Astin et al., 2011a, p. 64). At the same time, students' charitable engagement, outside of helping friends and donating money, declines slightly from first year to junior year, which researchers

suspect might be due to time limitations often associated with upper class students (Astin et al., 2011a). However, students at evangelical colleges tend to increase their charitable engagement slightly between their first and junior years.

The potential relationship between emerging adult volunteerism and purpose development appears clear because of the overlapping value of contribution to the world beyond oneself. However, recent findings appear to suggest that autonomy may act as a potential moderator between volunteering and purpose. Researchers found that among Korean college students, purpose development was positively impacted when students were intrinsically motivated to volunteer (Shin, Kim, Hwang, & Lee, 2018). Participation in charitable acts is not enough, students need to have a self-directed motivation to engage in order to form purpose.

Study abroad. Studying abroad affords students the opportunity to live and learn in a new environment, growing in their awareness, appreciation, and knowledge of self and others. Ninety-eight percent of students from the University of Minnesota who studied abroad between 1960 and 2007 reported the experience had a strong impact (83.3%) or some impact (14.8%) on their lives (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009). The level of impact ranged from personal and professional development to civic and global engagement. In another study, 4,500 men and women who attended college in the United States and had studied abroad between 1999 and 2017, reported that their experience abroad helped them develop highly important skills, including self-awareness, intercultural skills, and interpersonal skills (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017).

Study abroad trips, even shorter multiweek trips, facilitate personal growth through the engagement of new physical and social spaces, and students become "active participants in the ongoing and collaborative process of making sense of themselves, the world, and places within it" (Pipitone & Raghavan, 2017, p. 265). As for faculty, cultural learning and challenging ethnocentrism appear to be their top two student learning objectives (Niehaus & Wegener, 2019). Challenging ethnocentrism may not directly relate to purpose, but may foster the personal growth necessary to engage a beyond-the-self focus.

Ethnocentrism is the act of valuing one's own culture or group above others (Neuliep, 2012). Ethnocentrism can promote comradery and loyalty within a group, but taken too far it can promote extreme views of one group over the other (e.g., discrimination) (Neuliep, 2012). When people believe their culture is superior (thus inflating their own ego), they judge other cultures and people from different groups, assuming their own culture/ group represents the way things *should* be. Study abroad programs challenge this perspective and "allow students to reflect on what they have in common with others. While encountering such differences helps students to examine preconceived notions and beliefs about self and other, it also lets them recognize their oneness with others and the world" (Astin et al., 2011a, p. 80). Students who participate in study abroad trips increase their ability to make meaning in adverse situations and they experience growth in how they think about caring for others and the world (Astin et al., 2011a). Study aboard trips appear to influence

facets of growth that would influence both identity development (e.g., self-awareness) and purpose development (e.g., beyond-the-self focus).

Participation in a faith community. Faith, the process of making meaning - inextricably connected to both self and others, is an important facet of development (Daloz-Parks, 2000). However, when it comes to religious institutions, many emerging adults are skeptical (Arnett & Jensen, 2002) and spiritual development during college is not well researched (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011b). Most college students do not change their level of religious commitment during college (fewer than 30%), even though many change their level of engagement in religious activities (Astin et al., 2011a). In particular, 39% of students attend faith services less frequently then they did prior to coming to college; frequent engagement in a faith community decreases by 19% and nonattendance increases by 18% (Astin et al., 2011a). However, among students at evangelical colleges a different phenomenon appears. Ninety percent of incoming students frequently attended faith services in high school and continue to do so in their first year of college. Attendance declines, but only slightly, by junior year when 76% of evangelical students continue to report frequent attendance of faith services. Researchers credit the student peer group for these sustained levels of religious engagement among evangelical students.

As noted throughout this paper, young people are forming their identity and asking questions such as "'Who am I?' 'Where do I belong?' What is my purpose?' 'To whom or with what am I connected or responsible?'" (Tirri, Tallent-Runnels, & Nokelainen, 2005, p. 209). Researchers have found that spirituality and religion,

along with corresponding faith communities, support young people as they seek these answers (King, 2008; Mariano & Damon, 2008; Tirri & Quinn, 2010). Faith communities foster development because the unique social context provides connection with peers, intergenerational relationships, and spiritual role models (King , 2008). King (2003) proposed that religious communities enhance development, by offering young people

> A profound sense of connectedness with either supernatural or human other[,] that other invokes a sense of awareness of self in relation to other. This heightened consciousness of others often triggers an understanding of self that is intertwined and somehow responsible to the other. (p. 201)

Daloz-Parks (2000) suggested that when young people understand that their own sense of meaning is intersected with humanity, they begin to dream about how things might be and how they might participate to make this new reality possible. These dreams begin to shape purpose.

While purpose does not require the support of a spiritual environment; when present, faith communities can help young people consider how to nurture and tend to both self and other, which enhances purposive living (Tirri & Quinn, 2010). By enhancing self and other awareness, faith communities influence both identity development and purpose formation - highlighting the interconnected nature of these processes.

Mariano and Damon (2008) provided several models for the potential influence of spirituality on faith. One such model posits that religious communities

promote a shared sense of purpose, which in turn fosters and provides support to the young person's personal sense of purpose. After surveying over 900 high school students from Los Angeles, California, researchers found that relationships within religious communities with adults, friends, and parents that promote trust and shared values make it more likely that the young person will increase moral standards and engage in prosocial behaviors (King & Furrow, 2004). Liang and Ketcham (2017) noted similar findings upon interviewing college students: students with the strongest commitment to their personal purpose reported support from a faith community, which acknowledged and empowered them and offered them a communal purpose to engage. When college educators connected purposeful exploration programs with student participation in a faith community, upon graduation the young people experienced higher levels of "intentionality [and] more resilience" than peers who engaged in purposeful exploration programs without participation in a faith community (Clydesdale, 2015, p. 211).

Strictly looking at correlations between emerging adults and religious commitment, some interesting trends emerge. Researchers divided 63% of U.S. emerging adults into four categories, *the devoted* (attend weekly worship services, "faith is very or extremely important," "feel very or extremely close to God" and engage in regular prayer and scripture reading); *the regular* (attend two or three worship services each month, faith, "closeness to God, prayer and scripture reading are variable")*; the sporadic* (attend some worship services, "faith is somewhat to not very important in everyday life" and "closeness to God, prayer and scripture reading

are variable"); and *the disengaged* (does not attend worship services, "faith is somewhat, not very, or not important in everyday life," little connection with God and infrequent prayer or scripture reading) (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 259). Thirty-seven percent of emerging adults do not fit into these categories and are not included in the following results. The devoted, regular, and sporadic reported a significantly higher purpose score than the disengaged (the devoted reported the highest scores). Interestingly, data also exists on the correlation between religious commitment and locus of control (a construct similar to autonomy). In this study, locus of control included the following reverse-scored items, "feels one has little control over things that happen" "feels there is no way to solve some personal problems" "feels there is little one can do to change many of the important things in life" and "often feels helpless when dealing with problems of life" (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 269). Taken together, the devoted reported a significantly higher sense of locus of control than the disengaged (the regulars and sporadic did not report significantly higher scores except for the single item "often feels helpless when dealing with problems of life"). Previous literature suggests that engagement in a faith community may influence both a sense of purpose and autonomous functioning.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative non-experimental methodology and bivariate analysis to investigate the relationship between autonomous functioning and the criteria for purpose in traditional undergraduate college students. The results were compared with the independent variables of gender, volunteerism, study abroad interest, and faith community involvement. This chapter includes the approach to this correlative research, including the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

Historically, developmental theorists have suggested that adolescents and young adults are making commitments to their identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Loevinger, 1976; Marcia, 1966). Identity achievement involves the formation of political and spiritual ideologies, decisions about professional roles and romantic partnerships, and purpose (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1963, 1968). In this study, purpose refers to a personal and overarching intention to contribute something of value to the world (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon et al., 2003). Purpose is beneficial in many ways, researchers have found that purpose is correlated with life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009), positive emotions (Hill et al., 2018; Ryff, Singer, & Dienberg Love, 2004; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992), physical health (Hill et al., 2018; Ryff et al., 2004), and longer lives (Hill et al., 2018; Ryff, Singer, & Dienberg Love, 2004; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992).

Another aim of identity development is becoming more autonomous (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Autonomy is defined as self-endorsed behavior (Deci

& Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), and over time some individuals develop an autonomous orientation, perceiving themselves as capable of living self-determined lives (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Emerging adults, young people in the developmental period between adolescence and young adulthood, often spend time exploring and constructing their identities before making commitments to their roles, responsibilities, and purposes (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2005). When college students are able to exercise autonomy, they are more likely to make intentional choices about how they want to live (Arnett, 2000; Baxter Magolda, 2014; Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2014).

Scholars have written about the overlapping relationship between autonomy and purpose, but it is not well understood. Researchers have not analyzed the relationship between autonomy and purpose, when purpose is defined to include a beyond-the-self focus. Although researchers have found that meeting autonomy needs in college enhances the college experience (Cullaty, 2011; Davidson & Beck, 2019; Sheldon & Krieger, 2007), researchers have not specifically investigated the more stable feature of autonomous functioning and purpose. Higher education faculty and administrators are tasked to help students develop autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Clydesdale, 2015), therefore understanding the relationship between the two constructs will provide new insight for parents and educators regarding how they can help emerging adults shift toward autonomous functioning and living with a sense of purpose.

Variables

The variables of this study are purpose and autonomy. In this study, purpose is defined as a personal and overarching intention to contribute something of value to the world (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon et al., 2003). Three dimensions of purpose exist: goal orientation, meaningfulness, and beyond-the-self focus (Bronk et al., 2018). People with purpose are focused on an overarching goal that gives direction to how they conduct their lives (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Damon et al., 2003; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). This purpose goal provides a sense of personal meaningfulness (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Finally, individuals who meet the criteria for purpose are aimed at contributing to the world—their goal orientation is not self-focused (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017; Damon et al., 2003; Frankl, 1985).

Autonomy is defined as self-endorsed behavior that concurs with, and is an expression of the integrated self (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, this particular study is investigating autonomous functioning, which is when individuals embody autonomy to such an extent that they believe they are capable of a self-endorsed life (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Three dimensions of dispositional autonomy exist: authorship/ self-congruence, interest-taking, and a low susceptibility to control (Weinstein et al., 2012a). People who are functioning autonomously see themselves as the author of their own lives. Individuals with an autonomous orientation are curious and interested in growing in self-awareness and using new insight to guide their self-determined actions. Finally, dispositional autonomy is negatively correlated with susceptibility to control because their

behavior derives from the integrated self rather than responding to internal or external pressure.

Four independent variables were included in this research study: gender, volunteerism, intention to study abroad, and participation in a faith community. The study will explore the associations between the demographic variables and purpose and autonomy by using reliable and valid instruments.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following hypothesis were derived from the research questions and designed to measure the dependent variables:

1. Research Question 1: What is the relationship between the level of autonomous functioning and the likelihood that one will meet the criteria for purpose?

   H1o: No significant correlation between the level of autonomous functioning and the criteria met for purpose exists.

   Hypothesis 1: Individuals who have a higher level of autonomous functioning will be more likely to meet the criteria for purpose.

   Hypothesis 2: Individuals who have a low level of autonomous functioning will be less likely to meet the criteria for purpose.

2. Research Question 2: Which relationships between the dimensions of autonomous functioning and the criteria for purpose, if any, appear to be significant?

H1o: No significant correlations between the dimensions of autonomous functioning and the dimensions of purpose exists.

Hypothesis 1: All three criteria for purpose will be associated with all three dimensions of autonomous functioning.

3. Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference for criteria met for purpose between males and females, students who volunteer and students who do not volunteer, students who have or plan to study abroad and students who have not and do not plan to study abroad, and students who participate in a faith community and students who do not participate in a faith community.

   H1o: No significant difference of criteria met for purpose between each category of students exists.

   Hypothesis 1: Females will meet more criteria for purpose than males.

   Hypothesis 2: Students who volunteer will meet more criteria for purpose than students who do not volunteer.

