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7-3-2017

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### Recommended Citation

Sharma, Gitima; Kim, Jungnam; and Bryan, Julia (2017) "The Effects of Purpose Orientations on Recent High School Graduates' College Application Decisions," *Journal of College Access*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jca/vol3/iss2/8>

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# The Effects of Purpose Orientations on Recent High School Graduates' College Application Decisions



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## ABSTRACT

Using the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study database, the authors examined the different types of purpose orientations amongst a nationally representative sample of adolescents and the effect of these purpose orientations on high school graduates' college application decisions. Results indicated four types of purpose orientations: career, interpersonal, altruistic, and self-oriented purpose orientations. Only career purpose orientation was positively related to high school graduates decision to apply for college. Implications for school counseling and research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Purpose in life, purpose orientations, college enrollment, college outcomes, career counseling

Supporting all students to successfully access college and fulfill their career goals is one of the most important goals in the current era of education reform. School counselors play a critical role towards fulfilling this goal through their role in motivating and influencing students' educational outcomes and career decisions (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Herr, 2000; McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). Posner (2002) stated, "It is a tricky business trying to guess what experiences will motivate an individual to intellectual achievement" (p. 316). Several scholars have engaged in research to identify the factors that motivate students to apply for college. For example,

Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) emphasized social support, personalized student attention, and ongoing formal and informal conversations that help students to understand the various facets of preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from post-secondary academic institutions as key factors to promote college-going culture. According to Damon (2008), one of the key factors that distinguish adolescents who feel motivated to fulfill their future goals and those who do not lies in whether they have found a compelling purpose in life. Damon (2008) stressed that "the pursuit of purpose can organize an entire life, imparting not only meaning and exhilaration but also motivation for learning and achievement" (p. 34).

A sense of purpose could serve as a source of motivation for high school students to apply to college through providing them with a deeper reason to fulfill their current and long-term goals. Research has demonstrated that young people with greater sense of purpose show higher motivation to learn (Bronk, 2008). In fact, when adolescents and young adults are certain about their life's purpose, they are more likely to persist toward college education (Allen & Nora, 1995). Moreover, clarity about purpose in life helps students to



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develop positive characteristics such as grit and ability to persevere in fulfilling important goals such as achieving a college degree (Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2016). Since high school students' future expectations, hopes, goals, and purpose influence their decision to pursue college (Spohn, Crowther, & Lykins, 1992) and persist during college (Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2016), it is important to explore the relationship between their life's purpose and college application.

Purpose is defined as a "central, self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning" (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009, p.242). Purpose is a central, life aim that lasts across time and contexts, and can support students in persevering toward fulfilling their career and academic goals (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between purpose commitment and adolescents' positive affect, hope, happiness, contentment, and motivation to work toward their ultimate aim (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley et al., 2009; Burrow & Hill, 2011). A significant correlation has also been found between high school students' sense of purpose in life and measures of academic success such as GPA and mental ability (Martin & Martin, 1977). However, in spite of the positive role that purpose plays, the traditional education system provides very little support for school students to fulfill their quest for meaning and purpose behind school activities (Damon,

2008). Critics have complained that even if our society has made significant advancements in education, we have not yet supported students in examining the relationship between their educational pursuits and larger purpose, which could strengthen their commitment to learning (Damon, 2008).

Due to the lack of emphasis on purpose in educational settings, a dearth of empirical work on the construct exists. Moreover, most of the existing studies have mainly focused on measuring the extent to which youth are aware of their purpose and not the content or nature of their purpose. The few studies that have focused on adolescents' content or nature of purpose have demonstrated that different types of purpose influence adolescents' developmental and educational outcomes differently (Hill, Burrow, Brandenberger, Lapsley, & Quaranto, 2010). Hill et al. (2010) referred to different types of purpose as "purpose orientations." Given that different types of purpose may differentially predict students' wellbeing and achievement (Hill et al., 2010), it is critical for researchers to examine the relationship between different purpose orientations and college outcomes. Leppel (2005) examined the effect of different types of purpose on students' college decisions and found that students whose purpose was associated with only earning money were less motivated to pursue college than those whose purpose was to contribute to the wellbeing of society. This

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implies the need for counselors who can inspire students to connect their personal career goals with broader, ultimate, purposes that can enable them to contribute to society. Given the results of such studies (e.g., Hill et al., 2010; Leppel, 2005), one would also anticipate that different purpose orientations would differentially impact high school students' decision to pursue college. Perhaps specific purpose orientations or a combination of them may encourage students' persistence in the college going process and promote their application to college. However, no research exists on how high school students' purpose orientations influence their college-related decisions prior to their entry to college.

