
Exploring Pathways to Purpose in Scouts

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Abstract

Youth purpose was investigated using a two-phase embedded design with youth participating in Scouts BSA ($N=3,943$), ages 9–20 ($M=14.0$, $SD=1.9$). Participating Scouts were mostly White (91%) and male (98%). In Phase 1, we conducted a two-step cluster analysis on Scouts' survey responses to three purpose dimensions (personal meaning, goal-directedness, beyond-the-self orientation). Four clusters emerged: *Purposeful*, *Explorers*, *Dreamers*, *Nonpurposeful*. In Phase 2, we explored qualities of purpose within each cluster and programmatic features and relationships within the scouting context fostering youth purpose with a Scout subsample ($N=30$) who completed semi-structured interviews. Results demonstrated that adults supporting scouting, inspiration from older peers, and opportunities to help others and explore new activities supported youth purpose.

Keywords

youth purpose, sense of purpose, mixed methods research, relational developmental systems, adolescence, positive youth development

The development of purpose is an evolving topic that invites inquiry from a broad range of theoretical perspectives seeking to define its contours and contexts. Since purpose is inextricably interwoven with the human capacity to become self-actualized, it is not surprising that it continues to be examined from a variety of disciplines. Delineating the development of youth purpose is a particularly challenging venture that asks researchers to question long-standing notions of youth as generally disinterested in purposeful explorations and altruistic pursuits and instead, to adopt more optimistic views of youth and their developmental potentialities (Burrow et al., 2020; Damon et al., 2003; Hill & Burrow, 2021). Recent views of youth purpose put forth fluid conceptualizations that make room for youth having a “sense of purpose” or “the perceptible feeling that one’s life is directed and significant,” even if aims are not explicitly articulated (Hill & Burrow, 2021, p. 1). Such views suggest youth may be more purposeful than previously thought (Hill & Burrow, 2021), including adolescents who are in the process of constructing a sense of identity and exploring potentially purposeful pursuits (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003). From a relational developmental systems perspective, youth purpose development occurs within a dynamic, mutually-influencing relationship between a youth and their ecology, drawing upon contextual assets, both adaptive and supportive of positive development over time (Lerner et al., 2012; Overton, 2013; Urban et al., 2009). As such, equitable access to opportunities that inspire and nurture youth purpose development are considered necessary capital for promoting positive outcomes for all youth (Lerner et al., 2012; Overton, 2013; Urban et al., 2009). The goal of this study is to explore patterns of purpose in youth participating in scouting and how scouting-related experiences and relationships with adults and peers within the scouting context influence youth purpose.

Purpose as a Construct

Purpose has been described as a commitment to a long-term, personally meaningful goal and its scope extends beyond personal gain and moves toward benefitting the broader world (Damon, 2008). For centuries, philosophers from various intellectual traditions have posited that a satisfying or *good life* is shaped through purposeful pursuits and meaningful activities that add value to life and benefit others (Becker, 1992; Ryff & Singer, 1998). One of the first social scientists to investigate the role of purpose in living a meaningful life was Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, who survived four Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. Frankl entered his first concentration camp with a book manuscript hidden in the lining of his coat, outlining his fundamental premises of *Logotherapy* which

focuses on helping people find meaning and purpose in their lives (Frankl, 1946/1986, 1959; Viktor Frankl Institute, 2021).

In his writings, Frankl proposed the concept of a *will to meaning*, or the innate human desire to “give as much meaning as possible to one’s life, to actualize as many values as possible” (Frankl, 1946/1986, p. xviii). Frankl’s observations of survivors of the concentration camps provided him with evidence that the “will to meaning—has actual survival value” (Frankl, 1946/1986, p. xii). Camp prisoners who exhibited a future orientation, whether it was to complete a meaningful goal or to be reunited with a loved one, were most likely to endure the horrors of the camps (Frankl, 1946/1986). Moreover, Frankl’s emphasis on personal agency or an individual’s freedom to choose their own attitude in any given situation, and to create meaning out of suffering provided a path to persevere through even the most inhumane of conditions (Frankl, 1959). Frankl’s concept of a will to meaning postulates that a person’s desire to give meaning to their life serves as a motivating force to actualize values that bring out the best in oneself and the world around them, in other words, to live a purposeful life (Frankl, 1959; Viktor Frankl Institute, 2021). Recent conceptualizations of purpose move beyond an internal meaning orientation or *will to meaning* (Frankl, 1959) and further characterize purpose as an external quest to make a difference in the world (Damon et al., 2003). Accordingly, an external orientation concerned with the welfare of others is as essential to living a purposeful life, as is Frankl’s more internally oriented *will to meaning* construct (Damon et al., 2003; Frankl, 1959).

Theoretical perspectives from the field of positive psychology also propose that each person is in possession of empowering internal resources and the ability to choose values and goals that promote higher or noble purposes (Seligman, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Similarly, social psychologists describe purpose as constituting one of four human needs for meaning, along with self-worth, value, and efficacy (Baumeister, 1991). Cognitive psychologists frame purpose as encompassing three dimensions of scope, strength, and awareness; scope referring to the ubiquity of a sense of purpose in a person’s life, strength referring to the influence purpose has on a person’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and awareness as the extent to which a person is consciously aware of their purpose in life and can articulate it (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Purpose has also been conceptualized as an integral part of positive human health and flourishing and as positively influencing physical and mental health outcomes (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 1998). For example, studies in resilience highlight the protective role of purpose in promoting both physical and psychological health, including in stressful environments (Antonovsky, 1987; Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Youth Purpose

Purpose is defined as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is meaningful to the self and consequential for beyond the self” (Damon, 2008, p. 33). This definition encompasses four purpose dimensions, including *reason* (i.e., to intend), *goal-directedness* (i.e., to accomplish something), *personal meaning* (i.e., meaningful to the self), and *beyond-the-self orientation* (i.e., consequential beyond the self; Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003; Moran, 2014). Youth purpose is described as a “motivator of good deeds and galvanizer of character growth” and is viewed as a developmental process (Damon et al., 2003, p. 119). Purposeful youth are identified as having something that matters to them, knowing why it matters to them, and working toward accomplishing that something with a long-term plan (Damon, 2008). Youth purpose development is also characterized as a dynamic and changing process in that youth may “combine and recombine their purposes as they learn more about themselves and the nature of their more ultimate concerns” (Damon, 2008, p. 70). As such, youth’s sense of purpose is seen as contextualized by developmental opportunities that nurture and support its development (Hill & Burrow, 2021).

In the early 2000s, researchers investigated youth purpose across five US communities, including a northeast inner-city urban community, an upper income west coast community, two cities in heterogeneous agricultural regions, and one small town in the south (Damon, 2008; Damon et al. 2003). Over 1,200 youth between the ages of 12 and 26 were surveyed; approximately 25% of those surveyed completed in-depth interviews (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003). Interviews included questions about whether youth had found a sense of purpose, as well as where and how this sense of purpose was being expressed in their lives (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003). Four groups of youth were identified: Purposeful (20%) with a high sense of purpose; Dreamers (25%) who have purposeful aspirations, but do not follow through on those aspirations; Dabblers (31%) who explore a number of potentially purposeful pursuits but demonstrate little personal meaning or long-term commitment to those pursuits, and Disengaged or Nonpurposeful (25%) who show no visible signs of purposeful explorations or pursuits (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003).