   Hypothesis 3: Students who have studied abroad or plan to study abroad are more likely to meet the criteria of purpose than students who have not and do not plan to stay abroad.

   Hypothesis 4: Students who participate in a faith community will meet more criteria for purpose than students who do not participate in a faith community.

4. Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference of autonomous functioning between males and females, students who volunteer and students who do not volunteer, students who have or plan to study abroad and students who have not and do not plan to study abroad, and students who participate in a faith community and students who do not participate in a faith community.

   H1o: No significant difference of autonomous functioning between each category of students exists.

   Hypothesis 1: Females will report higher autonomous functioning than males.

   Hypothesis 2: Students who volunteer will report higher autonomous functioning than students who do not volunteer.

   Hypothesis 3: Students who have studied abroad or plan to study abroad will report higher autonomous functioning than students who have not and do not plan to stay abroad.

   Hypothesis 4: Students who participate in a faith community will report higher autonomous functioning than students who do not participate in a faith community.

Research Design Strategy

This quantitative, non-experimental, correlative research study contributes to the research on purpose and autonomous functioning. The relationship between these two continuous variables were investigated using Pearson's correlation coefficient,

which provided data about the strength and direction of the relationships (Muijs, 2011). The study consisted of 356 traditional undergraduate students from an Introduction to Wellbeing course at a small private faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwest portion of the United States. Independent *t*-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to better understand how demographic variables influence the likelihood that a student will function autonomously or meet the criteria for purpose (Muijs, 2011).

To collect the data, an online survey was administered to participants. The survey consisted of two distinct scales, the Claremont Purpose Inventory and the Dispositional Index of Autonomous Functioning, with additional questions regarding demographic information (i.e., gender, volunteerism, intention to study abroad, and participation in a faith community).

Population. Participants in the study were part of a convenience sample of college students at a small private evangelical liberal arts university in Minnesota. The private liberal arts institution is a four-year university with two colleges, a graduate school, and a seminary. The students in this study are from the undergraduate program that offers 90 majors in 106 areas of study. Seventy-five percent of the undergraduate students at this institution participate in a study abroad program before they graduate.

All participants were current students in the course Introduction to Wellbeing. Unless a medical condition warrants an exemption (e.g., social anxiety because of required conversation with other students), all incoming first year students are

required to take the course Introduction to Wellbeing. Throughout the course students explore dimensions of their wellbeing (i.e., spiritual, cognitive, emotional, physical, relational, and meaning) and consider how they can exercise agency to intentionally influence their wellbeing. The students were asked to participate in the study after they have received foundational content about wellbeing but prior to engaging with meaning or purpose content.

Although most students are traditional first year students, a small number of sophomores, juniors, and seniors also take the course because they did not previously (e.g., transfer students). Typically, 450 students enroll in Introduction to Wellbeing. Of those, some are dual enrolled as high school students and are not yet 18 and therefore were not be eligible for this study as they would need parent permission to participate. All eligible students received information regarding the study, were informed that their participation was a not a required element of the course, and were asked to provide informed consent prior to participation.

Excluded instruments. Previous scales have been developed to measure purpose and/ or autonomy, however in many cases the constructs were defined differently. For instance, the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Bates, Cooper, & Wachs, 2001; Wachs & Cooper, 2002) that measures Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors addressing purpose and autonomy operationalized autonomy as independence and omitted the beyond-the-self dimension from the purpose construct. The Student Development Task and Lifestyle Assessment is primarily used as a measure to understand the college student experience (Damon et

al., 2003) and not to understand the nuances of purpose or autonomy. Similar to the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Assessment, the Purpose in Life test, like most purpose inventories, does not include items that would measure the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose (Bronk et al., 2018; Claremont Graduate University, 2018). The Purpose in Life test also includes questions about life satisfaction, which is not a dimension of purpose. In the current study, the Claremont Purpose Scale is a more sufficient measure of purpose.

Claremont Purpose Scale. The Claremont Purpose Scale addresses the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose that was previously missing from purpose measures (Bronk et al., 2018). Purpose, the personal and meaningful intention to contribute something of value to the world, includes three dimensions: goal orientation, personal meaningfulness, and beyond-the-self influence (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon et al., 2003). The Claremont Purpose Scale has 12 items and uses a five-point Likert scale (Bronk et al., 2018) (see Appendix B). Both the purpose scale and individual subscales demonstrated validity and internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the entire scale in the first two studies was .917-.945. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the subscales also demonstrated internal consistency (i.e., goal orientation = .862, meaningfulness = .924, beyond-the-self = .917).

In the validation study, results suggest the Claremont Purpose Scale and Purpose in Life test were positively related and appear to measure the same construct (Bronk et al., 2018). However, the Claremont Purpose Scale measures the beyond-

the-self dimension of purpose more sufficiently than the Purpose in Life test. As noted, there are concerns regarding the correlation between the Purpose in Life test and life satisfaction, and the Claremont Purpose Scale was not as highly correlated with life satisfaction. In addition, the Claremont Purpose Scale was also positively correlated with openness, empathic concern, and wisdom and negatively correlated with depression.

The Claremont Purpose Scale was designed to measure how many criteria for purpose the respondents have met (rather than as a measure of low, medium, or high purpose) (Bronk et al., 2018). In addition, the researchers state that the scale is nuanced enough to measure changes over time. The goal orientation subscale has four items and sample items include "How engaged are you in carrying out the plans you set for yourself?" (1 = "not at all engaged" and 5 = "extremely engaged") and "How hard are you working to make your long-term aims a reality?" (1 = "not at all hard" and 5 = "extremely hard"). The meaningfulness subscale has four items and sample questions include "How well do you understand what gives your life meaning" (1 = do not understand at all" and 5 = "understand extremely well") and "How confident are you that you have discovered a satisfying purpose for your life" (1 = not at all confident" and 5 = "extremely confident"). The beyond-the-self dimension has four items and sample questions include "How often do you hope to leave the world a better than you found it?" (1 = "almost never" and 5 = "almost all the time") and "How often do you find yourself hoping that you will make a

meaningful contribution to the broader world?" (1 = "almost never" and 5 = "almost all the time").

Index of Autonomous Functioning. Researchers developed the dispositional Index of Autonomous Functioning scale because previous general causality orientation scales did not measure the complexity of the autonomy orientation (Weinstein et al., 2012a). Autonomous functioning has been defined as "the experience of oneself as self-congruent, reflective and interested in one's own experiences, and resilient in the face of social pressure" (Weinstein et al., 2012a, p. 398). In this study, autonomous functioning is operationally defined as the outcome of embodying autonomy to such an extent that the individual believes he or she is capable of a self-endorsed life (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

After several analyses, the Index of Autonomous Functioning has demonstrated to have high validity and reliability, and researchers found a confirmatory factor analysis supported the index (Weinstein et al., 2012a). The data supports that the results indicate stability over time (consistency over a six-month period) and after multiple studies researchers suggest a predictive nature between autonomous functioning and positive factors for well-being. The dispositional Index of Autonomous Functioning demonstrated internal consistency, and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .81. The scale was designed to measure the trait like disposition autonomy but authors indicated that the dimensions of autonomy can also be measured by using the subscales. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .89 for the authorship/ self-congruence subscale, .83 for interest-taking subscale, and .84 for

susceptibility of control subscale. Recent studies using the index of autonomous functioning have found results consistent with prior research (Legault et al., 2017; Paradnike & Bandzeviciene, 2015; Weinstein et al., 2016).

The dispositional Index of Autonomous Functioning has 15 items and uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "not at all true" to 5 = "completely true" and measures three dimensions of autonomy (authorship/ self-congruence, interest-taking, and susceptibility of control) (Weinstein et al., 2012a) (see Appendix B). Authorship/ self-congruence and interest-taking are positively correlated with autonomous functioning and susceptibility of control is negatively correlated with autonomous functioning. Sample items for authorship/ self-congruence include "My decisions represent my most important values and feelings" and "My actions are congruent with who I really am." Sample items for interest-taking include "I often reflect on why I react the way I do" and "I am interested in why I act the way I do." Sample items for susceptibility of control include "I do things in order to avoid feeling badly about myself" and "I believe certain things so that others will like me."

Demographic variables. Participants were asked to respond to brief demographic questions at the end of the survey (see Appendix B). Gender, volunteerism, intention to study abroad, and participation in a faith community reported in order to better understand the relationship between these relevant college student demographics and purpose and autonomy. Gender was measured with an open-ended prompt (male, boy, man, M, or B were coded as male and female, girl, woman, W, F, or G were coded as female), no students reported non-binary gender.

Students reported whether they engaged in volunteer work while attending college frequently, occasionally, or not at all. Students indicated their current intention to study abroad by reporting if they have studied abroad (semester or one-month term), if they plan to study abroad (semester or one-month term), or if they are not planning to study abroad. Finally, students reported if they participate in a faith community outside of the college once-a-week, two or three times a month, once-a-month, a few times a semester, or not at all.

Data Collection Procedures

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board at the university (see Appendix A), the scales were digitized so the survey could be administered through Qualtrics; data was collected and tabulated using SPSS software. Qualtrics was set up so students received alternative formats of the survey regarding the order of the purpose and autonomous functioning scale, and demographic questions were asked last.

Students received an email from Qualtrics which included information about the purpose of the study, informed consent, and instructions on how to proceed with the survey. To minimize potential bias, the students were reminded that their responses were confidential and there is no time limit for the survey.

The autonomous trait has shown stability over time with college students (Weinstein et al., 2012a), unlike autonomy need satisfaction, which has higher daily variability and in college students appears to be higher on the weekends (Reis et al., 2000), therefore the survey was provided to students without concern regarding which

day of the week they take the survey. Students were able to complete the survey outside of class, but class time was allotted to encourage participation. Reminders were sent to students through Qualtrics as deemed necessary.

Data Analysis

That data analysis involved inferential statistics using Pearson's correlational coefficient to investigate the relationships between purpose and autonomy. Pearson correlations were completed between the main variables (i.e., purpose and autonomous functioning), between the main variable purpose and the subscales for autonomous functioning, and between the main variable autonomous functioning and the subscales for the criteria for purpose.

Further analysis was completed by conducting independent *t*-tests for gender and volunteerism demographic variables and each of the main variables (i.e., purpose and autonomous functioning). When significant difference existed, additional analysis was conducted using independent *t*-tests and that variable's subscales. Independent *t*-tests did not include genders outside of the binary male and female constructs. One-way ANOVA was conducted for study abroad and faith community participation demographic variables. When a survey answer received fewer than a 10% respondent rate, that survey response item was collapsed into the next closest group.

Limitations of Methodology

Several limitations within the current study need to be acknowledged. The study used a convenience sample of students in a course on wellbeing at a faith-based

institution, rather than a random sample, which limits generalizability. Introduction to Wellbeing instructors previously introduced students to concepts within positive psychology (e.g., agency, growth mindset, and emotional intelligence), which may have influenced students' perception of their autonomy or purpose. However, this study is primarily focused on the relationship between autonomous functioning and purpose, and not the isolated data collected for either variable. Also, as previously discussed there is evidence to suggest that students at evangelical institutions may experience personal and spiritual growth differently than other college students (Astin, et al., 2011a).