In the present study, we explored the different types of purpose orientations amongst a nationally representative sample of adolescents and the effect of these purpose orientations on high school graduates' college application decisions using the Educational Longitudinal Study 2002 (ELS: 2002). Following sections provide the review of literature on the concept of "purpose orientations" and the relationship between purpose orientations and college outcomes.

### **Defining and Assessing Purpose Orientations**

A few scholars (e.g. Bronk & Finch, 2010; Hill, Burrow, & Thornton, 2010; Moran, 2013) have recently begun to explore the nature and content of adolescents' life purpose. They have employed multiple methods to identify

different types of purpose and have contributed to the literature on "what" the nature of adolescents' life purpose is, instead of just providing evidence about whether or not adolescents feel a sense of purpose. For instance, Moran (2013) referred to different types of purpose as cultures of purpose and identified four cultures of purpose among adolescents: Supported, Strivers, Givers, and Disciples. The Supported focused on reasons and meaning for what they could gain from others. Strivers aimed for primarily standard career success goals. Givers felt certain about their aims to help others. Disciples felt certain about their faith-focused purpose to serve God. Similarly, Hill, Burrow, and Thornton (2010) explored adolescents' definitions of purpose and coded them based on five categories: foundation and direction, happiness, prosocial content, financial or occupational goals, and religious content. On the basis of cluster analysis of data collected from 144 adolescents' surveys, Bronk and Finch (2010) reported four groups: youth without clear long-term aims, youth with self-oriented long-term aims, youth with other-oriented long-term aims, and youth with both self and other-oriented long-term aims. In a similar vein, Hill et al. (2010) proposed that an individual's "purpose in life is often indicated by multiple and related goals, rather than a single one" (p. 174). For instance, if someone's life's purpose is materialistic in nature, then that person might value pursuit of several materialistic life goals such as earning money, gaining financial

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stability, getting a high-paying job, and so on. According to Hill et al. (2010), purpose orientations refer to the constellation of related and long-term life goals. To develop the purpose orientations measure, Hill et al. (2010) performed a Principal Components Exploratory Factor Analysis on the life-goal items formulated by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at University of California-Los Angeles after collecting data from 1,748 undergraduate seniors. The results of their study suggested four types of purpose orientations: pro-social orientation, financial orientation, creative orientation, and personal recognition orientation. Hill et al. (2010) defined pro-social orientation as “one’s propensity to help others and influence the societal structure”; financial orientation as “goals of financial wellbeing and administrative success”; creative orientation as “artistic goals and a propensity for originality”; and personal recognition orientation as “one’s desire for recognition and respect from colleagues” (p. 174). High positive correlation over two measurement occasions (13 years apart) revealed that these purpose orientations remain stable over time. The results of Hill et al. (2010) study also suggested that only prosocial purpose orientation predicted personal growth, purpose, and integrity among middle adults after controlling for other orientations. The implications of the study emphasized the importance of assessing the range of purpose orientations across the lifespan, and how these orientations differentially predict

peoples’ developmental and educational outcomes.

### **Purpose Orientations and College Outcomes**

Apart from a general sense that he or she has a purpose to fulfill, different types of purpose impact adolescents’ developmental and educational outcomes differently. For example, Bronk and Finch (2010) reported that those young people who expressed both self- and other-oriented purpose demonstrated more positive developmental outcomes and life satisfaction than others. In the context of postsecondary outcomes, Leppel (2005) found that students who choose their career solely on the basis of a financial purpose, that is, for material gain rather than other purposes, such as desire to contribute to society, were less likely to pursue a college education.

