Parenting and Youth Purpose: Fostering Other-Oriented Aims

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Abstract: Youth purpose is defined as a life aim that is both personally meaningful and contributes to the world beyond the self. This study disaggregated other-oriented (OO) aims (i.e., purpose as defined as a life aim intended to contribute to the world) and self-oriented (SO) aims (i.e., a personally meaningful life aim without intention to contribute beyond the self) to examine the development of youth who evince various combinations of high and low OO and SO aims. In a sample of 207 adolescent girls, hierarchical cluster analysis revealed three clusters: High SO–High OO ("Self and Other-Oriented Aims"), High SO–Low OO ("Self-Oriented Aims"), and High OO–Low SO ("Other-Oriented Aims"). A MANOVA indicated that youth who reported higher levels of parental trust and communication were more likely to have OO purpose (i.e., "Self and Other-Oriented Aims" and "Other-Oriented Aims") versus primarily SO aims ("Self-Oriented Aims"). The "Self and Other-Oriented Aims" cluster was associated with better psychosocial functioning.

Keywords: parent-adolescent relationship; parenting; youth purpose; adolescent girls; psychosocial functioning

1. Introduction

Nearly two decades of research has converged to illustrate the numerous developmental benefits of youth purpose [1–4]. Purpose is defined as the presence of a sustained, far-reaching goal that includes the intention to accomplish something that is both personally meaningful and contributes to the world beyond the self [1,2,5]. Purpose "can organize an entire life, imparting not only meaning but also inspiration and motivation for ongoing learning and achievement" [6]. That is, when a young person has a meaningful purpose, it can provide a sense of direction and motivate present behavior or engagement in daily tasks toward accomplishing this goal, despite the challenges that may arise in doing so [2].

The seminal definition of youth purpose characterizes the goal as one that is personally meaningful and other-oriented. Scholars have differentiated other-oriented (OO) long-term aims (i.e., personally meaningful life aims intended to contribute to the world beyond the self) from self-oriented (SO) long-term aims (i.e., personally meaningful life aims without intention to contribute beyond the self) [6]. It is assumed that having this intention to contribute to others is one of the criteria of youth purpose, such that strictly self-oriented aims do not fit the definition of youth purpose [1]. Yet little research has been done that explicitly examines the sequelae and outcomes of OO aims (i.e., purpose) vs. SO aims to determine whether aims that intend to contribute to others are indeed more desirable for positive youth adjustment than those that are strictly self-seeking. The benefits of OO aims may be especially important for youth who are socialized to focus primarily on

extrinsic rewards and self-oriented goals. Our study examined different combinations of OO aims and SO aims and the developmental consequences of these goal orientations among a population particularly primed to endorse self-oriented goals, adolescent girls from affluent communities.

1.1. Purpose and Adolescent Development

In general, youth purpose has been linked to academic achievement [5], well-being [3,7], physiological health outcomes [8], mental health outcomes [2,8], hope [7,9], and life satisfaction [10]. Purpose has also been shown to mitigate the effects of poverty on antisocial behavior [11]. Another study revealed that adolescents enrolled in a court-mandated treatment facility for juvenile offenses had low levels of purpose [12]. For youth offenders struggling with a variety of psychosocial concerns, cultivating a sense of purpose may be a protective factor against other negative outcomes.

1.1.1. Other-Oriented vs. Self-Oriented Aims

In addition to the positive personal outcomes associated with purpose, purpose can benefit others. Indeed, purpose can provide the motivation to accomplish a goal that is meaningful to the self, as well as provide an individual with the desire to contribute to others' lives [2]. Purposeful youth who endorse other-oriented or prosocial aims report various positive outcomes such as motivation and persistence [13]. This type of purpose has been referred to in various ways, including "self-transcendent purpose" and "positive purpose" [14,15].

Youth who primarily have SO aims describe striving toward individual successes such as earning money, having fun, and/or having a good career, without mention of the desire to contribute to others. Whereas youth with OO purpose are often characterized by commitments to various causes (e.g., doing social justice work, finding cures for disease, supporting the arts) [16], and the desire to strive toward prosocial successes such as helping others, giving back to communities, and/or making the world better [6,17]. Furthermore, Bronk and Finch [6] found four distinct clusters of youth purpose: youth with OO purpose, youth with SO aims, youth with both SO aims and OO purpose, and youth with no orientation.