Critical conditions that promote youth thriving include “forward movement toward a fulfilling purpose” and “a structure of social support consistent with that effort” (Damon, 2008, p. 38), highlighting the importance of ecological or contextual assets in supporting a youth’s sense of purpose. More recent research has demonstrated that exposure to opportunities to explore

new interests and activities can foster the development of youth purpose, and when purposeful explorations lead to the acquisition of life skills, a greater commitment to purpose is observed (Burrow et al., 2020). Youth with a stronger commitment to purpose are also reported to have a heightened sense of hope and positive affect (Burrow et al., 2009) and youth with long-term, beyond-the-self goals report higher levels of life satisfaction (Bronk & Finch, 2010). Even when adolescents or emerging adults are searching for a purpose, life satisfaction tends to increase (Burrow et al., 2009).

Furthermore, a sense of purpose contributes to more resilient mental health in youth who experience adversity and victimization (Hamby et al., 2020), and can lead to a stable sense of identity and youth well-being (Burrow & Hill, 2011). For example, personal hardships can forge a sense of purpose in youth from low-income backgrounds, when familial support and other developmental assets are present (Bronk et al., 2020). In these instances, personal hardships that represented a problem in the broader world served as catalysts for potentially purposeful pursuits for youth, although it was not exactly clear how personal hardships led to the discovery of purpose (Bronk et al., 2020). These findings parallel the work of Frankl (1959) in that hardships are seen as providing an impetus for purpose development, rather than an obstacle. This is particularly the case when contextual assets of familial support and guidance are present, and when youth find meaning in addressing these hardships to help others (Bronk et al., 2020). Last, purpose is associated with fewer depressive symptoms and is positively related to hope, satisfaction with life, support from peers, prosocial goals, and positive emotions in youth from low-income backgrounds (Bronk et al., 2020).

The Context of Scouts BSA

Scouts BSA, formerly known as Boy Scouts, is a national youth program for boys and girls in fifth grade through high school that promotes a youth-led experience; the program emphasizes the development of leadership skills, character virtues, and service to the community (Boy Scouts of America, 2021a). The mission of Scouts BSA is “to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law” (Boy Scouts of America, 2021a). Such values include trustworthiness, kindness, bravery, and helpfulness, and lay the groundwork for character-building activities (Boy Scouts of America, 2021b). Scouting units are chartered through local churches, schools, and community organizations and are led by adult volunteers (Boy Scouts of America, 2021a). Youth leadership training and outdoor

activities, such as camping, hiking, and high adventure trips are central features of Scouts BSA, and in this sense, the program provides diverse opportunities to try new things and build self-confidence (Boy Scouts of America, 2021b). Youth work together as a group, teach and mentor younger Scouts, and advance through a series of ranks that demonstrate progressive mastery in leadership, scouting and basic life skills, and service to the community. For example, the completion of a significant service project is the culminating requirement for Eagle Scout—Scouts BSA's highest individual rank. Scouts BSA also promotes a culture of character development by infusing character-building activities that encourage Scouts to practice ethical decision making and character virtues, as put forth in the Scout Oath & Law (Boy Scouts of America, 2021a).

Study Aims

The primary aim of this study was to investigate patterns of youth purpose, and secondarily to examine qualities of purpose within these patterns and how scouting-related experiences and relationships with adults and peers within the scouting context influence youth purpose. We selected a mixed methods embedded design situated under a pragmatic paradigm which seeks to find the best approach to address specific research questions and which values both objective and subjective knowledge (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Lincoln et al., 2011). As such, this ontological stance welcomes multiple perspectives and the use of multiple methods (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Our embedded design consisted of two-phases in which our Phase 1 quantitative findings framed the sampling and analysis of our Phase 2 qualitative study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Accordingly, our qualitative data analysis served a secondary role of enhancing our understanding of the quality of youth purpose patterns and how scouting-related experiences and relationships with adults and peers within the scouting context influenced youth purpose development. All protocols utilized in both the quantitative and qualitative methodological phases of the study were approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board.

Study Phase I

The primary research question that guided our first phase quantitative study was: What patterns of purpose emerge in youth participating in scouting and how do these patterns differ?

Phase I Method

Design and Procedure

The data for this study are from a nationwide sample of Scouts ($N=3,943$) who took part in the first wave of the larger longitudinal *Building Evidence in Scouting Together (BEST)* study, which examined the relationship between adult volunteer leaders' training and experience, and character outcomes for youth. Data are from online surveys administered between March and July 2019.

Sample

Scout survey participants were recruited from four regions of the United States, including the Northeast (23.6%), South (27.9%), Central (32.8%), and West (15.8%) and included youth from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Our sample was disproportionately white and male, with the majority of Scouts coming from upper-middle income households. Details of sample demographics are described below.

Measures

Demographics. Youth were asked to self-report their age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), religion/religious affiliation, and grades. Scouts could select more than one race/ethnicity, and gender was measured as a categorical variable by asking Scouts to describe their gender identity as male, female, or another way. In the total Wave 1 sample, 98% identified as male, 1.8% as female, and 0.2% another way, and Scouts ranged in age from 9 to 20 ($M=14.0$, $SD=1.9$). SES was measured with the following question, "For most of the time in your family, which of the following statements best describes your family situation?" (Roehlkepartain et al., 2002). Responses included 0 (We have a hard time buying the things we need), 1 (We have just enough money for the things we need), 2 (We have no problem buying the things we need, and we can also sometimes buy special things), and 3 (We have enough money to buy almost anything we want). The four categories corresponded to 0=low income (2.5%), 1=middle income (16.2%), 2=upper-middle income (68%), and 3=upper income (13.3%).

Scouts were also asked to report what religion or religions they follow. The religion/religious affiliation(s) options were then collapsed into five broad categories: Christian (70.6%; Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Protestant, Non-denominational Christian, Other Christian), Other (6.6%; Bahai,

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations on Scouts BSA Participation, Purpose, and Depressive Symptoms.

Variable	Mean (SD)	Range	Cronbach's alpha
Scouts BSA participation			
Age	14.02 (1.90)	9.33–20.33	
Scouting hours	15.31 (21.48)	0–80	
New activities	2.41 (0.66)	0–4	
Grades	5.99 (1.21)	0–7	
Highest rank achieved	3.93 (2.03)	0–7	
Trainings (sum)	0.70 (1.01)	0–7	
Leadership roles (sum)	2.72 (2.30)	0–18	
Purpose			
Personal meaning	2.73 (0.91)	0–4	0.88
Goal directedness	2.78 (0.73)	0–4	0.85
Beyond-the-self	3.12 (0.77)	0–4	0.85
Depressive symptoms	3.44 (3.38)	0–21	0.73

Note. Total $N=3,943$

Buddhist, Hindu, LDS, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Other), None (14.7%), Multifaith (2.1%), and Don't Know (5.9%). Scouts identified their racial/ethnic group as: White/Caucasian (91%), Asian (8.2%), Hispanic or Latinx (7.1%), Black/African American (3%), Native American (4.6%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1.5%), Middle Eastern or North African (1.6%), and Other ethnicity (0.7%); note percents total more than 100% as Scouts could select more than one racial/ethnic category. Additionally, Scouts were asked to report their grades earned in school, which was measured as a continuous variable with Mostly As (4.0)=7, About half Bs and half As (3.5)=6, Mostly Bs (3.0)=5, About half Bs and half Cs (2.5)=4, Mostly Cs (2.0)=3, About half Cs and half Ds (1.5)=2, Mostly Ds (1.0)=1, Mostly below Ds (0.5)=0. The mean, standard deviation, and range of grades are reported in Table 1.