While many writers theorize about the predictive nature of one variable on another, the current study is observational and will only provide information on correlation and not causation (Muijs, 2011). Similarly, Pearson's *r* is only able to provide data regarding a linear relationship between the variables and is not able to provide data indicative of a curvilinear relationship (Muijs, 2011). Therefore, the data suggest the strength of the relationship between the criteria for purpose and autonomous functioning is consistent over time, even though that may not be accurate. Collected data that could be considered an outlier could skew the Pearson's *r* correlation (Muijs, 2011); careful consideration was given to the removal of any outliers and no removal was warranted. Finally, the current data analysis involved independent *t*-tests and ANOVA, which only analyzed one demographic variable at a time, this study did not compare multiple demographic variables with one another (Muijs, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

In order to protect the rights of research participants, careful consideration was given to any ethical issues. While the researcher provided instruction to two of the ten Introduction to Wellbeing courses, outside of the allotted class time to take the survey, there was no research study interaction between the researcher and the participants. The survey was confidential and students were not required to participate. However, because of the teacher/ student relationship, it was possible for students to feel pressured to participate or feel uncomfortable providing certain information. The survey did not use language that was biased against any persons and the demographic questions did not risk harming individual students. Students may have felt uncomfortable sharing whether or not they volunteer or if they are involved in a faith community with their instructor, and to alleviate concerns confidentiality was addressed in the informed consent.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between autonomous functioning and the criteria for purpose in traditional undergraduate college students. The criteria for purpose was measured with the Claremont Purpose Scale (Bronk et al., 2018), which seeks to understand one's intention to contribute to the world beyond oneself in a manner that is personally meaningful (Damon et al., 2003). Autonomous functioning is the embodiment of autonomy that results in the belief that one is capable of living a self-endorsed life (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this study, autonomous functioning was measured with the dispositional Index of Autonomous Functioning (Weinstein et al., 2012a). This study used a quantitative non-experimental methodology and Pearson correlations to explore the relationship between these two constructs, and the results were compared with the independent variables of gender, volunteerism, intention to study abroad, and participation in a faith community. The current chapter will include the results of this research study.

Sample

This quantitative study used a convenience sample of college students in attendance at a small private evangelical liberal arts university in Minnesota. Students were invited to participate because of their enrollment in a required first year course called Introduction to Wellbeing. There were 365 students who took the survey. Of those, five did not provide consent and four were under the age of 18 and

unable to consent to participate in this research study. The study sample included 112 males, 227 females, and 17 students who did not provide information regarding their gender (*n*=356). All of these students were over the age of 18 and consented to participate in this study.

Scale Reliability

The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the Claremont Purpose Scale for the sample in this study was .833, which demonstrates good internal reliability of this scale. This finding is a little lower compared to what Bronk et al. (2018) found in the first two studies using this scale when the Cronbach alphas were between .917-.945. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the Claremont Purpose Scale subscales also demonstrated internal consistency in the original study (Bronk et al., 2018), and those results are similar to the current study. For the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .788 for the goal orientation subscale, .861 for the meaningfulness subscale, and .801 for the interest-taking subscale.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the Index of Autonomous Functioning scale for the sample in this study was .731, which demonstrates adequate internal reliability of this scale. This Cronbach alpha coefficient was similar to what Weinstein et al. (2012a) found in their original study ($\alpha = .81$) and consistent with previous research (Legault et al., 2017; Paradnike & Bandzeviciene, 2015; Weinstein et al., 2016). The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the Index of Autonomous Functioning subscales also demonstrated internal reliability, again similar to what was found by Weinstein et al. (2012a). In this study the Cronbach alpha coefficient

was .758 for the authorship/self-congruence subscale, .729 for the susceptibility of control subscale, and .843 for the interest-taking subscale.

Descriptive Statistics

Current students in the course Introduction to Wellbeing at a small private Christian liberal arts university were invited to participate. Of the 468 students invited to participate, 356 participated (112 men, 227 women, and 17 did not provide gender information). The participants provided information about how frequently they volunteered since entering college. The students who volunteered occasionally was the largest respondent group (see Table 1 for results).

Table 1

Volunteering Since Entering College

Volunteer Frequency	Students	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
None	149	41.854	41.972	41.972
Occasionally	175	49.157	49.296	91.268
Frequently	31	8.708	8.732	100.000
Missing	1	0.281		
Total	356	100.000		

Students also responded to a question about their intention to study abroad. The most frequent respondent group was students who were planning to study abroad during interim (see Table 2).

Table 2

Planning for or Experience Studying Abroad

Abroad	Students	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No interest	114	32.022	32.022	32.022
Planning to, interim	142	39.888	39.888	71.910
Planning to, semester	87	24.438	24.438	96.348
Experienced, interim	4	1.124	1.124	97.472
Experienced, semester	9	2.528	2.528	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	356	100.000		

Finally, students responded to their frequency of participation in a faith community outside of college. The largest group of students were those who participated in a faith community on a weekly basis (see Table 3 for results).

Table 3

Participation in a Faith Community Outside of the University

Frequency	Students	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No participation	72	20.225	20.225	20.225
A few times each semester	92	25.843	25.843	46.067
Two or Three times a month	76	21.348	21.348	67.416
Once-a-week	116	32.584	32.584	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	356	100.000		

Research Questions

Research question one. The first research question inquired about the relationship between the level of autonomous functioning and the likelihood that one will meet the criteria for purpose. The null hypothesis (H1o) stated that there would be no significant correlation between the level of autonomous functioning and the criteria met for purpose. The first research question had two hypotheses, which stated that individuals with a higher level of autonomous functioning would be more likely to meet the criteria for purpose and individuals with a lower level of autonomous functioning would be less likely to meet the criteria for purpose. The data was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to investigate the relationship between purpose and autonomy. The positive correlation between autonomous functioning and the criteria met for purpose indicated that the more autonomous

students were, the more likely they were to meet the criteria for purpose, r (352) = .271, $p < .001$. Likewise, the positive correlation suggests that as students report less autonomous functioning, they are less likely to meet the criteria for purpose. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Research question two. The second research question focuses on the relationship between the dimensions of autonomous functioning and the dimensions of the criteria for purpose. The null hypothesis (H1o) stated that there would be no significant correlations between the dimensions of autonomous functioning and the dimensions of purpose. The hypothesis stated that all three criteria for purpose would be associated with all three dimensions of autonomous functioning. The data was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to investigate the relationship between the subscales of the Index of Autonomous Functioning and the Claremont Purpose Scale.

Claremont Purpose Scale and the dimensions of the Index of Autonomous Functioning. There was a modest, but significant, correlation between the Claremont Purpose Scale and the authorship dimension of autonomous functioning, r (352) = .452, p <.001. There was a small, but significant correlation between the Claremont Purpose Scale and the interest-seeking dimension of autonomous functioning, r (352) =.229, $p < .001$. No significant relationship was found between the Claremont Purpose Scale and the susceptibility of control dimension of autonomous functioning r (352) = -.076, p = .157. Important to note is that had there been a relationship between the Claremont Purpose Scale and the susceptibility of control dimension of

autonomy, it would have been expected to be negative as higher scores on this scale represent a higher level of external control or internal pressure. A low level of susceptibly of control is a central characteristic of dispositional autonomy (Weinstein et al., 2012a).

Index of Autonomous Functioning and the dimensions of the Claremont Purpose Scale. Data suggested the Index of Autonomous Functioning had significant positive correlations with all three dimensions of the Claremont Purpose Scale, the goal orientation dimension, r (352) =.233, p <.001; the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose, r (352) =.273, p <.001; and the meaning dimension of purpose, r (352) = .113, p = .034.

Subscale correlations. More specifically, there were several correlations between the dimensions of the Claremont Purpose Scale and the dimensions of the Index of Autonomous Functioning. The data indicated significant positive correlations between authorship for all three dimensions of the purpose scale, goal orientation, r (352) = .350, p <.001; meaning, r (352) =.366, p <.001; and beyond-the-self focus, r (352) = .278, p <.001. The results suggested significant correlations between the interest-seeking dimension of autonomous functioning and all three dimensions of purpose, beyond-the-self focus, r (352) =.228, p <.001; goal orientation, r (352) =.139, p <.01; and meaning, r (352) =.145, p <.01. The susceptibility of control dimension of autonomous functioning, representing a higher level of external control and internal pressure, had a significant negative correlation with the dimension of meaning, r (352) = -.204, p <.001. Although the data revealed

correlations, these results did not fully support the hypothesis and the null hypothesis was retained (see Table 4 for results).

Table 4

Relationships between Purpose Scale & Subscales and Autonomous Functioning Scale & Subscales

		Purpose	Goal Orientation	Meaning	Beyond-the-Self	Autonomous Functioning	Authorship	Susceptibility of Control	Interest-Seeking
Purpose	r	—							
	Sig.	—							
Goal Orientation	r	0.708***	—						
	Sig.	< .001	—						
Meaning	r	0.774***	0.316***	—					
	Sig.	< .001	< .001	—					
Beyond-the-Self	r	0.727***	0.375***	0.272***	—				
	Sig.	< .001	< .001	< .001	—				
Autonomous Functioning	r	0.271***	0.233***	0.113*	0.273***	—			
	Sig.	< .001	< .001	0.034	< .001	—			
Authorship	r	0.452***	0.350***	0.366***	0.278***	0.397***	—		
	Sig.	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	—		
Susceptibility of Control	r	-0.076	0.027	-0.204***	0.046	0.630***	-0.151**	—	
	Sig.	0.157	0.617	< .001	0.383	< .001	0.004	—	
Interest-Seeking	r	0.229***	0.139**	0.145**	0.228***	0.801***	0.167**	0.209***	—
	Sig.	< .001	0.009	0.006	< .001	< .001	0.002	< .001	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Research question three. The third research question investigated the relationship between the criteria met for purpose and different life experiences. The demographic variables researched were gender, volunteerism, experience or intention to study abroad, and participation in a faith community. The null hypothesis (H1o) stated that no significant difference exists between the criteria met for purpose and each category of students.

Purpose and gender. Hypothesis 1 stated that females would be more likely to meet the criteria for purpose than males. Independent *t*-tests were used to investigate these relationships. First, Levene's test of equality of variances was used to ensure the assumption of homogeneity of variances. Levene's test revealed the homogeneity of variance was not violated when investigating the relationship between gender and the Claremont Purpose Scale ($p > .05$). The results of the independent *t*-test did not reveal a significant difference between gender and the Claremont Purpose Scale, $t\ (335) = -1.081$, $p = .280$, $d = -.125$.

Further, the Levene's test revealed the homogeneity of variance was only violated for the goal dimension ($p < .05$). In response, Welch's adjusted *t*-statistic was used to correct the violation and a significant statistical difference was found between gender and goal orientation, $t\ (197.464) = -2.258$, $p = .025$, $d = -.267$. Women were significantly more likely to meet more criteria for the goal orientation dimension of purpose. Levene's test did not reveal the homogeneity of variance was violated for the other dimensions ($p > .05$), and the independent *t*-tests did not support a significant difference between gender and meaning, $t\ (337) = 1.15$, $p = .249$, $d = .133$. However, there was a significant difference between gender and beyond-the-

self focus, t (336) = -2.030, p =.043, d = -.235. Women were also significantly more likely to meet more criteria for the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose. The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 5. Even though women were more likely to meet the criteria for two of the three dimensions of purpose, there was no significant difference between the likelihood that females would be more likely to meet the criteria for purpose and the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 5

Purpose and Gender Descriptive Statistics

Scale	Group	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*SE*
Goal Orientation*	Male	111	3.574	0.630	0.060
	Female	227	3.733	0.561	0.037
Meaning	Male	112	3.465	0.911	0.086
	Female	227	3.351	0.823	0.055
Beyond the Self*	Male	112	3.951	0.663	0.063
	Female	226	4.112	0.696	0.046
Purpose	Male	111	3.664	0.529	0.050
	Female	226	3.730	0.522	0.035

* $p < .05$

Purpose and Volunteerism. Hypothesis 2 focused on the relationship between purpose and students who volunteer, stating that students who volunteer would be more likely to meet more criteria for purpose. It was determined before the study was conducted that if a survey answer received fewer than a 10% respondent rate, that survey response item would be collapsed into the next closest group. Only 8.7% of students responded that they volunteered frequently, and therefore, their results were collapsed with the students who volunteered occasionally. Below, the collapsed results are provided first, followed by the raw results.

An independent *t*-test was used to compare the criteria met for purpose by students who did not volunteer (*n*=149) with the students who volunteered occasionally or frequently (*n*=206). All *t*-tests were first tested for homogeneity of variance assumption, and Levene's test revealed there was no violations of homogeneity for any of the scales (see Table 6). There was no statistically significant

difference ($p > .05$) identified between the two groups when the students responded to the criteria for purpose, thus the null hypothesis was retained. However, students who volunteered occasionally or frequently were significantly more likely to meet more criteria for the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose (results can be found in Table 7). The group descriptive statistics can be found in Table 8.