In several studies, youth who demonstrated a combination of both SO and OO aims seemed to have the best outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction, meaning, self-realization, social support, and well-being) [6,18,19]. For example, Blau and colleagues [18] found that youth with SO and OO aims reported the highest levels of well-being, suggesting an optimal balance of personal aspirations and prosocial concerns. In this same study, youth who endorsed only self-oriented goals (SO aims) fared poorly with the lowest levels of meaning [18]. On the other hand, OO aims may provide greater protective benefits in the face of adversity. Research has suggested that OO aims buffered adolescent girls from the negative effects of academic stress [20]. Among urban, low-income youth, OO aims have also been associated with positive outcomes, including a motivation to succeed and engage academically [21,22]. However, adolescents focused on OO aims may lack support from parents, peers, and teachers [18]. While OO aims appear to yield benefits at the individual, family, and community levels for a diversity of youth, adolescents pursuing primarily prosocial aims may need additional social support [18].

1.1.2. Purpose across Diverse Contexts

Sumner and colleagues [23] argued that research on youth purpose tends to focus on the center of the socioeconomic spectrum and to ignore youth at the opposite ends. Their own work addressed this void by highlighting the ways a lack of privileges may shape the development of self-integrative and clear purpose among adolescents. In particular, under-privileged youth have often described OO aims in terms of helping their family [21,24,25]. For example, any aspirations for monetary rewards and prestige were typically described as potentially beneficial for their families (e.g., "make money to take the pressure off my

mom", " . . . give back to [my parents]", and " . . . make them proud"). Indeed, helping one's family was a major motivation for success. Moreover, even those who described goals to benefit the larger society admitted that their motivations to do so stemmed from a desire to make their families proud and to improve their families' livelihood.

While research on underprivileged populations is imperative and scarce, literature from the last two decades has revealed that youth from affluent communities have their own unique stressors [26,27]. Adolescent girls from competitive, upwardly mobile communities appear to be particularly at risk for maladjustment, reporting greater levels of stress and clinical depression than their counterparts [20,26]. One study found that across all participating high achieving schools (HAS), students had clinically significant depressive and anxious symptoms that were six to seven times higher than the national average [28]. Partially underlying this depression and anxiety is that girls from HAS overly focus on extrinsic, self-oriented goals, such as physical appearance and peer admiration [29]. Similarly, research has also demonstrated associations between valuing extrinsic rewards and maladjustment among girls from HAS contexts, highlighting unique vulnerability among affluent girls who prioritize self-oriented, extrinsic goals [30]. Other related stressors among adolescent girls in this population include competition, limited definitions of success, and unrealistically high expectations for achievement [20,26,29]. Put simply, the context of affluence often prioritizes SO aims such as appearance and achievement over prosocial passions. The present study considers the purpose orientations and parenting characteristics associated with the development of purpose in adolescent girls from such backgrounds given the pressures and narrow focus on extrinsic, self-oriented aims that often preclude the cultivation of OO aims.

The limited research on this population suggests that affluent adolescent girls' with beyond-the-self purpose seemed to emphasize prosocial goals that would benefit others on a macro level, such as "do[ing] something that I find worthwhile that can also help a lot of others" or "giv[ing] back to the community" [20] (p. 25). Indeed, youth have become increasingly engaged in efforts to contribute to the world around them (e.g., youth activism) in the context of increasing social justice concerns, which include a deep sensitivity to the needs of all people, but especially those who are poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised.

1.1.3. Parent-Adolescent Relationships and Other-Oriented Purpose/ Prosocial Development

Researchers are recognizing the critical role that relationships with parents and other adult mentors may have in cultivating youth purpose [4,5,31]. Parent–adolescent relationships provide the primary setting for social capital and psychosocial development and thus may provide a key pathway to the development of OO aims among youth [32]. Beginning early in life, parent–child relationships can begin cultivating other-oriented, prosocial behaviors in children by enabling them to take the perspectives of others and to grow in empathy [33,34]. In turn, empathy, perspective-taking, and prosocial behaviors all may play critical roles in youth developing OO aims [35]. During the middle school and high school years, parents can assist their adolescents in this development of purpose by modeling behaviors that contribute to society and engaging their children in these modeled behaviors and activities [35]. For example, one study suggested that positive parenting is associated with daughters' OO purpose, mediated by daughters' prosocial behavior [4].

