

PURPOSE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

The Roles of Meaning-Making and Adversity Among Purposeful College Students

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This qualitative study examined the intertwined processes of purpose development and meaning-making of 15 participants (12 females, 3 males; age range 18–21 years) students from three private universities on the East Coast of the United States. Consensual qualitative research analysis revealed that as participants considered their purpose in life, they engaged in three particular meaning-making processes based on an existing sense of purpose: (1) resilience through adverse experiences, (2) adaptation during adverse experiences, and (3) persistence to overcome barriers to purpose. Additionally, analysis revealed that meaning-making outcomes produced a sense of purpose as a result of adverse experiences in three themes: (1) renewed outlook and appreciation of life experiences and relationships, (2) redefined prosocial direction, and (3) centralization of purpose around adverse experiences.

Keywords: purpose, meaning-making, positive youth development, college students

Cultivating a sense of purpose can support the exploration of essential developmental questions during emerging adulthood. In this life stage, young people grapple with questions of identity, including “who am I?” and “what role

will I have in the world?” (Arnett, 2014). These and other questions form the foundations of purpose, which can be defined as a longstanding aim that is both personally meaningful and contributes to the world

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beyond-the-self (Damon et al., 2003). College in particular can serve as a setting for students to develop a sense of purpose (Pfund et al., 2020). Resources available at colleges, including first-year seminars, experiential learning opportunities and mentoring relationships can be important influences and supports for developing a sense of purpose in students (Pfund et al., 2020). Purpose is associated with a host of positive outcomes for college students, such as academic achievement (Adelabu, 2008; Brown & Jones, 2004; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2020), academic engagement (Hill et al., 2018; Klein et al., 2019), increased self-esteem (Blattner et al., 2013; Halama & Dedová, 2007), and personal agency (Burrow et al., 2009; Hill et al., 2014). Therefore, college contexts can serve as distinctive and valuable environments in which students can explore their purpose.

Research on purpose development in college has increasingly focused on identifying antecedents, correlates, and outcomes of purpose. For example, Liang et al. (Liang, White, Mousseau, et al. 2017; Liang, White, Rhodes, et al. 2017) highlighted four main influences on purpose development: *people*, *passion*, *propensity*, and *prosocial benefits*. The four Ps framework builds on existing research that suggests that purpose develops through the identification of strengths and interests (Bronk, 2011), the support of people (Malin et al., 2017), and desire to contribute to the world beyond-the-self (Bronk & Finch, 2010). This framework has been descriptive of purpose among various contexts, including individuals with backgrounds of marginalization and adversity (Liang, White, Mousseau, et al. 2017; Liang, White, Rhodes, et al. 2017) and also provides a model of the factors that contribute to purpose development.

Other theoretical work and research has delineated various antecedents and pathways to purpose that highlight the role of adverse experiences. In particular, Kashdan and McKnight (2009) described how one pathway of purpose may develop in response to trauma or other types of adversity when individuals

engage in meaning-making through processes such as reflection and reexamination of values and priorities (Kashdan & McKnight, 2019). The meaning-making model posits that an individual must reduce the discrepancy between the appraised meaning (i.e., assignment of meaning) of a stressful event and their broad views of the world (i.e., global beliefs) and internal representations of desired processes or outcomes (i.e., global goals; Joseph & Linley, 2005). More specifically, meaning-making refers to the processes that people utilize to reduce the aforementioned discrepancy (Park, 2010). Although recent research has identified a connection between adversity and purpose (Gutowski et al., 2018; Sumner et al., 2018), less empirical work has examined the specific processes through which purpose develops from adversity (Bronk et al., 2020; Malin et al., 2019). Given the extensive literature on meaning-making in response to adversity, it may be that meaning-making processes may help explain how an individual's sense of purpose is shaped or influenced by personal adversity.