Table 6

Purpose and Volunteerism, Levene's Test of Equality of Homogeneity

Scale	*F*	*df*	*p*
Goal Orientation	0.038	1	0.846
Meaning	0.028	1	0.867
Beyond-the-Self	1.032	1	0.310
Purpose	2.673	1	0.103

Table 7

Purpose and Volunteerism, Independent t-Test

Scale	*t*	*df*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Goal Orientation	0.785	352	0.433	0.084
Meaning	0.516	353	0.606	0.055
Beyond-the-Self**	-3.005	352	0.003	-0.324
Purpose	-0.709	351	0.478	-0.076

**$p < .01$

Table 8

Purpose and Volunteerism Descriptive Statistics (collapsed response groups)

Scale	Frequency	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*SE*
Goal Orientation	Does Not Volunteer	149	3.710	0.624	0.051
	Occasionally or Frequently	205	3.660	0.567	0.040
Meaning	Does Not Volunteer	149	3.413	0.842	0.069
	Occasionally or Frequently	206	3.366	0.852	0.059
Beyond-the-Self**	Does Not Volunteer	149	3.911	0.727	0.060
	Occasionally or Frequently	205	4.134	0.661	0.046
Purpose	Does Not Volunteer	149	3.678	0.568	0.047
	Occasionally or Frequently	204	3.718	0.495	0.035

** $p < .01$

Although the decision was made to collapse response groups with fewer than 10% of student responders, because 8.7% of students indicated they volunteered frequently a one-way ANOVA was conducted to study the relationship between volunteerism and purpose and all three original response options. Levene's test demonstrated that the homogeneity of variance was not violated ($p = .093$). The Q-Q Plot indicated that the results follow a normal and linear distribution pattern. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to study the relationship between volunteerism and purpose, which revealed a significant difference, $F(2,350) = 3.470$, $p = .032$. Tukey post hoc tests revealed no significant difference between students who do not volunteer ($M = 3.678$, $SD = .568$) and those who volunteer occasionally ($M = 3.680$, $SD = .499$, $p = 1.00$, $d = -.003$). However, students who volunteer frequently ($M =$

3.942, *SD* = .407) had significantly higher purpose scores compared to students who do not volunteer (*p* = .032, *d* = -.484) and compared to students who volunteer occasionally (*p* = .031, *d* = -.538) (see Table 9 for the descriptive statistics).

Table 9

Purpose and Volunteerism, Descriptive Statistics (uncollapsed response groups)

Frequency	Mean	*SD*	*N*
Does not volunteer	3.678[a]	0.568	149
Volunteers occasionally	3.680[a]	0.499	174
Volunteers frequently	3.942[b]	0.407	30

Note: Means with different superscripts are significantly different from one another.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to study the relationship between volunteerism and the goal dimension of purpose, after Levene's test indicated no violation of homogeneity (*p* = .736), which revealed no significant difference, *F*(2,351) = 1.992, *p* =.138. No significant difference was found between volunteerism and the meaning dimension of purpose. Levene's test revealed no violation of homogeneity (*p* = .232) and a one-way ANOVA resulted in *F*(2,352) = 2.898, *p* =.056. However, after Levene's test indicated no violation (*p* = .178), a one-way ANOVA did suggest a significant difference between volunteerism and the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose, *F*(2,351) = 5.891, *p* =.003. The post hoc test results reveal that students who do not volunteer (*M* = 3.911, *SD* = .727) are significantly less likely to report higher scores for the beyond-the-self dimension of meaning than students who volunteer occasionally (*M* =4.101, *SD* = .680, *p* = .036, *d*

= -.271) and students who volunteer frequently (M = 4.325, SD = .509, p = .008, d = -.595) (see Table 10).

Table 10

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Purpose Scale by Volunteerism

Comparison Groups		Mean Difference	Cohen's *d*	*p*
Does not volunteer	Volunteers occasionally*	-0.190	-0.271	0.036
	Volunteers frequently**	-0.414	-0.595	0.008
Volunteers occasionally	Volunteers frequently	-0.224	-0.340	0.228

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Purpose and study abroad. Hypothesis 3 stated that students who have studied abroad or plan to study abroad are more likely to meet the criteria of purpose than students who have not and do not plan to stay abroad. Of the students in this study, less than 10% had already studied abroad so those students were collapsed into the most relevant category – students who studied abroad for a semester were combined with students who intended to study abroad for a semester and students who had studied abroad for a one-month term were combined with students who planned to study abroad for a one-month term. There were 114 respondents who indicated they had no plans to study abroad, 146 indicated they were planning (n=142) or had previously (n=4) studied abroad for a one-month term, and 96 indicated they were planning (n=86) or had previously (n=10) studied abroad for a semester. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate the relationship between study abroad and purpose. The ANOVA was first tested for homogeneity of variance assumption using Levene's test which revealed no violation (p = .124). The one-way

ANOVA did not reveal a significant difference between the experience of or the intention to study abroad and the likelihood that students would meet the criteria for purpose, $F(2, 351) = .277$, $p = .758$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained (the descriptive data can be found in Table 11).

Table 11

Purpose and Study Abroad, Descriptive Statistics

Intention	Mean	*SD*	*N*
No intention	3.675	0.568	113
Interim (plan or complete)	3.711	0.479	146
Semester (plan or complete)	3.727	0.555	95

Purpose and faith community participation. The fourth and final hypothesis in the third research question stated that students who participated in a faith community would meet more criteria for purpose than students who did not participate in a faith community. Levene's test indicated that the homogeneity of variance was not violated ($p = .063$). A Q-Q Plot demonstrated that the results followed a normal and linear distribution pattern. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate the relationship between participation in a faith community and purpose, which did reveal a significant difference, $F(3, 350) = 12.812$, $p < .001$. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that students who do not participate in a faith community outside of the institution ($M = 3.457$, $SD = .583$) were less likely to meet the criteria for purpose than students who participate in a faith community two or three times a month ($M = 3.617$, $SD = .512$, $p = .004$, $d = -.515$). Students who do not

participate in a faith community were also significantly less likely to meet the criteria for purpose than students who participate weekly (M = 3.904, SD = *.433,* $p < .001$, d = -.900). There was also a significant difference between students who participate in a faith community a few times a semester (M = 3.617, SD = .512) and those who participate weekly ($p < .001$, d = -.610). There was not a significant difference between students who participate in a faith community two or three times a month and those that participate in a faith community weekly (p = .122, d = -.353). The post hoc test comparisons support the hypothesis that students who participate in faith communities were statistically more likely to meet the criteria for purpose, and the null hypothesis was rejected (see results in Table 12).

Table 12

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Purpose Scale by Faith Community Participation

Comparison Groups		Mean Difference	Cohen's *d*	*p*
None	A few times a semester	-0.160	-0.294	0.184
	2-3 times a month**	-0.282	-0.515	0.004
	Weekly***	-0.446	-0.900	< .001
A few times a semester	2-3 times a month	-0.122	-0.238	0.405
	Weekly***	-0.286	-0.610	< .001
2-3 times a month	Weekly	-0.165	-0.353	0.122

**$p < .01$, ***$p<.001$

Upon discovery of the significant difference found in the criteria met for purpose between students who attend faith communities weekly and other students,

additional analyses were completed. A one-way ANOVA was completed for each of the subscales. Levene's test found no violation of homogeneity of variance for goal orientation (p = .150) or meaning (p =.181). The one-way ANOVA for goal orientation found no significant difference, $F(3, 351) = 1.954$, p = .121, for students who attended faith communities at different frequencies (see descriptive statistics in Table 13).

Table 13

Goal Orientation and Faith Community Participation, Descriptive Statistics

Faith Community Participation	Mean	*SD*	*N*
None	3.535	0.689	72
A few times a semester	3.695	0.562	91
2-3 times a month	3.734	0.571	76
Weekly	3.728	0.551	116

The one-way ANOVA for meaning found a significant difference between students who attended faith communities weekly and the likelihood that they would score higher on the meaning subscale, $F(3, 352) = 12.156$, p <.001. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that students who do who participate in a faith community outside of the university on a weekly basis (M = 3.733, SD = .718) were more likely to meet the criteria for the meaning subscale of purpose than students who do not participate in a faith community (M = 3.045, SD = .905, p < .001, d = -.866), students who participate in a faith community a few times a semester (M = 3.248, SD =.802, p <.001, d = -.641), and students who participate in a faith community a few times a month (M =

3.365, SD = .868, *p* = .012, *d* = -.471. No other significant differences were found within the frequency of faith participation and the meaning dimension of purpose, and the post hoc test comparisons (see Table 14).

Table 14

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Meaning Sub-scale by Faith Community Participation

Comparison Groups		Mean Difference	Cohen's *d*	*p*
None	A few times a semester	-0.203	-0.239	0.387
	2-3 times a month	-0.320	-0.361	0.080
	Weekly***	-0.688	-0.866	< .001
A few times a semester	2-3 times month	-0.117	-0.140	0.790
	Weekly***	-0.485	-0.641	< .001
2-3 times a month	Weekly*	-0.368	-0.471	0.012

*p <.05, **p < .01, ***p<.001

When investigating the relationship between the beyond-the self-dimension of purpose and faith community participation, Levene's test for the homogeneity of variance assumption found a violation (p = .001). A one-way ANOVA was run with Welch's correction and a significant difference was found, $F(3, 179.449) = 8.435$, $p <$ .001. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that students who do who participate in a faith community outside of the university on a weekly basis (M = 4.259, SD = .587) were more likely to meet the criteria for the beyond-the-self subscale of purpose than students who do not participate in a faith community (M = 3.792, SD = .778, p < .001,

d = -.700), and students who participate in a faith community a few times a semester (*M* = 3.908, *SD* =.766, *p* = .001, *d* = -.522). Post hoc tests on the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose also revealed a significant difference between students who participate in a faith community two or three times a month (*M = 4.118, SD* = .577) and students who do not participate in a faith community, *p* = .018, *d* = -.479 (see the results in Table 15).

Table 15

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Beyond-the-Self Sub-scale by Faith Community Participation

Comparison Groups		Mean Difference	Cohen's *d*	*p*
None	A few times a semester	-0.116	-0.150	0.696
	2-3 times a month*	-0.327	-0.479	0.018
	Weekly***	-0.467	-0.700	< .001
A few times a semester	2-3 times a month	-0.211	-0.307	0.186
	Weekly***	-0.351	-0.522	0.001
2-3 times a month	Weekly	-0.140	-0.241	0.498

*p <.05, **p < .01, ***p<.001

Research question four. The fourth question investigated the relationship between the criteria met for autonomous functioning and the demographic variables of gender, volunteerism, experience or intention to study abroad, and participation in a faith community. The null hypothesis (H1o) stated that no significant difference exists between the criteria met for autonomous functioning and each category of students.

Autonomous functioning and gender. Hypothesis 1 asserted that females would be more likely to meet the criteria for autonomous functioning than males. Independent *t*-tests were used to investigate these relationships, and the Levene's test was first used to check for the homogeneity of variance assumption which revealed no violations between gender and the Index of Autonomous Functioning or any of its subscales ($p > .05$). The independent *t*-tests showed a statistically significant difference in the likelihood that women are more likely to score higher on the Index of Autonomous Functioning, $t(335) = -2.172$, $p = .031$, $d = -.252$. Although women were more likely to meet the criteria for the Index of Autonomous Functioning, they were not statistically more likely to meet the criteria for any of the subscales (see Table 16). The descriptive statistics can be found in Table 17. In this study, the null hypothesis was rejected because the data indicated a significant difference between men and females and the likelihood that they would criteria for the Index of Autonomous functioning.