Scouts BSA Participation. Variables specific to participation in the Scouts BSA program, such as number of leadership roles achieved, or number of trainings completed were also measured. For instance, *Sum of Trainings* was calculated by summing a set of questions asking Scouts what youth leadership trainings they attended from a list of Scouts BSA trainings, such as National Youth Leadership Training (NYLT). Each training was treated as a dichotomous variable where 1 indicated they had attended the training and 0 they had

not. *Sum of Leadership Roles* was calculated by summing the early and advanced leadership roles they held within Scouts BSA, and included a range of roles, such as Assistant Patrol Leader (ASPL), Senior Patrol Leader (SPL), Den Chief, Bugler, Chaplain Aid, Librarian, and Junior Assistant Scoutmaster. Each leadership role was treated as a dichotomous variable where 1 indicated they had held the role and 0 they had not. *Highest Rank Achieved* was calculated by assigning a score to the highest rank the youth achieved in scouting, including Scout (1), Tenderfoot (2), Second Class (3), First Class (4), Star (5), Life (6), and Eagle (7). *Hours in Scouting* was measured as a continuous variable by asking Scouts, “Thinking about all the meetings, events, and activities you did with Scouts BSA during the past 3 months, how many hours, on average, did you spend on all the activities each week?” and asking them to enter a number between 0 and 80. *New Activities* was measured by asking Scouts, “How frequently do you get the chance to try new activities through Scouting (e.g., camping, hiking)?” on an ordinal-level scale, where 0=never, 1=once a year, 2=a few times a year, 3=once a month, and 4=once a week. Summary statistics for all Scouts BSA Participation variables are reported in Table 1.

Purpose. Purpose was measured using the Claremont Purpose Scale (CPS; Bronk et al., 2018). The CPS is a 12-item scale that measures three dimensions of purpose (personal meaning, goal directedness, and beyond-the-self orientation) on a scale of 0–4 with 0 indicating lower presence of the construct and 4 indicating higher levels of the construct. An example of an item from the personal meaning dimension is, “How well do you understand what gives your life meaning?”. An example of an item from the goal directedness dimension is, “How much effort are you putting into making your goals a reality?”, and an example of an item from the beyond-the-self dimension is, “How important is it for you to make the world a better place in some way?”. According to Bronk et al. (2018), the CPS demonstrated good convergent validity and strong internal consistency within their study sample ($\alpha = .92-.94$). For our Scout survey sample, the CPS demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$) as well. Cronbach’s alpha ranged from .85 to .88 for all three purpose dimensions as shown in Table 1.

Depressive Symptoms. Depressive symptoms were measured using 7 items from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale that measures symptoms associated with depression by asking respondents how they felt during the prior week (Radloff, 1977). A sample item is, “During the past week I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.” Response options ranged from 0 (5–7 days) to 3 (0—none at all or less than 1 day).

Scores can range from 0 to 21. Items were coded so that higher scores indicated the presence of more depressive symptoms (Radloff, 1977; Ross & Mirowsky, 1989). The CES-D Scale has demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$ and above) and acceptable test-retest repeatability (Radloff, 1977). For our Scout survey sample, the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .73$).

Analysis

Cluster analysis is a multivariate statistical procedure that organizes and classifies individual cases based on selected variables into relatively homogenous (e.g., high-internal consistency) groupings, while maximizing the heterogeneity or distinctiveness between them (Hair & Black, 1998; Hair et al., 2014). Clusters are determined according to how individual cases are distributed within the space of a data set in that cases with similar values on selected variables tend to cluster or group together in the data space (Linver et al., 2009). To identify and determine youth purpose profiles, we conducted a cluster analysis, whereby groupings of clusters in our sample were identified by their distribution of mean values on three dimensions of purpose (i.e., personal meaning, goal-directedness, and beyond-the-self orientation). Our process of identifying clusters was exploratory in nature in that the number and constellation of clusters were not hypothesized a priori according to previous research (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003). Instead, we selected a two-step cluster procedure since it is an exploratory clustering procedure that seeks to unfold natural groupings not readily visible upon initial investigation and is preferred when the number of clusters are not hypothesized a priori (Hair & Black, 1998).

We used SPSS's Version 26 two-step cluster procedure, which uses an algorithm to classify cases through a non-hierarchical procedure as a first step, and then an agglomerative hierarchical clustering procedure as a second step to compare the quality of clusters based on the Bayesian information criterion (BIC). This second step determines the greatest change in distance between the two closest clusters to refine the cluster solution (Fraley & Raftery, 1998; Hair & Black, 1998). To calculate the distance between clusters, we used Log-likelihood, a distance measure that incorporates both distance information and variance in clustering and can cluster data which presents in overlapping or complex forms (Sharma et al., 2016). By determining the greatest change in distance between the two closest clusters, we identified four distinct clusters in our total cluster analysis sample ($N=4,121$). Our cluster solution included only those Scouts who had scores on all three purpose sub-scales, resulting in 3,943 valid cases and 178 cases with missing data.

Missing Data

The percentage of missing data ranged from 0% to 11.98% across all study variables. Not all data were missing at random. Scouts who did not report their age reported lower ranks ($d=-0.769$) and fewer opportunities to try new activities ($d=-0.240$). Scouts who did not report their gender also reported lower ranks ($d=1.16$), fewer opportunities to try new activities ($d=-0.210$), and other race/ethnicity ($d=0.413$). Scouts who did not report SES also reported lower ranks ($d=-1.00$), fewer opportunities to try new activities ($d=-0.224$) and served in fewer leadership roles ($d=-0.237$). Scouts who did not report their religion reported lower grades ($d=-0.254$), fewer opportunities to try new activities ($d=-0.238$), fewer ranks achieved ($d=0.496$), and Black race/ethnicity ($d=0.278$). Scouts who did not report their grades tended to be younger ($d=-0.643$), reported lower ranks ($d=-0.769$), attended fewer trainings ($d=-0.229$), served in fewer leadership roles ($d=-0.415$), and were slightly lower on all three dimensions of purpose (i.e., personal meaning ($d=-0.210$), goal directedness ($d=-0.250$), and beyond-the-self ($d=-0.256$)). Additionally, Scouts who did not report their highest rank achieved were also lower in goal-directedness ($d=-0.653$), SES ($d=-1.0$) and were mostly male ($d=1.16$) and white ($d=-0.651$). Since missingness was below 15% for all variables, listwise deletion was used (Enders, 2003).

Phase I Findings

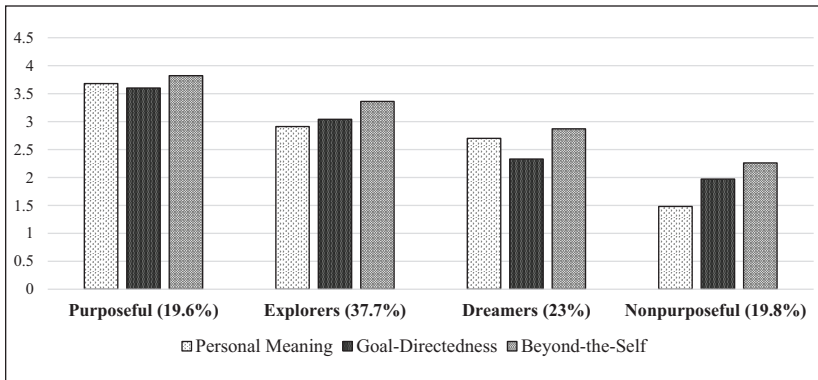
Mean scores and standard deviations across all study participants for age, number of scouting hours, frequency of new activities, grades, highest rank achieved, sum of trainings, sum of leadership roles, depressive symptoms, and three dimensions of purpose are presented in Table 1. A bivariate Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine the strength of co-occurrence between variables (Table 2).