Adversity and Purpose

Adversity can be defined as negative life events and hardships that significantly impact a person or community, such as the effects of trauma, natural disaster, chronic illness, or going to war (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Adverse experiences can also include marginalization, in which groups or individuals are separated physically, socially, or emotionally from the majority culture based on societal and systemic forms of discrimination (Sumner et al., 2018). Kashdan and McKnight (2009) described a reactive pathway to purpose that may result from transformative life events that are personally experienced or affect close others. Transformative life events include adverse experiences, such as the death of others and illness diagnoses that may catalyze an individual's development of purpose (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Research on purpose and adversity has largely examined the develop-

ment of purpose as a result of adversity or trauma. However, research continues to explore the specific opportunities and mechanisms for purpose to serve as a protective factor or an intervention in mitigating or overcoming adverse experiences.

Studies have suggested that those with a sense of purpose are less negatively affected by adverse experiences. Indeed, purpose can serve as a protective factor and source of motivation for college students during these adverse experiences (Liang, White, Rhodes, et al., 2017; Sumner et al., 2018). Gutowski et al. (2018) found that purpose was correlated with those who utilized their stress as a motivational tool. For example, some students in the Gutowski et al. (2018) study highlighted how they were motivated to pursue purpose as a means of overcoming existing financial or familiar stressors. Moreover, purposeful college students seem to have increased resilience and adaptive coping following adverse experiences (Malin et al., 2014). College students encounter various challenges as they navigate multiple transitions, and having a purpose, especially one with a prosocial aim, may serve to help them persevere.

Purpose can also be inspired and formed from adverse experiences. Theoretical work suggests that purpose can arise as a result of reevaluating and reflecting on life based on the challenges individuals have faced and overcome (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). In addition to a personal sense of purpose, people also seem to develop a strengthened sense of prosocial orientation following adversity (Godfrey & Cheng, 2016; Hill et al., 2014). Although a growing number of studies (Gutowski et al., 2017; Bronk et al., 2020) denote that adversity influences one's prosocial engagement that is associated with one's purpose, little is known about the processes that one undergoes to adapt their purpose in response to adverse events (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009; Malin et al., 2019). Thus, there is a dearth of literature that describes *how* individuals make the various changes to their purpose as a result of adverse experiences.

Meaning-Making From Adversity

When considering purpose development in relation to individuals' adverse experiences, the concept of meaning-making can be helpful. Commonly explored in research on posttraumatic growth and bereavement, meaning-making as a concept could be particularly valuable in understanding how purpose develops from adverse experiences (Kopacz et al., 2019; Park & Ai, 2006). Recent meaning-making research highlights its specific role in supporting the growth of individuals who experience adversity (Lachnit et al., 2020). Park (2010) suggested stressful life experiences, such as loss, trauma, or marginalization, may threaten one's global systems of meaning, which include one's beliefs about the world and oneself, one's goals, and one's purpose in life. When a person appraises a stressful event as discrepant with their global systems of meaning, they experience distress and subsequently engage in meaning-making processes to facilitate adjustment. The greater the discrepancy with their global systems of meaning, the greater their distress (Lachnit et al., 2020). The outcomes, or meanings made, after a stressful or adverse event might include feelings of acceptance, causal understanding about the stressor, changed global beliefs or goals, or changed sense of meaning in life, which result in better adjustment (Park, 2010).

Listed are four of the most common distinctions of meaning-making processes: automatic and unconscious experiences (e.g., intrusive thoughts) versus deliberate attempts to deal with a situation; assimilation, or changing appraised meaning to fit with one's global meaning, versus accommodation, or changing global beliefs or goals to fit with appraised meaning; searching for ways to make sense of the event (i.e., comprehensibility) versus evaluating an event (i.e., significance); and cognitive versus emotional processing (Park, 2010). Individuals possess a range of responses to adversity that are optimal to positive outcomes after an adverse experience. For example, individuals who are able to participate in exposure

and habituation of a stressful event (i.e., emotionally process) or flexibly modify their existing beliefs with information from a stressful event (i.e., cognitively process), will have an adaptive response to adversity. Individuals utilize meaning-making processes so that they can move forward from adversity through adapting, gaining clarity, or simply accepting the event.