Table 16

Gender and Autonomous Functioning Independent t-Tests

Scale	*t*	*df*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Authorship	-1.637	337.000	0.103	-0.189
Susceptibility of Control	-1.643	336.000	0.101	-0.190
Interest-Seeking	-0.938	336.000	0.349	-0.109
Autonomous Functioning*	-2.172	335.000	0.031	-0.252

*$p < .05$

Table 17

Gender and Autonomous Functioning Descriptive Statistics

Scale	Group	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*SE*
Authorship	Male	112	3.907	0.547	0.052
	Female	227	4.006	0.514	0.034
Susceptibility of Control	Male	112	2.680	0.745	0.070
	Female	226	2.827	0.789	0.052
Interest-Seeking	Male	111	3.641	0.853	0.081
	Female	227	3.734	0.851	0.056
Autonomous Functioning*	Male	111	3.409	0.443	0.042
	Female	226	3.525	0.470	0.031

* $p < .05$

Autonomous functioning and volunteerism. Hypothesis 2 focused on the relationship between autonomous functioning and students who volunteer, stating that students who volunteer more reported higher levels of autonomous functioning. As stated previously, it was decided prior to this study that when a respondent group represented less than 10% of the students, those student responses would be collapsed into the nearest response group. Students who volunteered frequently represented less than 10% of the total number of students and those responses were combined with the students who reported they volunteered occasionally.

An independent *t*-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in the likelihood that students who volunteered frequently or occasionally would be more likely to score higher levels of autonomous functioning than the

students who reported not volunteering. Levene's test indicated that no scales violated the homogeneity of variance assumption (see Table 18). The independent *t*-test indicated that there were no significant differences between the students who volunteered frequently or occasionally and the students who did not volunteer in their levels of autonomous functioning or any of the Index of Autonomous Functioning subscales (see Table 19 for results, and Table 20 for descriptive information). The null hypothesis 2 for research question 4 was retained.

Table 18

Autonomous Functioning and Volunteerism, Levene's Test of Equality of Homogeneity

Scale	*F*	df	*p*
Authorship	0.064	1	0.801
Susceptibility	0.612	1	0.435
Interest-Seeking	0.170	1	0.680
Autonomous Functioning	0.074	1	0.786

Table 19

Autonomous Functioning and Volunteerism, Independent t-Test

Scale	*t*	df	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Authorship	1.361	353.000	0.174	0.146
Susceptibility	-0.867	352.000	0.387	-0.093
Interest-Seeking	0.359	352.000	0.720	0.039
Autonomous Functioning	0.307	351.000	0.759	0.033

Table 20

Autonomous Functioning and Volunteerism, Descriptive Statistics

Scale	Group	N	Mean	SD	SE
Authorship	Does Not Volunteer	149	4.026	0.512	0.042
	Occasionally or Frequently	206	3.949	0.533	0.037
Susceptibility	Does Not Volunteer	148	2.727	0.783	0.064
	Occasionally or Frequently	206	2.799	0.763	0.053
Interest-Seeking	Does Not Volunteer	148	3.706	0.863	0.071
	Occasionally or Frequently	206	3.673	0.862	0.060
Autonomous Functioning	Does Not Volunteer	147	3.489	0.469	0.039
	Occasionally or Frequently	206	3.474	0.458	0.032

Although less than 10% of students reported they volunteered frequently, a one-way ANOVA was also conducted to study the relationship between volunteerism and the three original response options. Levene's test did not reveal a violation of the homogeneity of variance ($p = .980$) and the ANOVA did not indicate a significant difference, $F(2, 350) = 1.156$, $p = .316$. In this particular case, no significant difference was found regardless of whether or not the response groups were collapsed.

Autonomous functioning and study abroad. The third hypothesis indicated that students who have studied abroad or plan to study abroad will report higher for autonomous functioning than students who have not and do not plan to study abroad. As noted previously, less than 10% of the students in this study had already studied abroad so those students were collapsed into the most relevant category. A one-way

ANOVA was conducted after Levene's test for the homogeneity of variances revealed there was no violation (p=.922). The one-way ANOVA indicated there was not a significant difference between the intention to study abroad and the likelihood that students would meet the criteria for autonomous functioning, $F(2, 351) = 2.369$, p =.095 (the descriptive statistics can be found in Table 21) and the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 21

Autonomous Functioning and Study Abroad Intentions, Descriptive Statistics

Intention	Mean	*SD*	*N*
1 No intention	3.422	0.501	113
2 Interim (plan or complete)	3.474	0.442	146
3 Semester (plan or complete)	3.561	0.434	95

Autonomous functioning and faith community participation. The fourth hypothesis stated that students who participated in a faith community will report higher autonomous functioning than students who do not participate in a faith community. Levene's test demonstrated that the homogeneity of variance was not significant (p = .094). The Q-Q Plot established that the results follow a normal and linear distribution pattern. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate the relationship between frequency of participation in a faith community and autonomous functioning, which revealed a significant difference, $F(3, 350) = 3.363$, p = .019. The post hoc test revealed that students who attended a faith community weekly (M =

3.570, SD = .480) were statistically more likely to report higher levels of autonomous functioning than students who did not participate in a faith community (*M* = 3.383, *SD* = .508, *p* = .033, *d* = -.382), and the null hypothesis was rejected (the descriptive statistics can be found in Table 22, and the Tukey post hoc test results can be found in Table 23).

Table 22

Autonomous Functioning and Faith Community Participation, Descriptive Statistics

Faith Community Participation	Mean	*SD*	*N*
None	3.383	0.508	72
A few times a semester	3.415	0.434	90
2-3 times a month	3.515	0.390	76
Weekly	3.570	0.480	116

Table 23

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Autonomous Functioning by Faith Community Participation

Comparison Groups		Mean Difference	Cohen's *d*	*p*
None	A few times a semester	-0.032	-0.068	0.971
	2-3 times a month	-0.132	-0.293	0.296
	Weekly*	-0.188	-0.382	0.033
A few times a semester	2-3 times a month	-0.100	-0.242	0.496
	Weekly	-0.156	-0.338	0.074
2-3 times a month	Weekly	-0.056	-0.125	0.842

*$p < .05$

Additional analyses were conducted to better understand the relationships between faith community participation and the subscales of the Index of Autonomous Functioning. Levene's test showed no violation of homogeneity of variance for authorship ($p = .708$), susceptibility of control ($p = .148$), or interest-seeking ($p = .053$). The one-way ANOVA for the authorship subscale revealed that students who attended faith communities weekly were more likely to report higher levels of authorship, $F(3, 352) = 4.480$, $p = .004$. The post hoc test results revealed that students who participate weekly in a faith community ($M = 4.079$, $SD = .488$) report higher levels of authorship than students who do not participate in a faith community ($M = 3.847$, $SD = .546$, $p = .016$, $d = -.454$). The descriptive statistics for authorship

and faith community participation can be found in Table 24 and Tukey post hoc test results can be found in Table 25.

Table 24

Authorship and Faith Community Participation, Descriptive Statistics

Faith Community Participation	Mean	*SD*	*N*
None	3.847	0.546	72
A few times a semester	3.894	0.538	92
2-3 times a month	4.061	0.503	76
Weekly	4.079	0.488	116

Table 25

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Authorship Subscale by Faith Community Participation

Comparison Groups		Mean Difference	Cohen's *d*	*p*
None	A few times a semester	-0.047	-0.086	0.939
	2-3 times a month	-0.213	-0.407	0.060
	Weekly*	-0.232	-0.454	0.016
A few times a semester	2-3 times a month	-0.167	-0.319	0.162
	Weekly	-0.185	-0.363	0.052
2-3 times a month	Weekly	-0.019	-0.038	0.995

$*p < .05$

A one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference between the susceptibility of control subscale results and faith community participation, $F(3, 351) = .212$, $p = .888$. The descriptive statistics for susceptibility of control and faith community participation can be found in Table 26.

Table 26

Susceptibility of Control and Faith Community Participation, Descriptive Statistics

Faith Community Participation	Mean	*SD*	*N*
None	2.722	0.758	72
A few times a semester	2.811	0.723	91
2-3 times a month	2.747	0.703	76
Weekly	2.784	0.859	116

A one-way ANOVA investigating the relationship between interest-seeking and faith community participation did find a significant difference, $F(3, 351) = 2.837$, $p = .038$. The post hoc test revealed that students who participated weekly in a faith community ($M = 3.846$, $SD = .866$) were significantly more likely to report higher levels on interest-seeking than students who only attended faith communities a few times a semester ($M = 3.531$, $SD = .886$, $p = .043$, $d = -.360$ (see Table 27 for the descriptive statistics for the interest-seeking subscale, and Table 28 for Tukey's post hoc test results).

Table 27

Interest-Seeking and Faith Community Participation, Descriptive Statistics

Faith Community Participation	Mean	SD	N
None	3.578	0.950	72
A few times a semester	3.531	0.886	91
2-3 times a month	3.736	0.681	76
Weekly	3.846	0.866	116

Table 28

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Interest-Seeking Subscale by Faith Community Participation

Group Comparisons		Mean Difference	Cohen's *d*	*p*
None	A few times a semester	0.047	0.051	0.985
	2-3 times a month	-0.158	-0.193	0.672
	Weekly	-0.268	-0.298	0.157
A few times a semester	2-3 times a month	-0.205	-0.257	0.410
	Weekly*	-0.315	-0.360	0.043
2-3 times a month	Weekly	-0.110	-0.138	0.819

*$p < .05$

Chapter 5: Overview of Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between purpose and autonomous functioning in undergraduate college students. Self-determination theory posits that when individuals live with a sense of authenticity because their basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are met, they are most likely to experience a sense of purpose (Ryan et al., 2016). Higher education professionals and parents both have a vested interest in helping students develop as autonomous and purposeful people, yet little is understood about the relationship of these two developmental aims, especially when purpose is operationalized to include a beyond-the-self focus. In order to provide more informed guidance, this study sought to discover any useful correlations between purpose and autonomous functioning using bivariate analysis. The Claremont Purpose Scale was used to measure purpose and the Index of Autonomous Functioning was used to measure autonomous functioning.

Purpose was defined as having a goal orientation that focuses beyond-the-self and gives one a sense of meaning (Damon, 2003). Autonomous functioning, was defined as the sense of authorship of one's life, interest in exploring self, and the extent to which behavior is a response to the integrated self as opposed to motivated by pressure (Weinstein et al., 2012a). The study also explored the relationships among the independent variables of gender, volunteerism, study abroad interest, and faith community participation.

Research Question 1: Purpose and Autonomous Functioning

The first research question inquired about the relationship between the level of autonomous functioning and the criteria for purpose. The hypotheses, suggesting that those with a higher level of autonomous functioning would also be more likely to meet the criteria for purpose and those with lower levels of autonomous functioning will be less likely to meet the criteria for purpose, were supported. The data suggested that a small, but significant, positive correlation exists between autonomous functioning and the criteria met for purpose, indicating that autonomy and purpose are correlated but distinct constructs. This finding contributes to current literature on emerging adults because this study was the first to investigate the relationship between autonomous functioning and purpose, and the results support the widely accepted belief that exercising autonomy and operating from a sense of purpose are key developmental aims for emerging adults (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2005).

The correlation between purpose and autonomous functioning supports the suggestion of previous scholars that identity and purpose are related but separate dimensions of development (Bronk, 2014; Burrow & Hill, 2011; Hill et al., 2016; Mclean & Pratt, 2006). Moran (2017) used a metaphor of a boat to describe the value of purpose on a self-determined autonomous life:

> Purpose shines light in a promising direction, then individuals concentrate energy that way to build momentum. Without purpose, individuals are like sailboats, going whichever way the 'cultural winds' blow. External incentives drive their direction. Individuals that have a specific life purpose are like powerboats. Regardless which way the 'cultural winds' are blowing, or if life

> is a little 'stormy,' the person has internal 'on-board' power to 'stay on course' toward one's desired self. (p. 235)

While the current study does not attempt to determine to what extent either of these constructs is a mediating variable for the other, the findings do provide further evidence for Frankl's (1985) assertion and Moran's (2017) image that embodying our true self and contributing to the world in meaningful ways are deeply entwined.