Research also demonstrates that the number one life goal that students report for pursuing college is to fulfill their career aspirations (Astin, Korn, & Riggs, 1993). Adolescents, who value career-oriented goals such as job security, work that is interesting, and using one’s skills and abilities to produce results report stronger college aspirations (Wray-Lake et al., 2011). On the other hand, career indecision or lack of clarity regarding one’s career path, contributes to students’ decision to leave college (Shearer, 2009). Further on, the higher the students’ sense of purpose in life, the lower is their career indecision (Olivera-Celdran, 2011). Therefore, scholars

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such as Kosine, Steger, and Duncan (2008) have emphasized the importance of implementing purpose-centered career interventions in school settings.

In the context of purpose and career development, Savickas (2008) acknowledged Tiedeman (1985) as the first career theorist to see purpose as a key mechanism in self-organization and who considered purpose to be the engine of career development. Tiedeman and Miller-Tiedeman (1985) emphasized that purpose bridges the discontinuities in people's career unfolding and the goal of career development lies in perceiving and constructing one's own life and vision. Kosine, Steger, and Duncan (2008) suggested that having a sense of purpose supports adolescents and young adults in choosing sustaining careers with deeper levels of commitment and persistence. Through focusing on purpose, school counselors can support students to define work that is personally meaningful to them and enables them to contribute to their community (Kosine, Steger, & Duncan, 2008). Besides a general sense of purpose, specific types of life's purpose might impact high school students' college outcomes. Based on previous studies, we can hypothesize that some purpose orientations such as pro-social orientation appear to contribute more to students' psychological wellbeing (Hill et al. 2010), whereas other types of purpose, such as career-oriented purpose, seem to be more conducive to strengthening their college

aspirations (Wray-Lake et al., 2011). However, although a few scholars explored the relationship between sense of purpose and college persistence, a gap remains regarding understanding how purpose is related to high school students' decision to pursue college. Given the previous research on the effect of different types of purpose on student persistence and retention in college (e.g. Leppel, 2005), one would anticipate that different purpose orientations would also influence whether youth pursue in applying and enrolling in college. The goal of this study is to investigate the nature of purpose orientations and their effect on high school students' college application decisions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Guided by Hill et al.'s (2010) conceptualization of "purpose orientations," the purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of high school students' life purpose and further examine the relationship between their purpose and college application decisions. Two research questions guided this study.

First, what types of purpose orientations do high school students report? To examine this research question, we performed a Principal Components Exploratory Factor Analysis on 14 items about high school students' long-term life aspirations in the Educational Longitudinal Study 2002 (ELS: 2002).

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Second, what is the relationship between each of these purpose orientations and high school graduates' college application decisions after controlling for demographic variables (i.e., race/ethnicity, social class, school type, and urbanicity) and academic achievement? It is hypothesized that high school students' purpose orientations will be significantly related to college application decisions. The results of this study with regard to the nature of adolescents' life's purpose and its effects on college application could help school counselors to promote high school students' college-related decisions that align with their purpose in life, which research shows helps them to persist in post-secondary education (Allen & Nora, 1995). In our awareness, apart from this study, there have been no other studies on the construct of purpose among adolescents using national longitudinal surveys.

### Method

#### Participants

We used data from the ELS: 2002, a public-use data set collected by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The ELS: 2002 follows a national sample of 10th graders biennially from 2002 to 2004 and then a second follow-up in 2006. The 2006 follow-up included students who were in college or in the workforce and collected data specific to postsecondary enrollment, access and choices. These students attended U.S. public, private

and Catholic schools. Of the 12,027 analytic sample of high school students, 63.0% were White, 14.2% were Latina or Hispanic, 13.3% were Black/African American, 0.9% were American Indian/Alaska Native, 3.9% were Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 4.7% identified as multiracial. We combined Hispanic, no race specified and Hispanic, race specified as one category as Latina or Hispanic as the NCES categorized race/ethnicity in the ELS: 2002 data report (Bozick, Lauff, & Wirt, 2007).

Approximately 50% were male students and 51.1% were female students. Of the sample, 4.6% students attended Catholic schools, 3.3% students attended private schools, and 92% students attended public schools; 20.1% lived in a rural area, 51% lived in suburban and 29% lived in an urban area.