Based on the results of the two-step cluster analysis, we selected a four cluster solution that reflected distinct constellations along three dimensions of purpose: personal meaning (PM), goal-directedness (GD), and beyond-the-self (BTS). Scouts in the *Nonpurposeful* (19.8%) cluster were very low on all three dimensions of purpose (PM: $M=1.48$, $SD=0.70$; GD: $M=1.97$, $SD=0.72$; BTS: $M=2.26$, $SD=0.84$). *Dreamers* (23%) were low on all three (PM: $M=2.70$, $SD=0.55$; GD: $M=2.33$, $SD=0.40$; BTS: $M=2.87$, $SD=0.62$). *Explorers* (37.7%) were high on all three (PM: $M=2.91$, $SD=0.61$; GD: $M=3.04$, $SD=0.33$; BTS: $M=3.36$, $SD=0.44$). *Purposeful* Scouts (19.6 %) were very high on all three (PM: $M=3.38$, $SD=0.37$; GD: $M=3.60$, $SD=0.31$; BTS: $M=3.82$, $SD=0.26$). Figure 1 presents Scouts' mean scores on each of

Table 2. Correlation Matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Age	1.00							
2 Scouting hours	-.044**	1.00						
3 New activities	-.158**	.084**	1.00					
4 Grades	-.045**	-.087**	.016	1.00				
5 Highest rank achieved	.774**	-.049**	-.154**	.060**	1.00			
6 Trainings (sum)	.355**	.029	-.014	-.009	.435**	1.00		
7 Leadership roles (sum)	.724**	-.047	-.142**	.079**	.931**	.409**	1.00	
8 Depressive symptoms	.029	-.006	-.006	-.130**	-.020	-.002	-.012	1.00

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

**Figure 1.** Cluster Means Across Three Dimensions of Purpose

the three dimensions of purpose for each of the four clusters described above. In order to understand variations in youth characteristics across purpose clusters, a one-way ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons were run, as well as a Bonferroni correction to account for the large sample size. Statistically significant differences were found for a number of variables across clusters, including age, grades, frequency of new activities, hours spent in scouting, highest rank achieved, number of trainings attended, number of leadership roles assumed, and depressive symptoms (see Table 3).

There was a pattern of progressively increasing scores from *Nonpurposeful* to *Dreamer* to *Explorer* to *Purposeful Scouts* for age, grades, opportunities to try new activities, hours spent in scouting, number of trainings attended, number of leadership roles assumed, highest rank achieved; and a progressive decrease in depressive symptoms. For instance, *Purposeful* and *Explorer*

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA Results Across Three Purpose Dimensions.

Variable	Cluster	M	SD	F(df)	η ²
Age	Nonpurposeful ^a	13.88	1.91	F(3,3803)	.002
	Dreamers	13.98	1.90		
	Explorers	14.04	1.88		
	Purposeful ^a	14.15	1.93		
Hours in scouting	Nonpurposeful ^a	12.6	19.0	F(3,3873)	.007
	Dreamers ^b	14.4	20.8		
	Explorers	15.6	21.3		
	Purposeful ^{a,b}	18.1	23.8		
New activities	Nonpurposeful ^{a,b}	2.30	0.66	F(3,3932)	.011
	Dreamers ^c	2.38	0.62		
	Explorers ^b	2.44	0.65		
	Purposeful ^{a,c}	2.51	0.68		
Grades	Nonpurposeful ^{a,b}	5.70	1.40	F(3,3690)	.028
	Dreamers ^{c,d}	5.80	1.28		
	Explorers ^{b,d}	6.14	1.10		
	Purposeful ^{a,c}	6.19	1.07		
Sum of trainings	Nonpurposeful ^{a,b}	0.59	0.90	F(3,3939)	.010
	Dreamers ^{c,d}	0.61	0.94		
	Explorers ^{b,d}	0.76	1.02		
	Purposeful ^{a,c}	0.86	1.13		
Sum of leadership roles	Nonpurposeful ^{a,b}	2.35	2.14	F(3,3939)	.013
	Dreamers ^{c,d}	2.56	2.20		
	Explorers ^{b,d}	2.87	2.29		
	Purposeful ^{a,c}	3.10	2.49		
Highest rank achieved	Nonpurposeful ^{a,b}	3.68	2.04	F(3,3929)	.007
	Dreamers	3.86	1.98		
	Explorers ^b	4.05	2.03		
	Purposeful ^a	4.16	2.02		
Depressive symptoms	Nonpurposeful ^{a,b,c}	5.02	4.05	F(3,3870)	.065
	Dreamers ^{c,d}	3.39	3.02		
	Explorers ^{b,e}	3.21	3.19		
	Purposeful ^{a,d,e}	2.34	2.81		

Note. Letter superscripts indicate significant differences between cluster groups at the $p < .01$ level.

Scouts were more likely to get better grades, attend more trainings, serve in more leadership roles, and achieve higher ranks than *Dreamer* and *Nonpurposeful* Scouts. Both *Explorer* and *Purposeful* Scouts achieved higher ranks than *Nonpurposeful* Scouts; *Purposeful* Scouts reported more opportunities to try new activities than *Nonpurposeful* and *Dreamer* Scouts, as did *Explorer* Scouts when compared to *Nonpurposeful* Scouts. *Purposeful* Scouts also tended to be older than *Nonpurposeful* Scouts and spent more hours in scouting than both *Nonpurposeful* and *Dreamer* Scouts. Moreover, *Purposeful* Scouts had significantly lower scores on depressive symptoms across all clusters, and both *Explorer* and *Dreamer* Scouts had fewer depressive symptoms than *Nonpurposeful* Scouts.

Phase I Discussion

Youth in our *Purposeful* (19.6%) cluster presented with a high sense of purpose across all three purpose dimensions (i.e., personal meaning, goal directedness, beyond-the-self orientation) and had significantly higher scores on almost all variables as compared to our *Dreamers* (23%) and *Nonpurposeful* (19.8%) clusters. Our *Explorers* (37.7%) cluster presented with medium-high sense of purpose on all three dimensions, and our *Dreamers* cluster had purposeful aspirations, but were lower on goal-directedness, thus not taking action or concrete steps to follow through on those aspirations. Youth in our *Nonpurposeful* cluster were significantly lower on all three purpose dimensions, demonstrating little or no engagement in potentially purposeful pursuits and showing no visible signs of purpose.

Significant age differences were found between *Purposeful* and *Nonpurposeful* Scouts in that *Purposeful* Scouts tended to be older and higher in BSA-specific variables, such as rank achievement, completion of leadership trainings, and participation in new activities, suggesting that older, purposeful youth had both a sense of purpose and clearly directed their behavior toward purposeful aims and goals. Along these lines, BSA-specific program components, such as diverse opportunities to build leadership skills, exposure to new activities (i.e., potentially purposeful pursuits), and a program structure that supported youth serving in leadership and mentoring roles served as programmatic assets that fostered youth purpose. These findings suggest that youth purpose is not only a reflection of maturation, but also of developmental potentialities supported by programmatic components that provide opportunities to build feelings of competence and confidence and contribute to the growth of others.