Emerging adult developmental aims involve making sense of personhood, thus that autonomous functioning is correlated to having a sense of purpose is not surprising. Pfund, Bono, and Hill (2020) suggested that because purpose and identity development are closely related, "one route to helping students find a purpose is through helping students realize who they want to be as individuals" (p. 100). Recently, purpose researchers have turned their attention to college students with disabilities and have framed the bidirectional relationship between purpose and autonomy this way – autonomous acts, such as requesting accommodations, facilitate opportunities to pursue purpose while the development of purpose may make the student more likely to autonomously seek accommodations (Newman, Kimball, Vaccaro, Moore, & Troiano, 2019). Knowledge of the relationship between the direction purpose provides and the value of living autonomously is useful for parents, educators, and mentors as they interact with young people – the correlation suggests that supporting development in one area may bolster growth in the other.

Research Question 2: Relationships Between the Dimensions of Purpose and Autonomous Functioning

The second research question focused on investigating the relationships between the dimensions of autonomous functioning and the dimensions of the criteria for purpose. The hypothesis, that all three dimensions of autonomous functioning would be associated with all three dimensions of purpose, was partially supported and the null hypothesis was retained. The Index of Autonomous Functioning had significant positive correlations with all three dimensions of the Claremont Purpose Scale: a goal orientation, a sense of meaning, and a beyond-the-self focus.

Correlations between the Claremont Purpose Scale and the dimensions of the Index of Autonomous Functioning were not as apparent. The Claremont Purpose scale had a significant positive correlation with the authorship and interest-taking dimensions of autonomous functioning, but no correlation with a low level of susceptibility of control. Amongst the dimensions, the authorship/congruence and interest-taking dimensions of autonomous functioning had positive correlations with the goal-orientation, meaning, and beyond-the-self dimensions of purpose. The susceptibly of control dimension of autonomous functioning only had a positive correlation with the meaning dimension of purpose.

Purpose was positively correlated with the authorship and interest-taking dimensions of autonomous functioning. Purpose is thought to be developed through self-exploration (Damon, 2009; Fry, 1998). Self-exploration often involves interest-taking, increasing awareness, and increasing a sense of authorship, utilizing new insights gained through awareness to live congruently (Ryan et al., 2008; Weinstein et al., 2012a).

In one study, researchers incorporated the self-determination concepts of authorship and interest-taking within their conceptualization of purpose. Li, Liu, Peng, Hicks, and Gou (2020) stated that purpose "is the feeling that one has a core life goal and one's life has a direction, or the experience that one has made a choice on major life issues and determined to live in accordance with it" (para 33). The Li et al. (2020) study highlighted the value of reflection and interest-taking on purpose formation. As purpose develops, gaining a sense of comprehension, "feeling that one's own life, as a whole, is comprehensible" is attained through "curiosity, willingness to think, desire to explore the nature of things, and in particular, the tendency and ability of self-refection" (Li et al., 2020, para 33). The findings of this study reinforce this connection between increasing self-awareness, self-authorship, and autonomy with having a sense of purpose.

Susceptibly of control. The susceptibility of control dimension of autonomous functioning had a significant negative correlation with the dimension of meaning. In other words, as expected, a low level of external or internal pressure to act in a certain way was correlated with a sense of meaning. Curiously, no significant relationship was found between the susceptibility of control dimension of autonomous functioning and the Claremont Purpose Scale. Similarly, no significant relationship was found between the susceptibility of control and the purpose dimensions of goal orientation or beyond-the-self focus. The relationships between the Index of Autonomous Functioning and its dimensions provide more interesting insights. As expected, a low level of susceptibility of control was correlated with

self-authorship/congruence. Thus, the higher sense of alignment between values and behavior, the less likely one is to respond to pressure to behave in a certain way.

Surprisingly, a high level of susceptibility of control was correlated with the interest-taking dimension and autonomous functioning. This data seems to suggest that the more likely one is to self-reflect with a sense of curiosity, the more likely they are to respond to internal or external pressure. Even more intriguing, the more one operates from a sense of self-determination and self-organization, the more likely they are to sense they have pressured themselves to behave in a particular way.

Perhaps this data points to the complexity of becoming and perceiving oneself as autonomous. Emerging adulthood provides ample opportunities for young people to increase self-awareness but the reality is that enacting agency to live authentically can be daunting. Conceivably the results in this study point to a counterintuitive reality, that young people can both see themselves as autonomous and self-reflective while at the same time act in response to various internal and external pressures. The findings of this dissertation study offer new insight into how the pressure to behave in a certain way may be an invisible influence outside of the awareness of someone who reports high levels of autonomous functioning and an interest in self-reflection.

Susceptibility of control and goal-orientation. Although having a goal orientation was not correlated with susceptibility of control, there were significant relationships between goal orientation and interest-taking. In this study, interest-taking, which promotes the likelihood of agency being exercised to live according to self-determined goals (Ryan et al., 2008; Weinstein et al., 2012a), was negatively correlated with susceptibility of control.

Similarly curious, a correlation existed between authorship and a goal orientation but not between goal orientation and a low level of susceptibility of control. Previous authors have suggested that individuals who are living in alignment with their self-determined goals and values have a higher sense of authorship and congruence (Ryan et al., 2008; Weinstein et al., 2012a). Within self-determination literature, self-determined goals are referred to as self-concordant goals, which "feel internally caused [and] likely better represent the developing interests, core values, and long-term potentials of the person" (Sheldon, 2014, p. 359). People who are able to identify goals they want, as opposed to goals they feel pressured to attain, are more likely to meet the psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence therefore experiencing the benefits of psychological well-being (Werner & Milyavskaya, 2018).

Perhaps the lack of relationship between goal orientation and susceptibly of control is due to the issue identified by Sheldon (2009), of how challenging it is to "pick the 'right' goals for oneself, one must often be able to resist social pressures, from both peers and well-meaning authorities, which might prompt one to pursue personally inappropriate goals" (p. 558). In a review of the literature on goals, Milyavskaya and Werner (2018) summarized the distinction with more nuance,

> controlled goals [in contrast to self-concordant goals] are still likely to be personally set and endorsed, [yet] such pursuits are self-discrepant and do not reflect what the individual truly wants, thereby resulting in lower quality motivation and detracting from goal attainment. (p. 166)

It is worth mentioning, the students in this study attended a faith-based institution and may have grown up with significant religious figures, which could have some influence on how they are making sense of their future goals.

In the current study, the goal orientation dimension of purpose focused on personal goals set by oneself but did not investigate the locus of control regarding the choice of goals. The findings indicate that students with a goal orientation sensed congruence in their own life, perhaps the goals were "personally set and endorsed," while not necessarily releasing them from the pressure of identifying goals that they "truly want[ed]".

Interestingly, Werner and Milyavskava (2018) found that in addition to having want-to goals, progress toward any goal, and not the attainment of goals, resulted in psychological need satisfaction. Meaning that progress toward a goal orientation, regardless of the relationship between the goal and susceptibility of control, could result in meeting the need for autonomy. This dissertation study did not investigate moderating variables, which makes obtaining a full understanding of these relationships challenging. Additionally, identity formation is still in process, co-existing developmental aims may be difficult to investigate because emerging adulthood is ripe for exploration and change. A confusing relationship likely exists between how much young people are making decisions congruent with themselves and how much they are acting in a manner to feel a certain way (i.e., external locus of control) during developmental years when young people engage more questions than answers.

Susceptibility of control and meaning. Again, perhaps the most surprising finding is the lack of relationships the susceptibility of control dimension of autonomous functioning had with the dimensions of purpose. While a low level of susceptibility of control had a relationship with meaning, as hypothesized, no such relationship with a beyond-the-self focus was found. However, both meaningfulness and having a focus beyond oneself were correlated with the authorship and interest-taking dimensions of autonomous functioning.

Theorists and researchers have long believed that meaning-making, through engagement with challenging questions and self-exploration, is important in the formation of purpose (Arnett, 2000; Damon, 2009; Fry, 1998). Interest-taking involves getting curious about oneself and putting effort into reflection as a mode of increasing knowledge of oneself. One specific way young people can engage this process is by having novel experiences that offer new ways of considering the investment they may want to make in the world (Braskamp et al, 2008; Erikson, 1968; Malin, Ballard, & Damon, 2015). Reflection upon these new experiences and possible contributions one might make to society increases the likelihood that one will experience a sense of meaning around their purpose (Glanzer et al., 2017). The findings suggest that as students experience a sense of meaning they are more likely to report higher levels of authorship, interest-taking, and a lower level of susceptibly of control. Meaningfulness is the only dimension of purpose to have relationships with each of the autonomous functioning dimensions perhaps pointing to the value of meaning for self-determination.

Susceptibility of control and beyond-the-self focus. As stated, unexpectedly the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose had a relationship with authorship and interest-taking but did not have a relationship with a low level of susceptibly of control. Prosocial life purposes promote both self-regulation in the present and self-authorship in the future as an individual considers how they may offer the world something meaningful (Moran, 2017, 2020). The relationships between the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose and both authorship and interest-taking support this perspective. Conceptualizing purpose as such suggests that the beyond-the-self focus is, at least in part, a result of autonomous functioning. Perhaps a relationship between a low level of susceptibly of control and a beyond-the-self focus develops later in adulthood, which could be why the participants in this study did not report the relationship at this point in their lives.

Research Question 3 and 4: Gender, Volunteerism, Study Abroad, and Faith Communities

The third and fourth research questions focused on the relationship between the criteria met for purpose and different demographics. The life experience variables researched were gender, volunteerism, experience orientation to study abroad, and participation in a faith community.

Gender. The first gender hypothesis, that females would meet more criteria for purpose than males, was not supported as the results did not reveal a significant difference between gender and the sense of purpose. Perhaps not surprising as previous studies, which investigated the relationship between gender and purpose, have not found a consistent difference (García-Alandete, 2014; Meier & Edwards,

1974; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987). However, those studies did not include the newer beyond-the-self dimension of purpose.

The current research contributes to the literature around purpose and gender because the data indicated that women were statistically more likely to meet more criteria for the goal orientation and beyond-the-self dimension of purpose. Understanding the significant differences by dimension of purpose is useful because these results align with the propensity for women to report higher levels of Ethic of Care and charitable engagement (Astin et al., 2011a) and vital goals (Garcia-Alandete, 2014). The results of the current study provide insight about how men and women may be developing purpose in different ways. In other words, although there was not a significant difference between gender and the criteria met for purpose, women may develop purposeful goals and a beyond-the-self focus sooner than men.

The second hypothesis focusing on gender stated that females would report higher autonomous functioning than males and this was supported. While the data in this study revealed a significant difference between autonomous functioning and gender, no significant difference existed between gender and any of the autonomous functioning subscales. Women were more likely to report autonomous functioning, which is not entirely surprising given the complex and interconnected variables that influence gender expectations during emerging adulthood (Goldin, et al., 2006; Kleinfeld, 2009; Schiffrin et al., 2019).

In the current study, young adult women are more likely to be autonomous and have a goal orientation and a beyond-the-self focus. Notable, women were not more likely to report a sense of meaning, which may provide some indication that

women experience a disconnect between prosocial goals and a sense of meaning. Perhaps women could benefit from support making these connections. Relatedly, men may be delayed in their autonomous functioning and purpose development, specifically in the dimensions of goal orientation and beyond-the-self focus.

Volunteerism. One hypothesis stated that students who volunteered would meet more criteria for purpose than students who did not volunteer, which was not supported. However, students who volunteered frequently or occasionally were more likely to meet the criteria for the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose than students who did not volunteer but no statistical difference was found between these groups and the overall likelihood of meeting the criteria for purpose. When the raw data was analyzed, students who volunteered frequently (representing less than 10%) were statistically more likely to meet the criteria for purpose than students who did not volunteer and students who reported volunteering occasionally.