Accepting an adverse or stressful event may allow individuals to reduce the internal struggle about an event, replacing questions of “why me?” with questions such as “what will I do now?” It has been suggested that the outcomes of meaning-making overlap (Park, 2010). For example, an individual’s acceptance of a stressful experience may allow them to integrate it into their identity, thus allowing for a reconstruction of their identity that is potentially more holistic and nuanced. The consideration of this overlapping process in meaning-making might be particularly relevant to the exploration of purpose and how it manifests from college students’ adverse experiences. In summary, meaning-making affirms or revises elements of one’s orienting system to develop more nuanced and useful ways of thinking of the world (Gillies et al., 2014). Meaning-making is particularly important following a highly stressful event (Park, 2010) because it can mediate the harmful effects of future stress and trauma (Park & Ai, 2006). Understanding how meaning-making is used may inform the specific processes that contribute to how adversity influences or shapes college students’ purpose.

Current Study

Whereas previous research in purpose development has investigated the relevance of adversity in shaping purpose, far less is known about the specific processes surrounding adversity in particular that contribute to purpose development (Malin et al., 2019). The present study sought to explore how adverse experiences shaped or influenced college students’ sense of purpose. Prior research

addresses meaning-making processes among adult populations; but there is a gap in understanding meaning-making processes for college students as well as their role in shaping the impact of adversity on one’s sense of purpose.

METHOD

The data were derived from a larger, mixed-method, multisite longitudinal study as part of a research partnership among three universities—two of which are located in New England and one in the Southeast region of the United States. The larger study aimed to elucidate the developmental factors and trajectories of purpose during undergraduate students’ time in college. Given that over half of participants in the larger study reported adverse experiences as key components in developing their purpose, the present study explored the following research questions: (1) How did purposeful college students form purpose from adverse experiences? (2) How did college students utilize their sense of purpose to make meaning out of adversity? We hypothesized that meaning-making and purpose development were interconnected processes—that meaning-making helped these purposeful students either to develop or strengthen purpose following adverse experiences, and purpose in students was used as a guide to make meaning out of adversity. We analyzed semistructured interviews of exemplar participants to explore these research questions and hypotheses.

Participants

Fifteen participants ages 18 to 21 years old (12 females, 3 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 18.78$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.89$) were recruited from psychology courses at three universities. They received extra credit for their participation in the study. Seventy-three percent of participants identified as White, and 29% of participants identified as people of color (Latinx or Hispanic = 2 participants; Black or African American = 3 partici-

pants; American Indian or Alaska Native = 2 participants; Asian = 1 participant; Identified more than one race/ethnicity = 5 participants). All three institutions were predominantly White universities, which resulted in a predominantly White sample in our data. Additionally, the sample was predominantly female-identified, consistent with the majority female representation in the Psychology departments from which these participants were recruited. Multiple strategies were used to recruit participants, including research participant pools and flyers. For the recruitment for the qualitative portion of the larger study, data were collected using the exemplar sampling method to focus on the particular strengths and resources utilized by highly purposeful students.

As part of the larger three university study described above, researchers first collected quantitative data online to assess purpose and mentoring experiences. Those participants who scored in the top quartile of one of the purpose subscales were invited to complete qualitative interviews. Twenty-four of the 54 survey respondents who were invited to participate in qualitative interviews accepted the invitation. For the current study, we included interview participants who attributed their development of purpose to an adverse experience as defined by Linley and Joseph (2004) and Sumner et al. (2018). These researchers describe adversity as negative life events and hardships that significantly impact a person, including trauma, natural disaster, chronic illness, marginalization and discrimination based on identity. Fifteen participants fit this criteria (which is within the recommended range of 8 to 15 participants for qualitative analysis; Hill et al., 2005).