These findings are aligned with several studies demonstrating that parenting relationships and practices are positively associated with adolescent prosocial behaviors [36–38]. Positive and supportive parental relationships can provide a context for cultivating a prosocial orientation by encouraging OO aims and modeling ways for youth to become involved in the community [39]. Moreover, such parenting can motivate youths to engage in other-oriented helping behaviors [40]. As noted previously, research examining OO and SO aims among Israeli adolescents found that youth with OO aspirations reported the lowest levels of parental support compared to their counters with SO goals [18]. More research is needed to examine the parenting practices associated with different types of long-term aspirations in adolescence, especially among youth from diverse contexts of development.

Specifically, in HAS communities, the general culture of achievement emphasis is associated with relatively poor student functioning, and parents can either perpetuate this culture or promote prosociality/kindness [28,41]. Among affluent youth from HAS communities, parenting that primarily focuses on self-oriented goals and extrinsic markers of success may have deleterious developmental consequences [41]. In fact, one study demonstrated that students from HAS who perceive their parents as emphasizing prosociality and achievement equally and students who perceive their parents as emphasizing prosociality more have better outcomes both personally and academically than students who perceive their parents as prioritizing high achievement [41]. Further, girls from HAS who rated their mother as having high achievement emphasis and high parental criticism were more likely to report internalizing symptoms of depression and anxiety [41]. Research is needed to understand which parenting practices help youth foster other-oriented aims in HAS contexts where perfectionistic parenting centered on extrinsic goals is linked with maladaptive outcomes [42].

1.2. The Current Study

The current study builds on previous research on parent–child relationships and prosocial development by examining the association of parent–child relationships and OO and SO aims development in adolescent girls from competitive, achievement-oriented contexts. Specifically, we hypothesized that four clusters would emerge from our sample: (1) no orientation, (2) high levels of SO aims and low levels of OO aims, (3) high levels of OO aims and low levels of SO aims, and (4) both high levels of SO and OO aims [6]. Moreover, we expected that parenting variables would vary across the clusters: girls who endorsed primarily SO goals (and girls without purpose) were hypothesized to have the worst parental relationships (i.e., lower levels of trust and communication and higher levels of alienation), whereas those who report high levels of OO aspirations (alone and combined with SO aims) would have the best relationships with their parents. We also examined whether girls with different combinations of SO and OO aims would report differences in psychosocial functioning. Building on previous research, we hypothesized that girls with high levels of OO aims (alone and combined with SO aims) would report the best outcomes. That is, girls with prosocial aspirations would report better psychosocial development.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants were 207 6th, 8th, and 10th graders from two selective all-girls private schools in metropolitan areas in the Midwest and Northeast, respectively. They were part of a larger study examining high-achieving girls' experiences of stress and relationships. This longitudinal study spanned an 18-month period with four data collection points: (1) Year One—Spring semester, (2) Year One—Fall semester, (3) Year Two—Spring semester, and (4) Year Two—Fall semester. This study included only the first time point as our primary variables of interest (i.e., types of youth purpose) were only available at the first wave of data collection. The two schools were similar with respect to demographics, including socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity. The sample was primarily White (85%) and affluent; more than half of the participant's parents reported a family income greater than USD 240,000. Finally, participants in the study lived predominantly in suburban areas.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, as was informed parental consent and student assent prior to data collection. Participants were not compensated for their participation. Response rates were high at both schools (near 70%), and analyses indicated that there were no differences on key demographic variables between those who did and did not participate. One hundred percent of those with parental consent completed the web-based surveys (Qualtrics), which were administered on school computers via a secure online system. Students were informed that they could discontinue the survey and skip any questions for any reason. One student did not complete all of the purpose items and was excluded from analyses, resulting in an analytic sample of *n* = 206.

2.2. Measures

Parent–adolescent relationship. Three subscales from the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) were used to tap the parent–adolescent relationship characteristics of interest: Parental Communication, Parental Trust, and Parental Alienation [43]. The IPPA is a self-report measure administered to adolescents that examines their perceived level of communication, trust, and alienation in the context of their relationships with their parents. This scale has been used in previous research with adolescents from privileged, HAS contexts [44]. Girls rated the degree to which each of the 27 items applied to their relationship with their parents on 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Almost Always Never True" to 5 = "Almost Always True"). Sample items from each of the three subscales were: "I tell my parents about my problems and troubles" (Parental Communication), "My parents trust my judgment" (Parental Trust), and "I feel angry with my parents" (Parental Alienation). The reliability for each of the subscales was very good (α = 0.89).