The second hypotheses regarding volunteerism stated that students who volunteered would report higher levels of autonomous functioning than students who did not volunteer, which was not supported. Previous researchers have found that volunteerism influences both a sense of meaning and the development of self-concept (Astin et al., 2011a), but in the current study students who volunteered frequently or occasionally were not more likely to score higher for autonomous functioning or any of its subscales and were not more likely to meet the criteria for purpose or the meaning and goal dimensions.

Perhaps in order to conceptualize these results, understanding volunteerism in the context of young adulthood is important. In a study among 406 college students

at a small liberal arts university, Moore, Warta and Erichsen (2014) found that college student volunteering is in decline. Among the student participants, many had previous volunteer experience (65.3%) and considerably less were actively volunteering (22.9%). The primary motivation reported by student volunteers was to live out their altruistic values and the second motivation identified among current volunteering students was an understanding that the experience may give them new insights regarding future goals. Interestingly, current student volunteers scored higher on the agreeableness personality characteristic. These motivating factors and personality characteristics among student volunteers help explain the correlation between volunteerism and the beyond-the-self focus found in the current study. Perhaps just because students can see the beyond-the-self value of their volunteerism does not mean they volunteer from a sense of autonomy or that the choice aligns with their goals, and thus does not necessarily give them a sense of meaningfulness. Also worth consideration regarding this particular study is the potential influence of faith-based communities on a young person's decision to volunteer - an expected act or a genuine response to internal motivation.

Volunteerism is not the only way for college students to engage prosocial goal orientations. As Hill, Burrow, Brandenberger, Lapsley, and Quaranto (2010) stated "one's purpose in life is often indicated by multiple and related goals, rather than a single one...(i.e., help others, influence the social structure, serve the community)" (p. 174). Perhaps students in the current study have found prosocial goals that can be met outside of volunteering.

One study attempted to distinguish between different types of prosocial behavior in young adults and found that "helping and pro-environmental behaviors were related to higher daily well-being, whereas volunteering and charitable giving were not" (Wray-Lake, DeHaan, Shubert, & Ryan, 2019, p. 172). This study used the self-determination theory framework and focused on well-being attained through basic need satisfaction (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Wray-Lake et al. (2019) suggested that because other studies had found a correlation between volunteerism and wellbeing in older adults, perhaps volunteering is not always a satisfying experience for emerging adults.

While volunteering may be one way to increase exposure to the world's needs, it may not always be a satisfying or meaningful experience embarked upon with a sense of volition and could even lead toward resentment (Beehr, LeGro, Porter, Bowling, & Swader, 2010). If volunteering is not enjoyable or engaged under duress, it may thwart autonomy (Wray-Lake, DeHaan, Shubert, & Ryan, 2019). These associated experiences of volunteering may be why the current results only found a relationship between a beyond-the-self focus and volunteerism. The current findings are important because they give more specific insight into how volunteering may be influencing autonomy and purpose development.

Study Abroad. The hypotheses that students who had studied abroad or planned to study abroad would report higher scores for purpose and autonomy were not supported. The data revealed that when students were categorized by their intention to study abroad, there was no significant difference in the likelihood students would meet the criteria for purpose or autonomous functioning. This may

have been due to the few students who had study abroad experiences, thus the student interest category was combined with the student experience category. Among these participants, the interest and participation to study abroad does not correlate with purpose or autonomy. This finding is important because it suggests that there is nothing unique about the students who are interested in study abroad (e.g., personal characteristic or motivation) that would make them more likely to report purpose or autonomy. Perhaps this finding supports previous literature, which has indicated it is the trip itself that is transformative to the student (Astin et al., 2011a; Pipitone & Raghavan, 2017).

Faith Community Participation. The hypothesis that stated students who participated in a faith community would meet more criteria for purpose than students who did not participate in a faith community was supported. Students who participated in faith communities weekly were more likely to meet the criteria for purpose than students who participated in faith communities a few times a semester or not at all. Students who participated in faith communities two or three times a month were more likely to meet the criteria for purpose than students who did not participate in a faith community outside of the university. The data revealed these same differences in the likelihood that students who meet the criteria for the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose. Students who participated weekly in faith communities were more likely to meet the criteria for the meaning dimension of purpose than all other respondent groups.

The second hypothesis focusing on faith communities, that students who participated in a faith community would be more likely to report higher levels of

autonomous functioning, was also supported. Students who participated in faith communities weekly were significantly more likely to report autonomous functioning than students who did not engage a faith community. Additionally, students who participated weekly in faith communities reported higher levels of authorship and interest-seeking than students who did not patriciate in faith communities.

These findings indicate the value of a supportive community during emerging adulthood. Aligned with previous research that indicated religious organizations serve as supportive in purpose development (Pfund & Miller-Perrin, 2019) and specifically when it came to having prosocial focus (Moran, Bundick, Malin, & Reilly, 2013). Upon the conclusion of a recent study, Pfund and Miller-Perrin (2019) wrote that "faith community involvement offers exactly what an emerging adult needs to comfortably search for meaning while simultaneously being challenged to find it" (p. 249). Moran et al. (2013) suggested that churches could serve as "integrating structures" for young people (p. 366). In their research, faith communities orchestrated "networks to learn beyond-the-self values, build connections with others who shared their values, and engage in outreach activities, mission trips, and mentoring of younger children…religion also had a comforting effect that made helping others less stressful" (Moran, et al., 2013, p. 366). The current study contributes to these findings because for the first the Claremont Purpose Scale and the Index of Autonomous Functioning were used to further understand the relationships the faith community has with important developmental aims. Not only was faith community involvement correlated with purpose and autonomous

functioning, it also was associated with the meaning, beyond-the-self focus, authorship, and interest-taking dimensions.

The relationships between faith community participation and the concepts of meaning and prosocial focus have been established (Clydesdale, 2015; Mariano & Damon, 2008) and were expected. The correlation between faith community participation and authorship and interest-taking is more curious. Faith communities can be supportive to adults as they explore their identity (King, 2008; Tirri & Quinn, 2010). Further, the current research indicates that faith communities are not barriers to autonomous functioning, authorship, or interest-taking. In other words, participation with an in-group, such as a religious community, does not appear to inhibit a young person's ability to act with a sense of volition.

Implications for Practice

This dissertation research is the first to specifically study the relationships dimensions of purpose, including a beyond-the-self focus, and the dimensions of autonomous functioning, and provides valuable insights for parents, mentors, and educators. As suspected, purpose and autonomous functioning were positively correlated, which provides some indication that supporting one of these developmental aims could indirectly support the other. However, the experience of men and women may differ.

While previous results have provided inconsistent results regarding gender and developmental aims, this study was the first to investigate gender and the specific dimensions of both purpose and autonomy. This study provides some indication that women may develop purpose and autonomy sooner than men, which is valuable in

considering how to offer students support. However, while men may need more support than women, the findings also suggest that women may need help considering how their goal orientations and beyond-the-self focus can be a source of meaning in their lives.

Institutions should consider working with vocation and calling centers to enhance training for mentors, advisors, and student development professionals. When it comes to purpose and autonomy, questions, reflections, and suggestions need to be tailored around a student's readiness. Consideration should be given to how a student's gender may have influenced their purpose and autonomy development. Men may need more time and attention given to purpose exploration and the fostering of autonomy. Women may need less encouragement on cultivating autonomy and purpose and may need more attention given to how to connect their purpose to meaning.

The results of this study also indicate that involvement with a faith community is associated with purpose, a beyond-the-self focus, meaningfulness, autonomous functioning, authorship, and interest-taking. This study did not investigate moderating values and the data does not suggest whether it is students with higher levels of purpose and autonomy that choose to be involved in faith community or that the faith community promotes this development. However, these findings in the context of previous literature do provide further evidence that connection to a faith community during emerging adulthood may be of value. Importantly, regular interaction with a religious community does not appear to interfere with autonomous

development given the results indicating that students attending faith communities reported higher levels of autonomous functioning, authorship, and interest-taking.

Institutions of higher education should not misjudge faith communities as a barrier to autonomy development. Rather, schools, specifically small Christian universities, should consider these communities as possible extensions of outside-of-the-classroom education. As potential student development partners, church leaders could be invited to developmental theory and practice trainings. Students are influenced in positive ways by their faith community experiences and it would be prudent for schools to think about how they can maximize the student experience by helping shape how churches think about how college students develop autonomy and purpose.

Interestingly, while faith community participation correlated with purpose and autonomous functioning, volunteering did not. Having a beyond-the-self focus was the only dimension that had a positive relationship with volunteerism. Though students who volunteer do appear to have a desire to contribute to the world, the data does not provide evidence that students who volunteer are any more likely to have a clear understanding of a goal on their horizon that gives their life meaning. Further, students who volunteer are no more likely to report that they are living with a sense of volition. Although this study did not intend to study moderating values, this finding provides useful information for educators, parents, and mentors as it suggests that volunteering is not a standalone solution to purpose formation and autonomous development.

Volunteering for the sake of volunteering is not useful for supporting purpose and autonomy development and schools should not assume otherwise. According to the results of this study, volunteering is solely related to a beyond-the-self focus. Careful consideration should be given to providing a variety of volunteer opportunities that are connected to a student's major or area of interest. By diversifying volunteer opportunities, students have more opportunities to connect their volunteering to something that may be of interest to them, an autonomous act that is supportive of purpose exploration. Students should be encouraged to thoughtfully reflect on their volunteer experience. Perhaps service is a value of their faith or personal life, and it is important that students have the freedom to explore what they liked or did not like about the volunteer experience outside of how contributing to society may have made them feel.

Limitations

While the current study contributes to the literature on purpose and autonomous functioning as the first to closely investigate the relationships between these two constructs, certain limitations need to be considered when understanding these results. The first limitation is the student population. The participants in this study were students from a small private faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwest region of the United States and may not be representative of the diversity represented within the population of emerging adults. This study did not ask demographic questions about religious identity, racial identity, ethnic identity, sexual identity, gender identity, or ability and did not consider how different aspects of identity may intersect to influence purpose or autonomy formation. Nor did the study

consider socioeconomic status, or how the participants in this study were all students of higher education, which needs to be considered when reviewing the results.

A second limitation was the lack of student experience when it came to study abroad and volunteerism. The baseline thresholds were not met so study abroad experience was collapsed with study abroad interest and volunteered frequently was collapsed with volunteered occasionally. This lack of these experiences within the participant group provided no clear insight on the relationships of study abroad experience or volunteering frequently with sense of purpose or autonomous functioning.

A third limitation of this study was the potential limitations of how purpose and autonomous functioning were conceptualized. The literature sourced was predominately authored by Western scholars and suspected to be from Eurocentric cultures where whiteness, as a social construct, has shaped perspectives around developmental aims. While disentangling the influence of dominant and privileged cultures can be challenging, this study needs to be taken within context as unconscious bias could be embedded in the current understandings of purpose and autonomy. This study may provide contributions to the literature on purpose and autonomy, and understanding the potential limitations on how purpose and autonomy were understood from potentially homogenous, and not diverse, perspectives is important.

Finally, the current study solely focused on the relationships between purpose and autonomous functioning. It has been suggested that further research is necessary to understand best practices that will support exploration of and commitment to

purpose (Bronk & Baumsteiger, 2017). While this study provides information that could be valuable to educators, it does not provide insights regarding which variables may be having a supportive effect on the others.

Recommendations for Research

Among participants, only the beyond-the-self dimension of purpose correlated with volunteerism. This study raises some questions about how valuable volunteering may be as a support to purpose and autonomy development. The institution where the research was conducted does not have a formal service learning program. Future research should consider a similar study at an institution that has required service learning hours to better understand the relationship between volunteerism and the development of purpose and autonomy. Better understanding the relationships between both purpose and autonomous functioning with prosocial goals outside of volunteering would also be important. Research should also continue to investigate if there is a unique relationship between emerging adults and volunteerism and how this may change over time.

Future research should consider if the goal dimension of the Claremont Purpose Scale is a satisfactory measure for self-concordant goals. While this inventory was not based on self-determination theory, it could be useful to understand if the types of goals associated with purpose need to meet the same threshold of internal resonance that self-determination theorists have identified.