### Measures

**Dependent variable.** A college application question assessed whether high school students applied for college within the first two years after graduation with a dichotomous variable (Yes, No). Of the sample, 78.9% of the students reported that they had applied to college, while 21.1% of the students reported that they had never applied to college.

**Demographic variables.** Race/ethnicity was a categorical variable of six categories: White, Latina or Hispanic, Black or African

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American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial. Race was dummy coded, with White serving as the reference group. Social class was measured by a composite variable that made up parents' occupation, educational level and income in the ELS dataset, which is a continuous variable and standardized for use in the regression. School type (i.e., public, private) and urbanicity (i.e., urban, rural) were both dummy coded with rural and Catholic as reference groups. Academic achievement was all GPA from 10th grade through 12th grade as a categorized variable, which was treated as continuous variable and standardized for the regression.

### **Purpose Orientations variables.**

We conducted principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation of the 14 items from the ELS: 2002 database to derive purpose orientations based on Hill et al.'s (2010) conceptual framework. Using the scree plot, eigenvalue greater than one, and conceptual meaningfulness of the factors as criteria to retain factors, we examined 3, 4, and 5 factor solutions. The 4 factor model seemed most conceptually meaningful and aligned with the purpose orientations framework. The four factors or variables measuring purpose orientations are described on the next page (Table 1).

### **Career purpose orientation.**

We define career purpose orientation as adolescents' desire to realize their career aspirations such as gaining expertise and training to excel in their chosen profession. Career purpose orientation was measured by a composite of four items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .68$ ) regarding "importance of being successful in line work" (factor loading = .77), "importance of being able to find steady work" (loading = .63), "importance of being expert in field of work" (loading = .66), and "importance of getting good education" (loading = .67). All items were measured on a three-point scale and standardized it for entry to the regression that a higher score represented a higher career purpose orientation (1=not important, 2=somewhat important, 3=very important).

### **Interpersonal purpose orientation.**

We define interpersonal purpose orientation as adolescents' desire to cultivate happy relationships with their family and friends, and also provide better opportunities to their children. Interpersonal purpose orientation was measured by a composite of five items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .64$ ) coded 1=not important, 2=somewhat important, 3=very important): "importance of marrying right person/having happy family" (loading = .77), "importance of having strong friendships" (loading = .54), "importance of giving children better opportunities" (loading = .48), "importance of living close to parents/relatives" (loading = .30), and "importance of having

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**Table 1.**  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Factor Loadings of Purpose Orientations Variables (N =12,027)

	<i>Factor Loading</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Career Purpose Orientation</b>			
Importance of being successful in line work	.77	2.85	.38
Importance of being able to find steady work	.63	2.83	.41
Importance of being expert in field of work	.66	2.67	.54
Importance of getting good education	.67	2.82	.41
<b>Interpersonal Purpose Orientation</b>			
Importance of marrying right person/having happy family	.77	2.72	.54
Importance of having strong friendships	.54	2.82	.42
Importance of giving children better opportunities	.48	2.77	.49
Importance of living close to parents/relatives	.30	2.14	.66
Importance of having children	.76	2.34	.71
<b>Altruistic Purpose Orientation</b>			
Importance of helping others in community	.71	2.30	.59
Importance of working to correct inequalities	.79	1.92	.677
<b>Self-oriented Purpose Orientation</b>			
Importance of having lots of money	.58	2.33	.62
Importance of getting away from this area	.77	1.75	.77
Importance of having leisure time	.43	2.66	.52

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children" (loading =.76). We combined and standardized it for entry to the regression. The item of "importance of living close to parents/relatives" loaded on two factors, but conceptually it seems to fit the interpersonal purpose orientation.

### **Altruistic purpose orientation.**

We define altruistic purpose orientation as adolescents' desire to support people in their community and make a positive difference in society at large. Altruistic purpose orientation was measured by a composite of two items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .54$ ; "importance of helping others in community" (loading =.71) and "importance of working to correct inequalities" (loading =.79). It was measured on a three-point scale (1=not important, 2=somewhat important, 3=very important) and standardized it for entry to the regression.