Purpose. To examine SO aims and OO aims, we used the Categories of Identified Purpose in the COA Revised Youth Purpose Survey [45]. Participants rated the importance of 17 categories of purpose on a 7-point Likert scale. Previous research using this scale to categorize youth-reported importance of different types of purpose has employed a wide variety of approaches [6,18,46–48]. In our study, we employed the same approach as Bronk and Finch [6] and Blau and colleagues [18]; we utilized person-based analyses to categorize students into clusters according to different types of life aims endorsed. Items that assessed OO aims included "making the world a better place." Items that indicated an interest in serving one's own needs (i.e., SO aims) included "make money." In addition, some items do not indicate OO aims, nor SO aims (e.g., "earn the respect of others").

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, a self-report measure that has been widely used with diverse populations to assess feelings of self-worth among adolescents [49,50]. Girls rated the extent to which they agreed with 10 statements (i.e., items) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Agree" to 5 = "Strongly Disagree"). Higher scores on this measure indicate higher levels of self-esteem. A sample item is: "I feel that I have a number of good qualities." Previous work on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale has indicated that it has strong psychometrics [51]. In particular, test–retest correlations (0.82 and 0.85) and reliability (0.77 to 0.88) have been high. This scale has good reliability in this sample (α = 0.78).

Psychosocial functioning. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to assess girls' psychosocial functioning in the present study [51]. There are 25 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = "Not True"; 2 = "Somewhat True"; 3 = "Certainly True"). Higher scores on this scale indicate higher levels of psychosocial problems (i.e., peer, emotional, conduct, and hyperactivity problems); the prosocial subscale was not included in the SDQ scale. A sample item is: "I am often unhappy, depressed or tearful." This measure has been widely used and normed on U.S. samples [51]. The scale had good reliability in the current sample (α = 0.78).

Demographics variables. Participants self-reported their race/ethnicity, grade, and school.

3. Results

3.1. Cluster Analysis

A person-centered data analysis strategy was used to separate participants into homogeneous subgroups on the basis of purpose categories. To accomplish this, we utilized a hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward's method and squared Euclidean distance to capture discrete clusters of youth on the basis of *z*-transformed scores on the categories of identified purpose items [52]. We investigated two-, three- four-, five-, and six-cluster model solutions. After reviewing a range of cluster solutions and conducting a complementary *k*-means cluster analysis, we determined that the three-cluster solution best fit our data (Table 1).

Table 1. Means of OO and SO aim categories across the clusters.

	"Self and Other-Oriented Aims" n = 120 M (SD)	"Self-Oriented Aims" n = 50 M (SD)	"Other-Oriented Aims" n = 36 M (SD)
Create something new	5.07 (1.13)	4.36 (1.50)	4.36 (1.25)
Serve my country	4.28 (1.35)	2.78 (1.38)	4.31 (1.04)
Change the way people think	5.29 (1.24)	4.40 (1.73)	4.14 (1.36)
Help others	6.48 (0.59)	5.50 (0.86)	6.28 (0.66)
Have fun	6.53 (0.76)	5.88 (1.17)	6.00 (1.10)
Make the world a better place	6.63 (0.58)	5.48 (0.89)	6.33 (0.68)
Be successful	6.68 (0.49)	6.02 (1.12)	5.06 (1.22)
Have a good career	6.59 (0.62)	6.08 (0.99)	5.08 (1.30)
Serve God/a Higher Power	4.27 (1.81)	3.18 (1.84)	4.11 (2.14)
Make things more beautiful	5.26 (1.07)	4.68 (1.44)	4.61 (1.34)
Fulfill my duties	5.89 (1.02)	4.54 (1.15)	5.03 (1.42)
Do the right thing	6.58 (0.60)	5.80 (0.86)	6.33 (0.72)
Make money	6.03 (0.88)	5.58 (1.16)	3.89 (1.51)
Discover new things about the world	6.08 (0.95)	5.24 (1.22)	4.83 (1.08)
Earn the respect of others	6.68 (0.38)	5.76 (1.17)	5.58 (0.94)
Support my family and friends	6.83 (0.38)	5.86 (1.13)	6.69 (0.53)
Live life to the fullest	6.91 (0.32)	6.24 (1.08)	6.58 (0.77)