Purposeful Scouts also had significantly fewer depressive symptoms than *Nonpurposeful* Scouts, supporting the notion that having a sense of purpose is associated with better mental health outcomes in youth. Although *Purposeful* Scouts tended to be older, statistically significant correlations were not found between age and depressive symptoms amongst Scouts. *Purposeful* Scouts did, however, have significantly fewer depressive symptoms as compared to youth in all the other clusters. *Explorer* and *Dreamer* Scouts were also lower in depressive symptoms as compared to *Nonpurposeful* Scouts, which again lends support to the notion that having a sense of purpose is associated with better mental health outcomes (Harlow et al., 1986).

Our two-step cluster findings were similar to youth purpose profiles observed in previous research which identified four distinct groupings: *Purposeful* (20%) with a high sense of purpose, *Dreamers* (25%) having purposeful aspirations but not taking steps to follow through on those

aspirations, *Dabblers* (31%) exploring a number of potentially purposeful pursuits but showing little personal meaning or long-term commitment to those pursuits, and *Disengaged or Nonpurposeful* (25%) youth, showing little or no interest in purposeful pursuits (Damon, 2008). Interestingly, three of our clusters mirrored these groupings, with the exception of our *Explorers* cluster who presented as highly committed to their goals and connected personal meaning to their pursuits. Our *Explorers* were decidedly different from Damon's (2008) *Dabblers* who were described as engaging in potentially purposeful activities, but who "showed little awareness of the meaning of these activities beyond the present" (pp. 59–60). *Dabblers* also demonstrated "few signs of committing themselves to these pursuits over time" (Damon, 2008, p. 60). Compared to *Dabblers*, youth in our *Explorers* cluster had both a sense of purpose and were able to articulate purposeful goals, thus reflecting more evolved purpose development.

Further supporting *Explorers*' goal-directedness, our one-way ANOVAs with post-hoc tests revealed that *Explorers* significantly differed from our *Nonpurposeful* cluster in that they achieved higher grades, higher ranks, served in more leadership roles, attended more formal leadership trainings, reported more opportunities to try new activities through scouting, and reported fewer depressive symptoms. As a whole, these findings suggest that *Explorers* had a stronger commitment to long-term goals and attached more personal meaning to them, were more engaged in leadership development, had a greater sense of well-being, and were more willing to try new activities, hence the name *Explorers*. A final distinguishing feature of our Scout sample was that our *Nonpurposeful* cluster represented a smaller portion of our total sample (19.8%) as compared to previous research where *Nonpurposeful* or *Disengaged* youth made up 25% of the total sample (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003).

Study Phase 2

A pragmatic approach also informed Phase 2 of our mixed methods design in that we were better able to answer our research questions by embedding a qualitative strand to explore the qualities of purpose within each cluster and take into account the subjective experiences of Scouts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The research questions that guided the second phase of the study were: (1) What are the qualities of purpose within each cluster?, (2) What influences the development of purpose in youth participating in scouting?, and (3) How do Scouts describe adults and Scout peers that inspire or support them?

Phase 2 Method

Design and Procedure. The Phase 2 qualitative approach of our study was guided by our Phase 1 quantitative study and served a secondary role of enhancing our understanding of the qualities of purpose within each cluster. Our Phase 2 approach also allowed us to explore how Scouts BSA programmatic features, scouting-related experiences, and relationships with adults and peers within the scouting context were influencing youth purpose development (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Since our quantitative study alone could not provide a contextualized understanding of the data, an embedded mixed methods design was warranted in which our quantitative study played a primary role and our qualitative study played a secondary and supportive role (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

A purposive stratified sampling approach was used to select a subset of youth who also completed telephone interviews between March and July of 2019. Interviews with 109 youth were conducted by a team of trained interviewers and lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The rationale for using this strategy was to provide a more in-depth and contextualized understanding of our clusters and since this falls under the umbrella of non-probability sampling, it is a choice method for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The youth interviews were organized by cluster and then 30 total interviews were randomly selected across the four clusters identified in Phase 1. To achieve balance across cluster groups, the number of selected interviews per cluster group corresponded with the percentage of Scouts within each cluster (20% *Nonpurposeful* ($N=6$), 23.3% *Dreamers* ($N=7$), 36.7% *Explorers* ($N=11$), 20% *Purposeful* ($N=6$)).

Sample

The selected Scout interview participants ranged in age from 12 to 18 ($M=14.87$, $SD=1.89$) with 80% male and 20% female. Scouts were from four regions of the United States, including the Northeast (30%), South (30%), Central (20%), and West (20%), and SES ranged from low (3.0%), middle (17%), upper-middle (60%), to upper income (20%) households. Scouts identified their race/ethnicity as: White (80%), Asian (7.0%), Latinx (10%), and Black (3.0%) and specified their religion as: Christian (67%), Other (7.0%), None (17%), Multifaith (7.0%), and Don't Know (3.0%). Our Phase 2 interview sample closely approximated our Phase 1 survey sample in that it included representation from the same four regions of the US in similar proportions and was also disproportionately white (20% non-white) and male (80%), with the majority of Scouts coming from upper-middle income households.

Measures

The development of interview questions were informed by a pragmatic approach and were guided by a detailed theory of change (i.e., pathway model) that was co-developed with Scouts BSA staff at the National BSA office (Urban et al., 2020). A program's theory of change identifies how a program's activities contribute to changes that build toward the program's short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes (Urban et al., 2020). Open-ended questions and probes focused on Scout's perceptions of their BSA scouting-related experiences, including opportunities to experience novel activities and pursue new interests, develop skills, and serve in leadership roles. Questions also tapped into Scouts' perceptions of their relationships with adults and peers in the context of scouting, personal feelings about their accomplishments, and concerns about the broader world. The interview schedule consisted of 31 questions and examples include, "Has scouting given you the opportunity to try new things?", "What have you done in scouting that you are most proud of?", "Is there someone in your troop or in scouting that you look up to?", and "If you could change anything about the world, what would you want to be different?".

Analysis

We did not have an a priori hypothesis but were informed by previous research literature on youth purpose (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003). We used an inductive approach in organizing and analyzing interview transcripts to describe qualities of purpose within each cluster and to surface Scouts' perspectives of their scouting-related experiences and relationships with adults and peers that influenced a sense of purpose or fostered youth purpose development (Patton, 2002). This approach consisted of immersing ourselves in the interview data, writing memos of our first impressions, initially assigning codes that reflected qualities of purpose within each cluster and experiences and relationships influencing youth purpose (Patton, 2002). Next, we employed a thematic analysis, primarily a descriptive approach, to identify codes that occurred with regularity and examined both similarities and differences between them, while paying close attention to the Scouts' perspectives (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saldaña, 2016).