The results around the susceptibility of control dimension of autonomy provided the most unexpected, and perhaps interesting, results. In this study, having a low level of external and internal pressure only related with having a sense of

meaning and authorship/self-congruence. Further, higher levels of pressure correlated with interest-taking and autonomy. Perhaps these results are because of the complexity of emerging adulthood – students in this study reported higher levels of autonomous functioning and higher levels of pressure to behave in a certain way. Is this limited to this student population, perhaps students who would be drawn to a faith-based institution, or would similar scores be reported in more diverse communities of emerging adults? If this phenomenon is present in other groups of emerging adults, studying the relationship in other age demographics would be valuable. Understanding this seemingly paradoxical relationship more fully would be useful. For instance, are students aware of this potential disconnect, how are they making sense of what appear to be divergent experiences, and how do they resolve any cognitive dissonance they may encounter?

At the institution where this study took place, students who regularly attended faith communities reported higher levels of autonomous functioning. Future research may want to consider if a person's perceived autonomy equates with actual autonomy, specifically in relation to faith. If students have made strong commitments to their faith without exploring their faith on their own, they may assume a high level of faith development when developmentalist would still consider them foreclosed because of their strong reliance on authority figures (Marcia, 1966). It may be useful for future research to consider the connection between faith development and autonomy development with special attention given toward how perceived development may not align with the expectations of developmental theory.

Future research should also focus on understanding how unique identities (e.g., gender, cultural, ethnic, ability, social class, religion) may influence purpose and autonomy development. Due to the gender discrepancies, special attention should be given to how gender socialization may be a factor effecting the development of autonomy and purpose in women. Societal expectations may be a barrier for women as they appear to struggle finding a sense of meaning from their goal orientation and beyond-the-self focus. Future research should consider if this disconnect is related to how women, especially Christian women, are perceiving the expectations that their community has for them regarding their future intentions and how they serve the world. Do Christian women feel as though they have a responsibility to make contributions to society even when those efforts are not personally meaningful?

Important to note is that purpose exploration may be considered a privileged developmental aim. Purpose for young people from lower socioeconomic statuses may not fit within the current studies definition because survival has to be prioritized (Vaccaro, Kimball, Newman, Moore, & Troiano, 2019). For young adults with disabilities and/ or experiencing economic hardship, financial resources cannot be separated from purpose formation. Similarly, unique populations may have unique experiences that foster the dimensions of purpose and autonomy. For example, "having a sense of purpose may embolden" students with disabilities, and when they "believe in the value and meaning of their goals may be more likely to assert themselves in the face of faculty resistance or institutional obstacles" (Newman et al., 2019, p. 120), potentially increasing autonomy. Although the current study did not

investigate disability or class demographics, recent researchers have identified the need for further study of purpose within these populations (Newman et al., 2019; Vaccaro et al., 2020) and considering the relationship between purpose and autonomy in more diverse populations would be valuable.

Conclusions

The current study is important because it contributes to previous literature on development in young adults as it is the first to investigate the relationship between autonomous functioning and having a sense of purpose that includes a beyond-the-self focus. As suspected, students who reported higher levels of autonomous functioning were more likely to meet the criteria for purpose, a finding that aligns with developmental theory. In addition, the Index of Autonomous Functioning positively correlated with all three dimensions of the Claremont Purpose Scale, and the Claremont Purpose scale had a significant positive correlation with the authorship and interest-taking dimensions of autonomous functioning. The results involving the susceptibility of control dimension of autonomous functioning provided unexpected results, indicating that operating with a low level of internal/external pressure may be a more complex phenomenon.

Furthermore, this study provided useful insight into how gender may influence sense of purpose and autonomous functioning. Women reported higher scores on both scales but indicated they may need assistance with meaning-making when it comes to processing their purposes. Students who report higher levels of both autonomous functioning and criteria met for purpose were more involved with faith communities indicating the potential significance of these relationships.

Conversely, volunteerism was only associated with a beyond-the-self focus providing pause to how volunteering should be promoted and encouraged in connection with purpose and autonomy development. Overall, the data in this study offer important findings that add to the previous literature on purpose and autonomous functioning.

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Appendices

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

BETHEL
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
3900 Bethel Drive
PO2322
St. Paul, MN 55112

October 14, 2019

Michelle Steffenhagen
Bethel University
St. Paul, MN 55112

Re: Project FA-07-19 Purpose and autonomy in emerging adults

Dear Michelle,

On October 14, 2019, the Bethel University Institutional Review Board completed the review of your proposed study and approved the above referenced study.

Please note that this approval is limited to the project as described on the most recent Human Subjects Review Form documentation, including email correspondence. Also, please be reminded that it is the responsibility of the investigator(s) to bring to the attention of the IRB any proposed changes in the project or activity plans, and to report to the IRB any unanticipated problems that may affect the welfare of human subjects. Last, the approval is valid until October 13, 2020.

Sincerely,

Peter Jankowski, Ph.D.
Chair, Bethel University IRB

Appendix B

Purpose Survey 2019

Dissertation Research for Wellbeing

Start of Block: Letter of Consent

You are invited to participate in a study investigating purpose. I hope to learn more about the relationship between purpose and autonomy in emerging adults in order to better understand purpose development.

You are invited to participate in a study investigating purpose. I hope to learn more about the relationship between purpose and autonomy in emerging adults in order to better understand purpose development. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a Bethel University undergraduate student in Introduction to Wellbeing.

This study is being conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation research project as I work to complete my Doctorate of Education in Higher Education Leadership at Bethel University. My hope is to learn more about how educators can help young adults develop purpose as they take ownership of their lives. If you decide to participate, you will respond to 32 online survey questions. The questions are designed to ask you about your sense of purpose and autonomy and should only take you about 7-8 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey should not cause any discomfort, but you may find some of the questions to be of a sensitive nature. Please feel free to skip any question for any reason. If you do encounter a question that generates discomfort and you would like to speak with someone, please reach out to your instructor, your resident director, or the counseling center for further processing.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Bethel University or me in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. Consent to participating in this study does require you to be 18 years of age. If you are not 18 years old yet, your responses will remain confidential and the data will only be used for educational purposes.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research related injury, please email Michelle Steffenhagen (allmica@bethel.edu) or Dr. Jessica Daniels (j-daniels@bethel.edu).

Do you agree to participate in this study?
If you are not 18 years old or older, select option 3.

- ○ Yes, I am 18 years or older and I consent to participate in this research study. (4)
- ○ No, I am 18 years or older and I do not consent to participate in this research study (my responses, without any identifying information, will only be used by the Wellbeing program director for educational purposes). (5)
- ○ I am not yet 18 years old yet (my responses, without any identifying information, will only be used by the Wellbeing program director for educational purposes and not in this research study). (6)

End of Block: Letter of Consent

Start of Block: Claremont Purpose Inventory

Q1 How hard are you working to make your long-term aims a reality?

- ○ Not at all hard (1)
- ○ Slightly hard (2)
- ○ Somewhat hard (3)
- ○ Quite hard (4)
- ○ Extremely hard (5)

Q2 How much effort are you putting into making your goals a reality?

- Almost no effort (1)
- A little bit of effort (2)
- Some effort (3)
- Quite a bit of effort (4)
- A tremendous amount of effort (5)

Q3 How engaged are you in carrying out the plans that you set for yourself?

- Not at all engaged (1)
- Slightly engaged (2)
- Somewhat engaged (3)
- Quite engaged (4)
- Extremely engaged (5)

Q4 What portion of your daily activities move you closer to your long-term aims?

- None of my daily activities (1)
- A few of my daily activities (2)
- Some of my daily activities (3)
- Most of my daily activities (4)
- All of my daily activities (5)

Q5 How clear is your sense of purpose in your life?

- ○ Not at all clear (1)
- ○ A little bit clear (2)
- ○ Somewhat clear (3)
- ○ Quite clear (4)
- ○ Extremely clear (5)

Q6 How well do you understand what gives your life meaning?

- ○ Do not understand at all (1)
- ○ Understand a little bit (2)
- ○ Understand somewhat (3)
- ○ Understand quite well (4)
- ○ Understand extremely well (5)

Q7 How confident are you that you have discovered a satisfying purpose for your life?

- ○ Not at all confident (1)
- ○ Slightly confident (2)
- ○ Somewhat confident (3)
- ○ Quite confident (4)
- ○ Extremely confident (5)

Q8 How clearly do you understand what it is that makes your life feel worthwhile?

- ○ Not at all clearly (1)
- ○ A little bit clearly (2)
- ○ Somewhat clearly (3)
- ○ Quite clearly (4)
- ○ Extremely clearly (5)

Q9 How often do you hope to leave the world better than you found it?

- ○ Almost never (1)
- ○ Once in a while (2)
- ○ Sometimes (3)
- ○ Frequently (4)
- ○ Almost all of the time (5)

Q10 How often do you find yourself hoping that you will make a meaningful contribution to the broader world?

- ○ Almost never (1)
- ○ Once in a while (2)
- ○ Sometimes (3)
- ○ Frequently (4)
- ○ Almost all of the time (5)

Q11 How important is it for you to make the world a better place in some way?

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Somewhat important (3)
- Quite important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

Q12 How often do you hope that the work you do positively influences others?

- Almost never (1)
- Once in a while (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Frequently (4)
- Almost all of the time (5)

End of Block: Claremont Purpose Inventory

Start of Block: Index of Autonomous Functioning

Q13 My decisions represent my most important values and feelings.

- Not at all true (1)
- A bit true (2)
- Somewhat true (3)
- Mostly true (4)
- Completely true (5)

Q14 I strongly identify with the things that I do.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q15 My actions are congruent with who I really am.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q16 My whole self stands behind the important decisions I make.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q17 My decisions are steadily informed by things I want or care about.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q18 I do things in order to avoid feeling badly about myself.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q19 I do a lot of things to avoid feeling ashamed.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q20 I try to manipulate myself into doing certain things.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q21 I believe certain things so that others will like me.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q22 I often pressure myself.

- ○ Not at all true (1)
- ○ A bit true (2)
- ○ Somewhat true (3)
- ○ Mostly true (4)
- ○ Completely true (5)

Q23 I often reflect on why I react the way I do.

- Not at all true (1)
- A bit true (2)
- Somewhat true (3)
- Mostly true (4)
- Completely true (5)

Q24 I am deeply curious when I react with fear or anxiety to events in my life.

- Not at all true (1)
- A bit true (2)
- Somewhat true (3)
- Mostly true (4)
- Completely true (5)

Q25 I am interested in understanding the reasons for my actions.

- Not at all true (1)
- A bit true (2)
- Somewhat true (3)
- Mostly true (4)
- Completely true (5)

Q26 I am interested in why I act the way I do.

- Not at all true (1)
- A bit true (2)
- Somewhat true (3)
- Mostly true (4)
- Completely true (5)

Q27 I like to investigate my feelings.

- Not at all true (1)
- A bit true (2)
- Somewhat true (3)
- Mostly true (4)
- Completely true (5)

End of Block: Index of Autonomous Functioning

Start of Block: Demographic Questions

Q30 Since entering college, how often have you performed volunteer work?

- Not at all (1)
- Occasionally (2)
- Frequently (3)

Q31 Have you studied outside of the U.S. while at Bethel? Choose the response that best represents your experience. If you have studied overseas for both a semester and an interim, choose the answer "Yes, during a semester".

- ○ No, I have not and/ or will not study outside of the U.S. while at Bethel (1)
- ○ No, but I am planning to for an interim (2)
- ○ No, but I am planning to for a semester (3)
- ○ Yes, during an interim (4)
- ○ Yes, during a semester (5)

Q32 Do you participate in a faith community outside of Bethel during the academic year? Choose the response that best represents your experience.

- ○ No, I don't participate in a faith community outside of Bethel during the academic year (1)
- ○ Yes, I participate in a faith community outside of Bethel a few times a semester (2)
- ○ Yes, I participate in a faith community outside of Bethel two or three times a month (3)
- ○ Yes, I participate in a faith community outside of Bethel once-a-week (4)

Q29 Gender:

_____

End of Block: Demographic Questions