Materials

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006), a quantitative measure, was administered via Qualtrics for recruitment. The MLQ scale has been used in studies

of both meaning and purpose among college students (e.g., Lund et al., 2019). It includes two, 5-item subscales that assess the search for purpose and the presence of purpose. Our study utilized only the latter subscale as we were interested in identifying students with a strong sense of purpose. A sample item is: "I have discovered a satisfying life purpose." This subscale demonstrated excellent reliability in the present study ($\alpha = .91$). Furthermore, the presence of purpose subscale has demonstrated reliability and validity in previous research (Steger et al., 2006). Following survey data collection, selected participants were recruited via email by research assistants to schedule a meeting time for an interview. Participants then completed 3- to 45-minute semi-structured, in-depth interviews with trained bachelor's level and master's level research assistants in private, designated office spaces on their respective campuses in the November and December of 2017. Research assistants were students who attended the same schools as the interviewees. The interview protocol was developed and adapted from existing interview protocols on purpose development (Bronk et al., 2012; Liang, White, Mousseau, et al., 2017). These interviews explored the key events, people, and resources that participants referred to as impactful in developing their sense of purpose across time (see Appendix A).

The Four Ps purpose development framework (Liang, White, Mousseau, et al., 2017; Liang, White, Rhodes, et al. 2017) informed the interview protocol as well as the analysis process. In particular, this framework shaped the research questions and organization of key themes. Three research assistants, including one doctoral student and two undergraduate students analyzed the data through the lens of the Four Ps: people, propensity, prosocial intent, and passion (Liang, White, Mousseau, et al., 2017). Data were analyzed by three research assistants, including one doctoral student and two undergraduate students.

Procedure

Using the software HyperResearch, the interviews were coded using the consensual qualitative research method (CQR) by exploring purpose through participants' perspectives and interpretations of purpose (Hill et al., 1997). CQR was selected for its rigor and integration of grounded theory, phenomenological research, and comprehensive process analysis (Hill et al., 2005), including (1) open-ended questions in semistructured data collection, (2) a team of researchers who provide different perspectives throughout the analysis process, (3) consensus on judgment and interpretation of the data, (4) an auditor to review the team's analysis, and (5) formation of larger themes (i.e., domains), categories within these themes (i.e., core ideas), and cross-case analyses. Within CQR, prevalence of a code can be identified with four conventions: *general*, in which all or all but one case report the code; *typical*, in which more than half of cases up to the cut-off for general report the code; *variant*, in which three cases up to the cutoff for typical report the code; and *rare*, in which fewer than three cases report the code (Hill et al., 1997).

Prior to data collection, the study received approval from the institutional review boards of each of the three universities. In our implementation of CQR for this study, semistructured interviewing was conducted by two graduate students and four undergraduate students who received training on interviewing for qualitative research. At the beginning of their interviews, participants were given a definition of purpose according to the study and then identified their sense of purpose in response to the initial questions that asked them to define their sense of purpose. Interview questions were organized by addressing participants' future, present, and past exploring assets, barriers, and important experiences that shaped their identified purpose. These interviews were then deidentified and transcribed using a transcription software called HyperTranscribe. Pseudonyms were used for participants in the study.

Reflexivity

To ensure the study's credibility and integrity as a qualitative investigation, the principal investigators examined their subjective values, positionality and biases (Tracy, 2010). Each of the principal investigators have experience and expertise working with adolescents and emerging adults in various contexts including teaching, therapy, religious youth groups, and other community organizations. Additionally, the principal investigators conduct research on positive youth development and social justice issues. The research assistants worked closely under their supervision and were trained in these frameworks. Interpretations of the data were thus informed by positive youth development, purpose, and social justice lenses.