Our process of coding and consensus-building was collaborative and iterative. Two of the authors started coding 10 of the 30 interview transcripts, using provisional coding (Saldaña, 2016), reading transcripts, and using QSR's NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to tag references related to purpose dimensions (i.e., personal meaning, goal directedness, and

beyond-the-self orientation). After reviewing coded references and developing consensus on discrepancies encountered during our review (Hill et al., 1997), we agreed to code the remaining 20 transcripts using our provisional codes. Coding was conducted independently by the coders, who also drafted analytic memos consisting of categorized lists of quotes and reflections on purpose dimensions and how they seemed to appear in the data. The coders held regular meetings to review coding and work toward consensus (Hill et al., 1997). Trustworthiness was established through persistent observation of the data to provide depth and attune to contextual features influencing youth purpose, and by reflexivity through an openness to multiple perspectives of interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

We also simultaneously coded (Saldaña, 2016) the 30 transcripts for adult and youth influences and scouting-related experiences that influenced purpose development. We adopted a broad view of relationship influence for our coding, using NVivo 12 to tag any positive, neutral, or negative adult or youth influence identified by Scouts, or evident to researchers in Scouts' interviews. Influence coding consisted of two layers of coding. First, we coded the influencer as adult or youth. Second, we used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016) to identify the nature of the influence. Nearly 1,400 references were coded from this process. These nodes were later categorized as positive, negative, or neutral influences; neutral influences included references that may have been identified as both positive and negative. Throughout this process, analytic memoing was used to test understanding of the coded references (Birks et al., 2008), and their relationships to one another as well as the quantitative findings. Once provisional and simultaneous coding were completed, we ran a series of queries in NVivo 12 to explore relationships between purpose dimension coding, and influences of adult/youth relationships and scouting-related experiences. Our intent was to surface instances where influences appeared related to purpose dimensions and purpose writ large and examined these relationships within the clusters identified from our quantitative analysis imported into NVivo 12. Once again, we used analytic memoing, this time to explore possible relationships and themes within the data (Birks et al., 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saldaña, 2016). When these relationships and themes were identified, they were also coded to aggregate them from the data corpus.

Phase 2 Findings

Our qualitative analysis of interviews provided a more contextualized understanding of the similarities and differences between each cluster and allowed us to see how scouting-related experiences, relationships with adults and

peers within the scouting context, and Scouts BSA's culture and unique programmatic features were influencing youth purpose. Our analysis also helped identify variations across clusters, as well as overlap and interplay between purpose dimensions. Such variations and overlap helped us identify stronger influences on youth purpose. Finally, our analysis yielded questions concerning the ways in which youth's sense of purpose manifested across Scouts' lives, particularly outside their involvement of the Scouts BSA program. All names used in the Phase 2 findings that follow are pseudonyms.

RQ1: What are the Qualities of Purpose Within Each Cluster?

Prominence or Absence of Purpose Dimensions across Clusters. General trends observed among the clusters were that *Purposeful* Scouts often attached personal meaning or intrinsic value to their accomplishments and were highly goal-directed, thus helping them to stay focused and persevere. For example, Sarah (*Purposeful*) derived much personal meaning, as well as a sense of pride from advancing through the scouting ranks at an impressive pace, "I've gotten all the way to first class rank in five months, and a lot of people don't believe me, but I'm very proud of that, because I like to stay motivated." *Explorer* Scouts also persevered in their goals, including advancing through leadership ranks, and in some instances, identified new purposeful pursuits as they matured, "I've aged through [scouting], my interests have changed. But I've also been able to find activities for me that have been engaging for me for my age. I currently just completed my third year on NYLT [National Youth Leadership Training] Staff as an ASPL [Assistant Scoutmaster Patrol Leader]. . . I'm going to be an Assistant Scoutmaster for next year's course" (Daniel).

Although desirous of goal accomplishments, *Dreamers* tended to present as less motivated or goal-directed, and in some instances, less confident in their ability to persevere, as described by Tristan (*Dreamer*), "Generally, when you earn merit badges. . . a lot of times you have to be motivated to be proactive in looking at some of the requirements in order to continue working on different ranks. . . For a lot of people, especially me, that can be tough." For Robert (*Nonpurposeful*), pursuing character-building, including virtues of trustworthiness and being responsible was seen as desirable, but mostly for extrinsic reasons, ". . . I want to be responsible. . . if this adult sees you're being responsible with all your work, and all the things you're doing, then they can see that you're trustworthy."

Perhaps the most noticeable trend across the interview data was the presence of a beyond-the-self orientation. Of the 485 references coded, the beyond-the-self dimension was coded most often (192 of 485 references, or 40%)

compared to goal directedness (31.3%) and personal meaningfulness (29.1%). Beyond-the-self references included a wide range of statements across all clusters, reflecting not only efforts to be helpful to others, but also a conscious awareness of how such efforts could positively impact the broader world. For example, Ben (*Explorer*) said that he “always try[s] and help[s] others,” particularly when he met new people, which allowed him to “help more people in the world.” Similarly, Omayra (*Dreamer*) wished people “were more open minded,” so that they could “hear people’s stories” and commit to “changing the current state of our world.” A beyond-the-self orientation also reflected smaller scale, day to day efforts to make a difference in the world, including picking up trash as Robert (*Nonpurposeful*) expressed, “I’m kind of helping with recycling, picking up trash, because all these landfills, they’re filling up and that they’re effecting our planet.” On a larger scale, Jermaine (*Purposeful*) invoked the Scout Oath and Law in his character-building efforts to be helpful to youth who experienced a natural disaster in Puerto Rico:

Probably this past month, I went on a mission trip to Puerto Rico with my youth group and a lot of the Scout Law was needed to be in Puerto Rico, but also the Oath was also needed for assistance, caring. Because there's kids there who have witnessed something really tragic in the past . . . And they needed someone to trust on because a lot of people go down, but leave right away and they kind of forget about the people who are in need. . . And you have to stay morally straight because if you don't help the people who are needing, just focus on yourself, you're not really helping them. You're just making them feel worse because you're making them feel their problems aren't important.

Although beyond-the-self coding was more frequent among *Nonpurposeful* and *Purposeful* Scouts (see Table 4), the clusters were distinguished by differences in other purpose dimensions. For example, while both *Nonpurposeful* and *Purposeful* Scouts discussed taking steps to advance within the Scouts BSA program, *Purposeful* Scouts’ statements more often reflected goal directedness. *Purposeful* Scouts like Darryl, clearly articulated expectations for rank advancement, and also expressed frustration when obstacles of “not get[ting] a single merit badge finished” at summer camp, were encountered. *Nonpurposeful* Scouts described fewer new and personally meaningful opportunities than Scouts in other clusters, thus signaling the importance of exposure to experiences that carry the potential to spark youth interest and potentially foster purpose development. *Dreamers* like Tristan, however, more frequently identified activities that were personally meaningful to them, including visiting new places and “build[ing] lifelong relationships with people.” *Dreamers* also valued having access to opportunities to achieve goals, such as learning life skills (i.e., swimming, first aid); “I would have never learned them if I wasn’t a

Table 4. Coding References for Purpose Dimensions Across Clusters.

	Nonpurposeful (%)	Dreamers (%)	Explorers (%)	Purposeful (%)
Beyond-the-self	55	35	40	45
Goal-directedness	23	31	32	45
Personal meaning	22	34	30	10

Scout” Sebastian (*Dreamer*) said. Although our qualitative analysis helped identify broad characteristics of clusters, Scouts within each cluster were not always uniform in their orientations toward purpose dimensions. Our analysis also revealed some overlap across clusters. For example, there were some instances where *Nonpurposeful* Scouts, like Casey identified a more focused career ambition of “aspiring computer hardware engineer,” an interest introduced to him by a friend in Scouts BSA. Maleko (*Dreamer*) also identified an overarching goal of obtaining “information and smarts you need to get through life” which could be done in scouting “with other people that are like-minded.” He also asserted that merit badges in scouting helped him obtain such information and “develop as a person.”

RQ 2: What Influences the Development of Purpose in Youth Participating in Scouting?