### **Self-oriented purpose orientation.**

We define self-oriented purpose orientation (Bronk & Finch, 2010) as adolescents' desire to fulfill their personal aspirations such as achieving financial success and living a life of comfort and leisure. Self-oriented purpose orientation was measured by a composite of three items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .29$ ; "importance of having lots of money" (loading = .58), "importance of getting away from this area" (loading = .77), and "importance of having leisure time" (loading = .43). Three items were measured on a four-point scale (1=strongly agree, 4= strongly disagree) and

standardized it before entry in the regression.

### **Data Analysis**

We conducted hierarchical logistic regression analysis to investigate the relationships of the predictors (e.g., demographic variables, purpose orientations variables) to each category (e.g., Yes, No) of the dependent variable (e.g., whether high school graduates had ever applied for college). Given the ELS: 2002 is a complex sample using oversampling and multistage collection procedures, we used SPSS for Complex Samples to correct sampling weights and apply the sample design effects (Bryan, Day-Vines, Holcomb-McCoy, & Moore-Thomas, 2010).

### **Results**

We entered the variables in two steps with the demographic variables as well as academic achievement in Model 1 adding the purpose orientations of 10th grade variables in Model 2 (see Table 2 on page 108). The logistic regression model was significant at the first block comprising only demographic variables and academic achievement, Wald  $\chi^2(12) = 1187.11$ , adjusted Wald  $\chi^2(10) = 1089.98$ ,  $p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .203$ , and at the second block when the purpose orientations of 10th grade students were entered, Wald  $\chi^2(16) = 1092.64$ , adjusted Wald  $\chi^2(14) = 985.77$ ,  $p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .213$ , change in Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .010$ . The demographic variables and academic achievement explained 21.3% of the variability and the purpose orientations variables explained an

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additional 1.0 % of the variability in college application after controlling for the demographic variables and academic achievement.

### Effects of Demographic Variables and Academic Achievement on College Application

Race/ethnicity, gender, SES, types of schools, and academic achievement were significantly related to college application in all models. Compared to White, African American/Black, Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Latina, race/ethnicity were significantly related to their college application decisions at both models. Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, African American/Black and Hispanic or Latina students were more likely to apply to college than White students (vs. No; OR = 2.95; OR = 1.68; 1.28). Once purpose orientation variables were entered in model 2, the effects of those race/ethnicity were increased. Given the differences in the odds ratios between models 1 and 2, the purpose orientations may appear to decrease race/ethnicity and college application decisions gaps for minority high school students. SES was consistent in both models in that it was significantly related with college application. Specifically, SES has almost four times greater odds of deciding applying for college (vs. No; OR =4.21). The effects of the SES variable on college application were slightly increased once purpose orientation variables taken into consideration in model 2. Regarding academic achievement, students'

GPA from 10th grade to 12th grade was positively related to college application decisions (vs. No; OR =1.6). Regarding types of schools, students in public schools were less likely to apply for college than students in private schools in the both models (vs. No; OR =.41) comparing to students from private schools. Interestingly, students from Catholic schools were positively related to college enrollment in model 1 (vs. No; OR =1.52), then it was no longer significant in model 2 after purpose orientations was taken into consideration.

### Effects of Purpose Orientation on College Application

Regarding purpose orientations, only career purpose orientation was positively related to whether high school graduates had ever applied for college in the full model (OR =1.24). Interpersonal, altruistic and self-oriented purpose orientations were not related to college application decisions. Students who reported higher career purpose orientation, that is, who valued goals such as achieving steady work, becoming an expert in their field of work, being successful in their line of work, and receiving a good education are more likely to apply for postsecondary education. In other words, students' strong desire or aspiration for excelling in their profession and achieving educational success appeared to be linked to their action of applying for college.