Data Analysis

A research team of two undergraduates and one doctoral student led the analysis process, forming themes in the within-case analysis (the process of identifying domains and core ideas in each participant interview). Following data collection, three research assistants each read participants' deidentified interview transcriptions then formed and organized themes that they considered important to understanding participants' thoughts and ideas. The three then met weekly to review their recurring and overlapping themes and consensually produced the domains. The initial domains were informed by the Four Ps: people, propensity, passion, and prosocial benefits (Liang, White, Mousseau, et al. 2017). The Four Ps served as sensitizing concepts that helped create a foundation for understanding participant responses related to people, passions, propensities, and prosocial intentions that they identified in response to the interview protocol (Bowen, 2006). After creating these domains, these three research assistants met weekly about each interview case until they met consensus regarding tabulations and codes of the data. In light of further exploration of the data and consensus among the research team, several

domains were inductively added in addition to the Four Ps. This included a domain for “meaning-making,” which described negative personal life events from which participants reflected and identified as relevant to their purpose. The process of forming new thematic categories was then replicated when forming core ideas, which are the specific categories of concepts arising within domains. Research assistants arrived at consensus through open-ended discussion, expressing their ideas with mutual respect, shared power and equal involvement among themselves (Hill et al., 1997). Such meetings were also used to resolve discrepancies in coding and discuss changes of definitions or themes based on recurring coding differences. Through this collaborative process, the team explored and modified domains and core ideas based on their consensus of interpreting the data. This consensual process was conducted with seven of the 15 interviews. Upon conducting the first half of interviews consensually, the three research assistants, who were now very familiar with the codebook, then divided the remaining eight interviews among each other to analyze cases individually. This decision was made due to a lack of resources.

Two doctoral research assistants then served as the auditors for this analysis, ensuring that domains and core ideas were consistent in all cases. These auditors read all the transcripts and analyzed codes to ensure that the data was correctly categorized and included all domains and core ideas (Hill et al., 2005). Following their reanalysis of the data, the auditors provided feedback to the research team, which then worked to reach consensus regarding the auditors’ recommendations for the data. Cross-case analysis was conducted by the research assistants who coded the interviews by identifying key overlapping themes having to do with adverse experiences and their relationship to purpose. For the cross-case analysis, the three research assistants compared the data across interview cases of core ideas pertaining to meaning-making and overcoming adverse experiences, marking

key processes participants described (Hill et al., 2005). Findings were developed from in-depth analysis of the “meaning-making” domain and its core ideas.

RESULTS

The findings for the current study identify two major core ideas within the domain meaning-making—(1) meaning-making processes, and (2) meaning-making outcomes—with each of these core ideas highlighting several notable subthemes inductively formed by the research team’s consensual analysis. The first core idea, meaning-making processes, highlights how purpose informed and enhanced participants’ meaning-making of adverse experiences, which led to a strengthened sense of purpose (see Table 2). The second category, Meaning-Making Outcomes, focuses on how meaning-making resulted in the formation of participants’ sense of purpose as they responded to adversity in their lives (see Table 3). All but two of the identified subthemes across the two core ideas demonstrated typical prevalence, with each participant identifying at least one subtheme from each core idea during their interview (see Table 1).

Meaning-Making Processes

In the core idea of meaning-making processes, participants identified how their purpose helped them make meaning out of adverse experiences, which then enabled them to develop a strengthened understanding of what their purpose meant to them. Researchers found three subthemes of these meaning-making processes: (1) resilience during adverse experiences, (2) adaptation through adverse experiences, and (3) persistence to overcome barriers to purpose. Often participants noted two or three of these subthemes as critical events that shaped their purpose with all participants noting at least one. The first theme, resilience in adverse experiences, demonstrated typical prevalence, while adaptation

TABLE 1
Meaning-Making Processes and Outcomes

<i>Theme/Subtheme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Meaning-Making Processes	
Resilience in adverse experiences	Typical
Adaptation through adverse experiences	Variant
Persistence to overcome barriers to purpose	Variant
Meaning-Making Outcomes	
Renewed outlook and appreciation for relationships and life experiences	Typical
Redefined prosocial direction	Typical
Centralization of purpose around adverse experiences	Typical