Scouts BSA’s Role in Influencing Purpose and Fostering Youth Purpose Development
Programmatic Features Exposing Youth to Potentially Purposeful Pursuits.
 Scouts frequently mentioned that Scouts BSA provided many opportunities to explore new activities that were both enjoyable and held the promise of being cultivated into purposeful pursuits. For Jason (*Explorer*), access to opportunities to earn diverse merit badges were seen as particularly helpful in identifying potential career trajectories:

. . . merit badges, in my opinion are a way for Scouts to see . . . Like get a taste of a career, but not go too deep into it. So something like dentistry for instance. If you wanted to become a dentist, you could take that merit badge, and you get a small taste of what a dentist actually does, and then you can say, “Okay, yeah, I want to pursue dentistry more”, or “No, this is not a career for me”. . .

Maleko (*Dreamer*) also indicated that earning merit badges provided experiences for developing “life skills” which he perceived as fostering personal growth and being practically useful for future independent living:

School does give you the information and smarts you need to get through life, but then with scouting, you can learn skills like knot-tying and cooking and living by yourself. I mean you can learn them with other people that are like-minded. So the merit badges just help you develop as a person I guess.

When Scouts recounted their advancement through program ranks and merit badges, they discussed specific features of the Scouts BSA program that fostered youth purpose development. For example, Sahir (*Dreamer*) brought up the importance of leadership development in recalling how he joined Scouts BSA specifically to “get some of the important social skills” that “no other programs. . . would be able to give me.” Sahir (*Dreamer*) further explained that he and the other Scouts were forced to learn “a lot different than where you were learning [leadership] from other places.” In discussing rank advancement, Jason (*Explorer*) recalled leading his Eagle project which benefitted the community by improving a drainage ditch by digging it deeper and adding more than 200 tons of rock to the ditch. The Eagle project was designed to prevent erosion, and more generally to engage in sewer and water conservation, both personally meaningful for Jason. The pursuit of important skills through scouting also allowed Scouts to exercise choice in selecting badges and Eagle projects that were personally meaningful. Such purposeful pursuits encouraged Scouts to develop planning and organizational skills, which further supported goal-directedness and youth purpose development. Indeed, rank requirements, developing planning and organizational skills, and taking on leadership roles were all programmatic features of Scouts BSA that played a major role in influencing youth purpose development.

Scouts also reported numerous opportunities to teach younger Scouts and outside of scouting, opportunities to teach youth were seen as few and far between. Exposure to novel experiences not only allowed Scouts to try new things but to take healthy risks, and test their limits. For example, Sarah (*Purposeful*) shared, “I tried zip lining. That was pretty fun. And white water rafting. Just a bunch of things that I’ve never done before. It brings me out of my comfort zone.” Arjun (*Dreamer*) agreed, “It’s meant for you to get you out of your comfort zone. Most of the stuff I didn’t like, I’ve started to like; it kind of broke my shell and it taught me to try new things.” Having access to novel activities and learning opportunities through Scouts BSA also carried the promise of developing social skills, as Caleb (*Dreamer*) explained, “I joined because I wanted to better myself in all the skills that they were learning, and I thought that joining the Boy Scouts would help you with that. And it would also help me get some of the important social skills that no other programs would be able to give me.”

RQ3: How Do Scouts Describe Adults and Scout Peers That Inspire or Support Them?

Our analysis revealed two major relational influences on youth purpose development: processes of helping or receiving support from others, and being inspired by others. Perhaps just as important as these relational influences, were the adults and youth who were described at the center of them.

Inspiration and Support from Others. Sarah (*Purposeful*) described both her brother, an Eagle Scout, and mother, Assistant Scoutmaster of her troop, as motivating forces in her scouting journey and goal-directedness, noting her mother's support in all her scouting decisions. Sarah also benefitted from the positive encouragement she received from the Scoutmaster of the associated boys' troop. The following description speaks of the personal meaning she attributed to such support, "He always saw something in me. I think he always just believed in me and that I could be a Scout. That was always a really nice feeling, because he said, 'Oh, you have to join when the girls are allowed'." For Brianna (*Explorer*), the support she received from her Scoutmaster helped her realize the goal of becoming the first Senior Patrol Leader (SPL), "he's really supported me on my journey of being the first SPL of our girls troop. He's really helped me to grow, and I think that makes me look up to him." Similarly, Calvin (*Purposeful*) described older Scouts, including Eagle Scouts as supportive mentors, "I look up to them for advice and any extra skills they could teach me."

Scouts also described being inspired by older Scouts who they viewed as role models, both in the context of scouting and beyond. "Oh yea, my best friend who is a senior patrol leader, I really always try to look up to him," Matthew (*Nonpurposeful*) said, associating this older Scout's influence with his earning Life Scout rank at age 14. Within the references to influential older Scouts, Scouts who attained Eagle Rank were identified 22 times by Scouts. "I look up to [older and Eagle Scouts] because they finished the goal that I've started," explained Kyle (*Explorer*), adding that these Scouts "have a lot of good advice to give, and usually they're mature once they've finished." For Kyle, these Scouts were "sort of an idol," or at least "a role model to be able to see them and to, just think. . .that's what I want to finish as." Both adult and youth influences were observed to inspire and support goal directedness and personally meaningful pursuits in Scouts.

Helping Others. Scouts BSA units are organized into small groups called patrols. The patrol method tasks more experienced Scouts with taking on leadership roles and overseeing novice or inexperienced Scouts. The patrol

method potentially offers a number of opportunities for Scouts to help their peers. For example, Tristan (*Dreamer*) found it was “nice to be part of [a] Scout’s first experience” camping, where older boys in his troop regularly helped new Scouts with camping essentials like setting up tents. Service projects, including Eagle projects like the one described by Jason (*Explorer*), also presented opportunities to help others. As Brianna (*Explorer*) explained, the troop was “a really amazing place,” in part because of the way Scouts were able to “be a part of something big” and “do big things,” including “get[ting] to help other Scouts with their Eagle Scout projects.” Helping others (i.e., beyond-the-self orientation) appeared to be an integral part of the Scouts BSA program across all four clusters and a feature of scouting that Scouts benefitted from and enjoyed.

Helping others often took the form of teaching. Jordan (*Explorer*) explicitly linked the two together, explaining that one of the ways in which his Scoutmaster “tries to help everyone in the troop” is by “finding [Scouts] and . . . teach[ing] like the totin’ chip,” a Scouts BSA knife safety course. Teaching appeared to be a formal part of many troop meetings. In Daniel’s (*Explorer*) troop, Scouts were expected to “plan the lesson” on topics like first aid, then teach their peers to enhance their knowledge and skills; if Scouts failed to adequately plan and/or could not teach, adult leaders “would just jump in” and “be the ones that teach the skills to the troop.”

For Daniel, teaching younger Scouts was something he was drawn to given his involvement as a teacher in other contexts, including working as a ski instructor and as the science director at Cub Scout camp. Scouts were often expected to teach and to help others, both as part of their formal leadership roles in the troop and in more informal or impromptu activities or assignments. *Nonpurposeful* Scouts were less likely to be involved in helping or teaching younger Scouts, which may reflect being less interested or less confident in serving as a leader or teaching within the troop.

Not all of these influences focused on progress or success in the Scouts BSA program, some focused on career interests. As noted previously, Casey (*Nonpurposeful*) found a potential career aspiration in computer hardware engineering from the influence of an older friend in Scouts BSA, who helped him shift focus from computer software to more of an interest in building PCs and learning more about “my graphics processor, ram, [and] stuff like that.” Gabriel (*Dreamer*) recalled a friend who “basically aged out of Scouts,” subsequently joining the military. Gabriel believed this career path was “very honorable and something that no other jobs can really give you,” and found himself interested in pursuing a military career as well. “[T]hat’s something I really want to do,” he said. Inspiration and support from peers, including Eagle Scouts, who were pursuing their own purposeful goals, not only in the

Table 5. Coding References for Inspired by Eagle Scout, Adult Support, and Exploring New Opportunities.