The first cluster reflected high levels of SO and OO aims and thus was labeled "Self and Other-Oriented Aims." The second cluster had the second-highest means on many SO items (e.g., "make money") and the lowest means on several OO items (e.g., "help others"), and thus was labeled "Self-Oriented Aims." The third cluster had the second-highest means on several OO items (e.g., "fulfill my duties") and the lowest scores on SO items (e.g., "be successful") and thus was labeled "Other-Oriented Aims." Finally, chi-square tests examined whether the cluster membership was associated with demographic characteristics. Results indicated that cluster membership did not depend on student school, grade level, and race/ethnicity. Table 2 presents this demographic information across the clusters.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics across the clusters.

	"Self and Other-Oriented Aims" n = 120	"Self-Oriented Aims" n = 50	"Other-Oriented Aims" n = 36
School 1	48.33%	42.00%	36.11%
Grade 6	20.00%	22.00%	36.11%
Grade 8	36.67%	30.00%	25.00%
Grade 10	43.33%	48.00%	38.89%
White	85.71%	77.08%	91.67%

3.2. Primary Analyses

We conducted multivariate analysis of variance to examine differences across multiple aspects of parenting as a function of cluster membership. The Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices indicated that there was homogeneity of covariances ($p = 0.153$). The MANOVA indicated that cluster membership had a significant effect on parenting variables, $F(6, 402) = 2.23$, $p < 0.05$, Wilks' = 0.937, $\eta p^2 = 0.032$. To further examine differences in parenting as a function of cluster membership, we examined several univariate post hoc tests. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was not significant for parental trust and parental alienation but was significant for parental communication. We used the Games–Howell post hoc test for parental communication to account for this violation and Tukey post hoc tests for parental alienation and parental trust. Univariate tests indicated significant differences for parental trust and communication across the clusters at $p < 0.05$; differences for parental alienation were not statistically significant ($p = 0.078$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Univariate tests for differences in parenting across the clusters.

	"Self and Other-Oriented Aims" *n* = 120 *M (SD)*	"Self-Oriented Aims" *n* = 50 *M (SD)*	"Other-Oriented Aims" *n* = 36 *M (SD)*	*F*
Parental Alienation mean	2.35 (0.90) [a]	2.61 (0.87) [b]	2.20 (0.72) [c]	2.59
Parental Trust mean	4.14 (0.70) [a]	3.89 (0.65) [b]	4.30 (0.57) [b]	4.31 *
Parental Communication mean	3.74 (0.79) [ab]	3.33 (0.91) [b]	3.87 (0.61) [bc]	6.20 *

Note. Means in the same row that share superscripts differ at $p < 0.05$ according to the Tukey's HSD test for Parental Alienation and Parental Trust and differ at $p < 0.05$ according to the Games–Howell test for Parental Communication. * $p < 0.05$, $F(2, 203)$.

As displayed in Table 3, post hoc tests indicated that the "Self-Oriented Aims" group experienced slightly higher, but not significantly different, levels of parental alienation than did the "Other-Oriented Aims" group ($p = 0.08$). The "Self-Oriented Aims" group reported significantly less parental trust than the "Other-Oriented Aims" group ($p = 0.015$) and lower, albeit not statistically significant, parental trust than the "Self and Other-Oriented Aims" cluster ($p = 0.07$). The "Self and Other-Oriented Aims" ($p = 0.018$) and "Other-Oriented Aims" ($p = 0.004$) clusters reported higher levels of parental communication than the "Self-Oriented Aims" cluster. Taken together, girls with high SO aims and low OO aims experienced poorer parental relationships than girls with OO aims and, in some cases, girls with both SO and OO aims.