TABLE 2
Definitions and Examples of Meaning-Making Processes

<i>Meaning-Making Processes</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Example</i>
Resilience in adverse experiences	Endurance and perseverance of purpose through adverse experiences, which promotes renewed motivation in pursuing purpose.	Jessica	“I would read stories about Paul [the Biblical character] in prison, and I felt like I was in prison a lot of the time, the different houses that I got juggled around in, they literally had bars in the windows, most of them, and Paul was sitting there happy as a lark in June ... I want[ed] to be able to do that, that sounds pretty cool, right? [And I realized] that there’s more to this world and more to life and more to everything than just sitting here angry and locked up and hungry and sad all the time, you know? There’s more to it.”
Adaptation through adverse experiences	Redirection and modification of purpose as a result of barriers created from adverse experiences.	Sarah	“I was much more religious back then, actually, than I am now. Part of that was coming out [as gay], too. But that definitely did help with purpose ... I would say being more religious at the time gave me a bit more of a sense of purpose, but when I got to college, when I started becoming less religious and kind of had an identity crisis about that, I realized that I think it wasn’t like I thought that being a Christian was a big part of my identity in high school. Looking back on it now, it was not ... I didn’t realize that I was hurting myself because I was—I went to a [Christian summer] camp and it was like, ‘being gay was wrong,’ and that was taught, and people didn’t believe it, but that was just like the norm. And that kind of led me to internalize a lot of things.”
Persistence to overcome barriers to purpose	Continued determination and flexibility to overcome hardships that could set participants back in their purpose.	Anna	“Being a kid is rough anyway, but it’s really rough when there are people who want to hurt you, want to make things hard for you, and that was a big problem when I was little... I was very angry, and pretty much ready to just blow up and quit and leave and not know what else to do, but to do that would be to let them win, and quite frankly, they didn’t deserve to win, you know? You gotta come out of that and they get what they deserve eventually you know, and then I want to make a new way so that other people don’t have to deal with that.”

TABLE 3
Definitions and Examples of Meaning-Making Outcomes

<i>Meaning-Making Processes</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Example</i>
Renewed outlook and appreciation for relationships and life experiences	Newfound perspective and recognition of how adversity has resulted in meaningful insight for participants and their sense of purpose.	James	"[Last October,] my dog who I had my entire life, I had to go and put her down, my girlfriend of a year broke up with me, I got fired from my job, a friend from high school killed himself. Every week was just a [expletive]. It's been a rebuilding process really, and honestly if that hadn't all happened, I would not be the person that I am today, and overall I like the person that I am today, so I'm grateful that it happened. I know that I wouldn't be thinking the things I am or wanting to do the things that I want to do if I hadn't completely broken down."
Redefined prosocial direction	Dynamic reshaping of participants' scope for helping others and committing to social change.	Camila	"My mom came here when she was 19, so my age, and she came with no money in her pocket, coming here to work to support her family back in her country [sic], so seeing my mom like struggling and then raising [me and my brother].... When my parents got divorced it was all my mom on her own, and I've seen her work like 60 hours and take another part-time job. Like my goal hopefully is I don't want my mom to be having to push and break her back 60 hours a week"
Centralization of purpose around adverse experiences	Focus of purpose on supporting and alleviating shared adverse experiences.	Charlotte	"I think it's really important that I saw all of these racial injustices and all of these—and I was exposed to all of these diverse characteristics of people economically, religiously, racially and all of this, and it's really contributed to my person now. So I wouldn't trade that experience for anything, and I just want to get back to that."

through adverse experiences and persistence to overcome barriers to purpose both demonstrated variant prevalence.