	Nonpurposeful (%)	Dreamers (%)	Explorers (%)	Purposeful (%)
Inspired by eagle scout	3	7	13	13
Adult supports scout journey	0	7	7	10
Exploring new opportunities	10	20	30	17

context of scouting, but also in real life served as powerful examples for some Scouts (see Table 5). In an example that seemed to connect the three purpose dimensions together, Eric (*Explorer*), a self-proclaimed environmentalist, recalled his progress in a merit badge called “Citizenship in the Nation.” As part of the merit badge’s requirements, he drafted a letter to his “state’s Congress person,” which discussed his concerns about the environment, such as “people just throw stuff wherever” in the local waterways, including tires. “Citizenship in the Nation,” among the required merit badges for the Eagle Rank, gave Eric the opportunity not only to find a career or purposeful interest, but to take action, which took the form of stream cleanups, as well as contacting political leaders.

Overall, our analysis revealed that support from adults, inspiration from older Scouts, including Eagle Scouts, and exposure to new opportunities to discover and develop potentially purposeful pursuits, as well as a culture of both helping and being helped by others were features of Scouts BSA that fostered youth purpose development. Figure 2 depicts the number of coding references for receiving support from adults, being inspired by an Eagle Scout, and exploring new opportunities provided by the Scouts BSA program across all four clusters. These references emerged in 25 of the 30 total interviews coded.

Phase 2 Discussion

Our qualitative findings highlight the importance of providing youth with robust after school programs that not only provide exposure to new and diverse activities that can potentially spark purposeful pursuits, but also with explicit structures and supports that help youth develop as leaders and mentors. Programs infused with a culture of service, leadership and character-building activities, and avenues to contribute to the broader world in personally meaningful ways promote pathways that can forge youth purpose development. Our findings also reveal that inspiration and mentorship from older peers, support from adults, opportunities to develop planning,

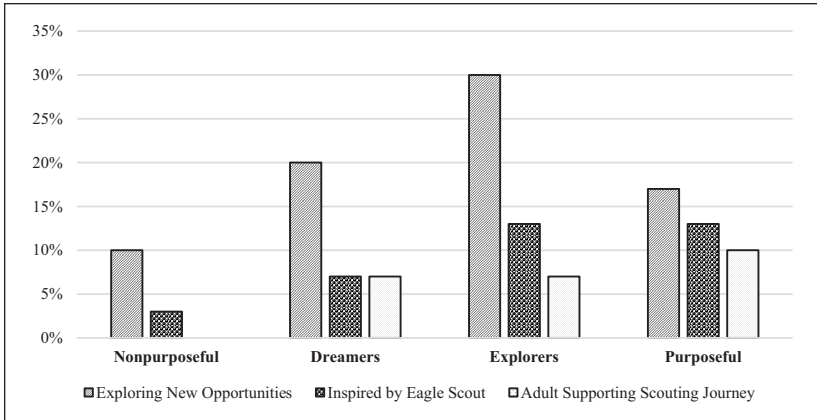


Figure 2. Coding references for exploring new opportunities, inspired by eagle scout, and adult supporting scouting journey.

organizational, and leadership skills, as well as to provide service to the broader community (i.e., Eagle Scout projects) not only nurtured youth purpose, but also fostered Scouts' belief in their ability to pursue and achieve personally meaningful goals beyond scouting.

Our qualitative analysis also identified similarities and differences in youth purpose within each cluster, and an awareness and interest in matters beyond-the-self across all four clusters. Such a preponderance of beyond-the-self orientation of youth purpose may be reflective of Scouts BSA culture which emphasizes service to others, both in and out of scouting. Even *Dreamers* and *Nonpurposeful* Scouts who were lower on personal meaning and goal-directedness purpose dimensions, were not only able to articulate beyond-the-self concerns, but with the support and structure of the Scouts BSA program were able to translate these concerns into concrete and personally meaningful goals. This finding is particularly salient since previous research has observed that young people who strike a balance between self-focused long-term aims and other-focused long-term aims report higher levels of life satisfaction and sense of purpose than those who only report other-oriented long-term aims (Bronk & Hill, 2010).

In sum, our Phase 2 findings suggest that after school programs like Scouts BSA which provide a structure and culture that yields robust opportunities for youth to try new things, develop leadership, mentoring, and practical life skills, and instill character-building, including projects aimed at contributing to something larger than oneself can foster youth purpose development. Scouts who embrace these opportunities also perceive themselves as more

confident and empowered to translate these gains into purposeful life pursuits.

General Discussion

Previous studies of purpose have identified groupings of youth along three dimensions of purpose (i.e., goal-directedness, personal meaning, beyond-the-self orientation) and distinguish between external and internal orientations (Bronk et al., 2018; Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003; Malin et al., 2019). Such distinctions are complex and challenging since features of purpose are often overlapping and contextually sensitive. Mixed method approaches offer a unique opportunity to explore such complexities by providing a more contextualized understanding of qualities and dimensions of purpose within groupings and variations and overlap that may exist between them. Such approaches allow for a more enhanced and nuanced understanding of the data (Patton, 1999), one that can expand our knowledge of youth purpose and what supports its development.

Informed by a relational developmental systems perspective, our study findings point to a constellation of Scouts BSA programmatic features and culture that serve as assets facilitating youth purpose development. More specifically, these assets include support and mentoring from committed adults and older peers who inspire youth; programmatic features that provide opportunities to try new things and learn valuable skills, including helping and teaching others, and that instill a sense of pride in personal accomplishments. The strong presence of beyond-the-self orientation across all four clusters, including Scouts who fell under the *Nonpurposeful* cluster, highlights the uniqueness of the Scouts BSA's program to spark and amplify youth engagement in personally meaningful pursuits, including service to others and calls attention to the importance of caring, committed, and inspiring adult and youth role models to nurture and support youth purpose development.

Implications

Our study highlights the value of leveraging ecological assets that inspire and foster youth's sense of purpose and how such assets promote positive youth development, a necessity for all youth (Urban et al., 2010). Policymakers and practitioners are encouraged to advocate for equitable access to youth-serving programs that foster youth purpose development, particularly programs that provide a structure and culture that expose youth to diverse activities, character and leadership-building, and supportive adult and peer mentors (Burrow et al., 2020, Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2011). Providing

equitable access promotes pathways for optimal development, particularly for youth residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods or communities (Bronk et al., 2020; Burrow et al., 2020, Lerner et al., 2005, 2011).

Our study has several limitations in that our sample was disproportionately White and male, with the majority of Scouts coming from upper-middle income households. Future studies should explore the experiences of Scouts from low-income households and after school programmatic features that would foster youth's sense of purpose in these contexts. Future studies could also benefit from examining the experiences of girls and ethnically diverse Scouts, both understudied populations. Additionally, since youth purpose development is a dynamic and malleable process, focusing on how youth's sense of purpose evolves in earlier ages and what nurtures this process would be a fruitful avenue of inquiry (Hill & Burrow, 2021). Last, exploring the relationship between youth purpose and mental health, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic would offer insight into helping youth build resilience under conditions of uncertainty and adversity.

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