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**Table 2.**  
**Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Purpose Orientations ( $n=12,035$ )**

Model	Step 1			Step 2		
	Yes Versus No			Yes Versus No		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Intercept	2.17	.16	8.76***	2.30	.18	9.98***
<b>Demographic Variables</b>						
<b>Gender<sup>a</sup></b>						
Male	-.53	.57	.58***	-.52	.06	.59***
<b>Student Race/Ethnicity<sup>a</sup></b>						
American Indian/Alaska Native	-.22	.24	.82	.04	.28	1.04
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.98	.13	2.67***	1.08	.14	2.95***
African American or Black	.44	.08	1.56***	.522	.09	1.68***
Hispanic or Latina	.17	.08	1.19*	.25	.09	1.28**
Multi-racial	.05	.13	1.05	.07	.14	1.08
White						
<b>Urbanicity<sup>a</sup></b>						
Urban	.002	.08	1.00	-.10	.09	.89
Suburban	-.05	.07	.94	-.11	.07	.89
Rural						
<b>School Control<sup>a</sup></b>						
Public	-.80	.15	.44***	-.87	.17	.41***
Catholic	.42	.19	1.52*	.34	.20	1.40
Private						
SES <sup>b</sup>	1.39	.06	4.04***	1.43	.07	4.21***
Academic Achievement <sup>b</sup>	.53	.02	1.70***	.53	.02	1.6***
<b>Purpose Orientation Variables</b>						
Career Purpose Orientation <sup>b</sup>				.21	.03	1.24***
Interpersonal Purpose Orientation <sup>b</sup>				.02	.03	1.02
Altruistic Purpose Orientation <sup>b</sup>				-.05	.03	.95
Self-oriented Purpose Orientation <sup>b</sup>				-.01	.03	.98

Note. Wald  $\chi^2$  (12) = 1187.11, adjusted Wald  $\chi^2$  (10) = 1089.98,  $p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .203$  for step 1, Wald  $\chi^2$  (16) = 1092.64, adjusted Wald  $\chi^2$  (14) = 985.77,  $p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .213$ .

<sup>a</sup> Reference categories for each variable in order: Female for gender, White for race/ethnicity, private for school type, rural for urbanicity, and

<sup>b</sup> Standardized as z-score.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

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### Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between high school students' purpose orientations and their college application decision after controlling for demographic variables and academic achievement. Here, purpose orientations are defined as the constellation of related and long-term life goals (Hill et al., 2010). We assessed purpose orientations through performing a Principal Components Exploratory Factor Analysis on 14 items that focus on students' long-term life aspirations in the Educational Longitudinal Study 2002 (ELS: 2002).

Consistent with previous findings on the college application rates (e.g., Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011), our findings indicate that students' gender, race/ethnicity, SES, and academic achievement significantly predicted applying to college. Interestingly, relative to White students, minority students such as African American or Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latino students were more likely to apply to college. Supported by previous research (e.g., Kim, Mayes, Hines & Bryan, in press), this finding indicates that race and ethnicity-based gaps appear to be closing in terms of college application rates. However, we need to acknowledge that the gaps persist in the types of colleges minorities apply to, with White and Asian students applying in larger percentages to more selective colleges. Further, when purpose orientation was

considered, the effect of race and ethnicity (e.g., Asian American/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, African American/Black and Hispanic or Latina) on college application rates increased. This finding may suggest that purpose orientation may be a motivator that increases the odds of minority high school students applying to college. As corroborated by previous studies (Bryan et al, 2011; Engberg & Wolnlack, 2010; Perna & Titus, 2005), SES appears to be the strongest predictor of college application. The higher SES students have, the more they are likely to apply for college. Interestingly, the effect of SES on college application increased once purpose orientations were taken into consideration. The effect of academic achievement also seems to be very pervasive in predicting college application. Students in private and Catholic schools were more likely to apply to college than those in public schools.

In relation to purpose orientations, present findings suggest four kinds of purpose orientations. First is a career purpose orientation that refers to adolescents' desire to realize their career aspirations such as gaining expertise and training to excel in their chosen profession. Second is interpersonal purpose orientation that refers to adolescents' desire to cultivate happy relationships with their family and friends, and also provide better opportunities to their children. Third is altruistic purpose orientation that is adolescents' desire to support people in their