We also examined whether girls' psychosocial outcomes differed as a function of cluster membership. A MANOVA indicated that cluster membership did not have a statistically significant effect on psychosocial outcomes, $F(4, 404) = 2.83$, $p = 0.052$, Wilks' = 0.955, $\eta p^2 = 0.023$. That is, cluster membership did not have a significant effect on overall psychosocial well-being. We conducted two ANOVAs to examine if self-esteem and social-emotional problems varied across cluster membership individually. Levene's test was not significant for either analysis. Univariate tests indicated significant differences for social-emotional problems ($p < 0.05$) and self-esteem ($p < 0.05$) (Table 4). The Tukey post hoc comparisons indicated that the "Self-Oriented Aims" group had higher levels of social-emotional problems than the "Self and Other-Oriented Aims" group ($p = 0.038$). Moreover, the "Self and Other-Oriented Aims" group demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem than the "Self-Oriented Aims" group ($p = 0.014$).

Table 4. Univariate tests for differences in psychosocial functioning across the clusters.

	"Self and Other-Oriented Aims" *n* = 120 *M (SD)*	"Self-Oriented Aims" *n* = 50 *M (SD)*	"Other-Oriented Aims" *n* = 36 *M (SD)*	*F*
SDQ	11.13 (5.53) [a]	13.32 (4.97) [a]	11.00 (4.68) [b]	4.38 *
Self-esteem	38.38 (7.31) [a]	35.02 (6.82) [a]	38.33 (5.92) [b]	3.37 *

Note. Means in the same row that share superscripts differ at $p < 0.05$ according to Tukey's HSD test. * $p < 0.05$, $F(2, 203)$.

4. Discussion

Purpose is a predictor of numerous beneficial outcomes among adolescents from diverse contexts [20,23]. Possessing a purpose in life, with prosocial goals, may also serve as a protective factor against stress, with some evidence suggesting that it can buffer against the pressures associated with growing up in competitive, affluent communities [20]. The present study examined whether parent–adolescent relationship characteristics are related to different types of adolescent goals or aims among girls from selective private schools in affluent communities, where meaningful relationships and contexts may help or hinder the formation of other-oriented aims. Our results indicated that adolescent girls with purpose (defined as including "Other-Oriented Aims") were more likely to experience higher levels of communication and trust in their relationships with their parents compared to girls who primarily endorsed SO aims ("Self-Oriented Aims"). Adolescent girls who have long-term aims that encompass both SO and OO aims (also considered purpose) also fared better

than girls with strictly self-focused goals ("Self-Oriented Aims"). These results further extend our understanding of the different types of long-term aims young people endorse and the types of parenting practices that foster in young people an interest in pursuing goals intended to contribute to the world beyond themselves.

The current study found three distinct clusters of youth purpose, named "Other-Oriented Aims," "Self and Other-Oriented Aims," and "Self-Oriented Aims." In contrast to the Bronk and Finch (2010) results, we did not find a cluster of youth with no orientation. The absence of this cluster may have to do with the characteristics of the current sample. That is, youth from high-achieving backgrounds may be especially likely to have goals for the future, making a "no orientation" cluster less prevalent. Other studies using Bronk and Finch's methodology have similarly failed to find a robust fourth cluster of youth with no orientation [18].

Consistent with previous research, we found that youth who experienced positive parent–adolescent relationships also had OO life aims [4,14,32], although some evidence from international samples has found that adolescents with OO purpose report less support from parents [18]. Both parental communication and trust were associated with OO aims among girls in our study. Our results also align with evidence demonstrating positive relationships with parents among adolescents who endorse both SO and OO aims [18]. Moreover, although not statistically significant, girls who focused on SO goals reported relatively high levels of parent alienation. Taken together, these findings suggest the importance of parental influence in the development of other-oriented aims (i.e., purpose) among adolescent girls from affluent backgrounds. There also seem to be certain qualities in relationships with parents that foster purpose among adolescent girls [20]. Specifically, those with less conflictual, more open and supportive relationships with their parents tended to feel as though they could explore their own interests, rather than feel pressured to live up to their parents' expectations.

Our results are also consistent with Liang and Klein's [22] notion of performance mindset, and findings from Luthar and colleagues [26,28] that youth from affluent backgrounds are sometimes subject to disconnected parents who pressure them to conform to narrow definitions of success focused primarily on extrinsic goals (e.g., academic excellence), rather than supporting their intrinsic interests and purpose. Moreover, it stands to reason that parents who lack empathy in their relationships with their daughters fail to model and instill in their daughters the same empathy that is associated with prosociality and ultimately other-oriented purpose. These findings suggest that despite the privileges of growing up in an affluent context, the way in which parents interact with their adolescents plays a critical role in the intergenerational transmission of healthy messages and mindsets [42]. Those parents who demonstrate empathy and attunement to their daughters will in turn pass down the skills and mindset of other-oriented purpose.