Resilience in Adverse Experiences

Participants highlighted how making meaning out of their adverse experiences enabled them to strengthen their sense of resilience and further their purpose, which likely reflected how the meaning of these adverse experiences were informed by a previous and consistent sense of purpose. In particular, purpose informed participants' global meaning, which led them to engage in the meaning-making process of assimilation that they identified as a source of resilience during setbacks and challenges. For example, Melissa, a 19-year-old White female who moved to the United States from France for her studies, identified how

coping with the loss of her grandfather increased her motivation toward her purpose. She described:

I left my parents' house when I was fourteen, so I was living by myself in another city ... at the end of the first year, my grandfather died, and I was not prepared for this because since I was always living with him, he was someone who was always gonna stay by my side... he was also my best friend and everything else, so I [said] that I need to live my life, do what I want to do, take it day by day, and just be happy because life can change at any time. I think it was really this day that I realized I really need to achieve my goals.

Melissa highlighted this moment as a turning point for her life and pursuing purpose in the midst of grieving her grandfather's death while overseas. Despite the shock of his death, she was also able to use this experience as a

motivating force in furthering her goals toward purpose.

Isabella, a 19-year-old White woman with immediate family members who experience severe mental illness and estrangement from each other, also identified this sense of resilience after describing a near-death accident and hospitalization caused by her sister when she crashed into Isabella while riding a jet ski. Isabella explained how this experience informed her motivation to pursue her purpose to help other families in psychology because this incident led to a closer relationship with her sister and increased strength following her physical recovery. She reflected:

I recovered, it was more my relationship with [Sister's name (redacted)] that I had to get back, and that taught me a lot about the importance of forgiveness, too—the importance of family matters so much.... I'd say the reason I have so much drive today and I've so much motivation is because it almost forces you, you know? To come back [from a near-death accident] ... in a way, I'm almost grateful, what does not kill you makes you stronger, and I wouldn't change any of it to happen.

Isabella highlights that, although challenges arose in rebuilding her relationship with her sister following the accident, she ultimately increased her motivation and resilience to continue with her life goals to support other families' healing in the way she was able to heal in her relationship with her sister.

Adaptation Through Adverse Experiences

Participants also used meaning-making to adapt and redirect their sense of purpose when their adverse experiences prevented them from pursuing their original life goals. Such changes led participants to develop increased flexibility and perspective toward alternative pathways. These changes reflect the meaning-making process of accommodation, in which participants needed to change their understanding of their global meaning and purpose as a result of the new meaning they have found in their adverse experience. For example, James, a 19-year-old White man who experienced a

severe injury to his knee in his first year, entered college through Reserve Officers' Training Corps because his purpose was to "serve others." This knee injury in his first year forced him to redirect his purpose and recognize his strengths and passions elsewhere:

I kept telling myself like once I'm all healed up, I'll just rejoin the TC ... and eventually I had to tell myself, "There's a reason you're not doing this," so from then, that was probably last December give or take, I've been trying to figure out what I actually do want to do. I don't really know what I want to do actually, but I know the theme to it—so I love people, really interested in people, so I've been actually teaching ... I really love it, and plan on doing Teach for America after my senior year.

James' injury forced him to evaluate his purpose in ways he had not considered when he started college. Although his desire to serve others had not changed, he recognized that his continued procrastination to return to the ROTC and his recognition that his knee would never fully recover were both signs that he needed to do something else. He realized that his personal purpose should be redirected and adapted toward his skills and passions, which were more suited for direct human services career paths than serving in the military.

Melissa also demonstrated adaptation and redirection of her purpose after her best friend suffered a catastrophic car accident in high school that caused her to become paralyzed. Melissa's goal had been to become an architect, but after the accident, she redirected her purpose to become a physical therapist as a way of supporting her friend:

[Becoming a physical therapist] became my new goal because one day, I'm still hoping that I'm going to be able to help her be able to walk again ... I was on the phone with her when she had her accident, so I was living the accident with her, and this became super important for me, so it's kind of my way to help her, so this is the biggest reason why I want to do this.

Melissa's purpose changed when she realized that supporting her friend was a more important goal than her initial passion to become an

architect. Because of this adverse experience, Melissa adapted her purpose so that she could support her friend through an adverse experience that impacted both of them.