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community and make a positive difference in society at large. Fourth is self-oriented purpose orientation defined as adolescents' desire to fulfill their personal and self-oriented aspirations such as achieving financial success and living life of comfort and leisure. Among these, altruistic purpose orientation is similar to Hill et al.'s (2010) pro-social purpose orientation defined as college students' propensity to help others and influence the societal structure. Other purpose orientations are different in both studies perhaps due to the difference in survey items. The present study further suggests that in contrast to altruistic, interpersonal, and self-oriented purpose orientations, only career purpose orientation is significantly associated with high school students' decision to apply for college. This indicates that high school students' clarity regarding their career goals and a strong desire to excel in their chosen profession appears to play the most crucial role in their decision to apply for college. The significant role of career purpose orientation in influencing high school graduates decision to apply for college also reinforces different scholars' (e.g. Kosine, Steger, & Duncan, 2008) suggestion on providing purpose-centered career counseling within school settings. Super (1980) proposed that during late adolescence, students engage themselves in the process of self-exploration and goal-establishment. While making career goals, adolescents seek personal consistency based on their values, ideas concerning the future of society, and what they dream of becoming

(Guichard, 2003).

During adolescence, occupational choices that reflect one's subjective sense of purpose become more specific, clear, and certain (Jepsen & Dickson, 2003). However, most of the career guidance programs only focus on providing students' with job information, conducting interest and personality assessments, and engaging in realistic decision-making strategies instead of recognizing broader concepts of purpose that adolescents can hold onto while making career decisions and transitions (Savickas, 2008). Savickas et al. (2009) instead suggested the importance of supporting students and clients to engage in diverse activities and roles that can help them to identify those activities that resonate with their core self and purposes. According to Tiedeman & Miller-Tiedeman (1985), life purpose enables people to bridge the discontinuities in their career unfolding in a more adaptive way. In line with this speculation, empirical studies have demonstrated that a sense of purpose strengthens students' characteristics such as grit and spirit to persevere, which are important in fulfilling their long-term goals such as college education (Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2016). As well as students are more likely to persist toward college completion when they are aware of their purpose in life (Allen & Nora, 1995). Hence, it is important to strengthen career choice readiness (Super, 1980) among school students through not only supporting them to explore different

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career opportunities and gain insight into their own interests and abilities, but also gain clarity about their ultimate purpose in life and the kind of career that could enable them to fulfill this purpose.

In spite of the evidence related to the significant role of career counseling in school settings, current federal and state mandates such as standardized testing has reduced the time and availability of school counselors to provide comprehensive career counseling to students (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012). Further, many stakeholders do not yet recognize the value of implementing career interventions in schools (Hutchison, Niles, & Trusty, 2016). A misunderstanding exists among school personnel that career-related interventions pressure students to pursue work instead of college education immediately after school counseling (Hutchison, Niles, & Trusty, 2016). However, the present study suggests that career-oriented long-term life goals are in fact closely linked with students' decisions to apply for college. Therefore, it is critical for school counselors to inspire and help students develop a career-oriented purpose through helping them awaken to their career aspirations, gain clarity about their short-term and long-term career goals, and perceive the value of college in fulfilling these goals.

## Limitations and Future Directions

The present study suggests that high schools students may be more likely to apply to college when they value career-related life-goals such as being successful in their career. Though the results of this study contribute significantly to the literature on different types of adolescents' life purpose and their effects on college application, it has several limitations. First, our analyses were limited to the variables identified in ELS: 2002 database. Since we used a national secondary data source, we could not alter the list of the variables. Even if the list seems extensive, it does not represent all types of long-term life aspirations that adolescents have. Also, low reliabilities of two factors (self-oriented and altruistic purpose orientations) due to the less number of items might not have fully captured the nature and role of these two purpose orientations. Further, the present study is correlational in nature and thus, causal interpretations cannot be made. In future studies, researchers should explore the purpose orientation variables that emerged in this study using more comprehensive datasets that provide a wider range of purpose related variables. Perhaps, researchers can create their own survey based on the types of adolescents' purpose that emerged in this study and other previous studies (e.g. Hill et al., 2010; Reilly, 2009; Yeager & Bundick, 2009). Future investigation can also focus on the effects of these purpose orientations on other academic, career, and socio-emotional growth related outcomes

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apart from college application. Another important research direction is to explore the possibility of gender, socio-economic, and ethnic differences in relation to adolescents' purpose orientations. For instance, researchers can explore whether the effects of purpose orientations differ in college application decisions based on socio-economic backgrounds. It would be interesting to also conduct cross-sectional studies to examine purpose orientations across different demographic backgrounds and further examine the environmental variables that influence nature of adolescents' purpose.