Not only did girls with primarily self-focused goals report poorer relationships with their parents, they also struggled with lower psychosocial functioning than did girls in the other clusters. Girls in the "Self-Oriented Aims" cluster reported lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of social-emotional problems compared to their counterparts who reported OO goals, especially those with SO and OO aims. Girls whose primary aims were self-oriented displayed the greatest dysfunction, which aligns with research on adolescent girls from affluent, HAS communities that have documented associations between extrinsic goals and dysfunction [30]. These results also fit with previous research in which youth who endorsed both SO and OO aims reported advantageous outcomes, such as higher levels of life satisfaction, well-being, and social support [6,18,19]. Blau and colleagues [18] suggested that adolescents with both SO and OO aims demonstrate an ideal balance between their own personal goals and prosocial intentions, which may be cultivated through high levels of support from parents, peers, and other influential relationships. In summary, the benefits of purpose in life do not merely extend to selfless youth, but also to youth who seek to accomplish goals that are both personally meaningful and beneficial to others.

5. Limitations and Future Directions

While the present study extends burgeoning research on youth purpose, there are several noteworthy limitations. First, the findings were based on cross-sectional analyses and thus do not examine changes in youth purpose categories over time and whether those changes varied as a function of parenting practices. Without these longitudinal analyses, the direction of effect can be interpreted with theory but not confirmed through our analyses. It is plausible that youth who report OO aims (alone and with SO aims) may elicit certain types of parenting, and that youth who have higher self-esteem may be more likely to pursue other-oriented aims. However, previous qualitative and theoretical work supports our inferred sequence that parent–adolescent relationships may provide a context conducive to the cultivation of youth purpose and that youth purpose leads to enhanced self-esteem and mental health [20,21,25,53]. Additional longitudinal analyses with the variables of interest in our study are needed to further confirm directionality. Specifically, future research should examine if and how different types of youth purpose change over time and how parenting plays a role in the transformation of purpose across the adolescent and emerging adulthood years. Indeed, others have suggested that youth who endorse both SO and OO aims demonstrate an emotional maturity and longitudinal research could examine if in fact the integration of both SO and OO aims is an important development step in purpose formation [18].

Another limitation of the present study was the use of self-report for all of our measures so that interrelationships among variables benefit from shared method variance. Nevertheless, assessing the adolescent's perspective on their relationships with their parents has its strengths. Parent and child reports of parenting are often modestly correlated [54]. Research also indicates that adolescents' reports of parenting can be even more accurate than parents' reports [55]. In any case, the current study's intention was to tap youths' own subjective experiences of mutual trust and good communication vs. alienation in their relationships with parents.

The third consideration of our study is that it may have limited generalizability for youth and parents across the socioeconomic spectrum, given our focus on the experiences of adolescent girls from affluent, high-achieving communities. A recent study has illustrated that urban youth of color structure and create career-related goals with the understanding and anticipation of hostile racial climates in some workplaces [56]. This points to understanding that girls with marginalized identities may cultivate different plans and goals for the future and is certainly an area for further research. Moreover, this study focuses only on the influence of parenting relationships, and it is likely that other formative relationships (e.g., mentors, teachers, peers) may play a significant role in the development of youth purpose [21]. Future research should include youth from a diversity of backgrounds and examine how other relationships (e.g., friendships and mentoring relationships) may contribute to the development of OO purpose, especially combined with SO aims

6. Conclusions

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the youth purpose literature in much-needed ways. Youth whose purpose is focused on others or demonstrate a balance between their own aspirations and prosocial goals experience the best outcomes. This study also provides insights into what kind of parenting leads to the development of youth with different types of purpose. In particular, if OO purpose is preferable to a sole focus on self-oriented aims, then does parenting make a difference in the development of this desire to contribute to the lives of others? Our findings suggest that parents should indeed be encouraged to foster close, trusting, and openly communicative relationships with their children in order to cultivate a personally meaningful, other-oriented purpose during the adolescent years.

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