Further on, the design of the current study did not allow for investigation of the process through which students acquire certain purpose orientations and their impact on students' development. Current research is just one of the first steps to examine the nature of school students' life purpose and its impact on their college outcomes. Much remains to be done in explicating the process or mechanism in which students make a decision to apply for colleges in the context of their purpose in life. In future, a qualitative study, structural equation modeling, or mixed-methods study

may provide further information to understand the nature and role of purpose orientations.

Additionally, apart from the content of purpose, the level of awareness, scope, and strength of that purpose could influence a person's developmental and educational outcomes (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Future mixed methods research, utilizing other measures of purpose, open-ended survey questions, and interviews is needed to gain an in-depth understanding about the relationship between high school students' purpose and their college application decisions.

**Implications for Practice**  
Given the important role that purpose plays in shaping people's short-

term and long-term goals (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009), it is important for school counselors and counselor educators to understand the nature of students' life's purpose. The present study revealed four kinds of purpose orientations among high school students: career, interpersonal, altruistic, and self-oriented purpose orientations. The results of the study also indicated that only career purpose orientation played a significant role in motivating



**“The present study revealed four kinds of purpose orientations among high school students: career, interpersonal, altruistic, and self-oriented purpose orientations.”**

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students to apply for college.

It is therefore critical for school counselors and educators to engage in purpose-centered career counseling to support students in formulating career goals that resonate with their purpose in life and further realize the value of college in fulfilling these goals.

Kosine, Steger, and Duncan (2008) suggested five key elements of purpose-centered counseling in school settings: (a) identity, (b) self-efficacy, (c) metacognition, (d) culture, and (e) service. According to this framework, identity can be developed through personal and career exploration. Self-efficacy refers to belief in one's abilities. Metacognition refers to self-awareness regarding one's own thinking processes, strengths, weaknesses and career decision making. The role of culture is considered significant in making career decisions that can positively impact one's community. Lastly, the component of service inspires students to advance greater good and explore the ways in which their career can assist them in contributing to society. At core, this framework focuses on supporting youth to engage in deeper self-exploration for identifying their purpose and decide a career path that has potential to benefit them as well as society at large.

School counselors can support adolescents to awaken to their life's purpose by engaging them in self-exploratory activities to help them gain clarity about their values and different aspects of their identity and

encouraging their participation in service-learning activities and pro-social initiatives that are beyond just personal success (Shamah, 2011). Indeed, school counseling programming can provide youth with structured activities that enable them to discuss their goals, values, purposeful work, interconnectedness in society, and pro-social functions of various occupations could also strengthen adolescents' sense of direction, purpose, and understanding about their interests and abilities (Dik, Steger, Gibson, & Peisner, 2011). School counselors could also support students' development of purpose by intentionally using instruments, such as the Sense of Purpose Scale (Sharma, Yukhymenko, & Kang, 2017), that measure students' level of awareness of their own purpose as well as the recent changes caused by their attempts to awaken to their purpose. Counselor educators committed to the development of school counselors must integrate the knowledge and educational experiences that could support graduate students in learning more about purpose-centered career counseling and purpose-centered interventions. We believe that teaching about purpose-centered activities might motivate graduate students enrolled in school counseling program to design interventions that could support school students in making career and college related goals that resonate with their purpose in life. According to Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2013) career is a way for people to express their life's purpose. The ultimate goal of an

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individual's career development lies in evolution of existential meanings and constructing one's own life and vision (Tiedeman & Miller-Tiedeman, 1985). The present study has highlighted that supporting students to develop clarity about their life's purpose, make career decisions that align with their purpose, and recognize the importance of college education in fulfilling their career-oriented purpose may strengthen their motivation to apply for college. Therefore, counselor educators, especially those teaching career counseling courses, could incorporate knowledge and professional development opportunities that specifically address relationship between sense of purpose and career aspirations among school students. 

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