Persistence to Overcome Barriers to Purpose

Last, participants' experiences of meaning-making resulted in a combination of persistence and flexibility to overcome adversities that could have become barriers to their pursuit of purpose. Participants' purpose helped them recognize that pursuing their purpose required both perseverance and a certain flexibility to meet the requirements of various twists and turns along their journeys. Anna, a 19-year-old, White and Native American woman from a low-income rural community, for example, highlighted that her personal sense of purpose was to "make the world better somehow" and make amazing people and action "a little bit more visible." She explained that this sense of purpose helped her persist through the poverty and bullying she experienced during childhood in her hometown. She emphasized this determination and persistence toward her personal sense of purpose by explaining her experience in a metaphor:

Coming out of a lot of mess, I guess you could say the start of my road was basically one big construction zone, and I've seen reasons to be afraid, and I've seen reasons to give up, and they're not worth it. Especially when you got a whole big life out there somewhere, and it comes from that, just not willing to let that construction zone, not willing to let the mess stop me.

Anna highlighted how she remained persistent in pursuing her purpose with the knowledge that the potential barriers that come her way are not enough to stop her and her desire to help others.

Participants also described how pursuing purpose requires not only endurance, but also flexibility as a way of adjusting from adverse experiences toward relevant milestones for their purpose. For example, when asked about

her purpose, Jessica, a 20-year-old adopted Asian woman and first-generation student, remarked, "I would love to be a pathologist." She described how this purpose was formed because it was "just what [she] like[s] to do in general." However, Jessica noted how this purpose was further strengthened after both of her parents were diagnosed with cancer:

My parents came down with cancer, so I think that really confused me in the beginning, but in the long run, I guess it strengthens me and helps me find purpose as well just because I helped my mom with a lot of house chores, stuff like that, taking care of my siblings... [and it taught me] how to rely on God more and so, but yeah in the long run it really helped me.

Jessica emphasized her Christian faith as well as her own flexibility with supporting the family needs when both her parents were sick. Supporting her parents during this time deepened her existing passion for medical studies as well as nurturing experience, which enabled her to increase motivation toward her specific purpose to become a doctor.

Meaning-Making Outcomes

Participants highlighted how adverse experiences helped them form their identified purpose based on several meaning-making processes. In particular, three subthemes reflect the meaning-making outcomes of participants who formed their purpose out of adversity: (1) renewed appreciation and perspective on relationships and life experiences, (2) redefined prosocial direction, and (3) centralization of purpose around adverse experiences. All three themes demonstrated typical prevalence.

Renewed Appreciation and Outlook on Relationships and Life Experiences

Participants highlighted how their purpose was strengthened when their perspectives had changed following adverse experiences. Meaning-making, especially in relation to par-

ticipants' beyond-the-self intentions, was reported as producing an increase of critical consciousness and overall appreciation of resources and relationships in the context of their personal life and social context. This outcome highlights the aspects of acquired wisdom and appreciation of life that have been noted to be results of meaning-making following adversity (Calhoun et al., 2010). Isabella aspired to become a family psychologist because she wanted to support families who struggled with mental illness and trauma. She noted that she has been able to develop insight on the significance of this role from her family experience as well as the near-death accident with her sister. She reflected on how she developed purpose following this accident. In particular, she felt that this traumatic event gave her the characteristics to become a psychologist. She emphasized:

I think if I didn't have that ski accident... I wouldn't have as much empathy, and I wouldn't have as much insight to people that are really struggling, so once again that's why I want to be a psychologist. I find if someone is having a tough day, my friends are struggling... I feel that in [sic] many levels that no one fully understands.

Isabella's near-death experience and rehabilitation process highlighted a renewed appreciation and insight for her relationships and her life experiences. They enabled her to feel empathy that she hoped to utilize in her work in the future as a psychologist.

Charlotte, a 21-year-old White woman who was raised in an urban, low-income, and predominantly Black and Latino community also exemplified the way adverse experiences provided relevant and distinct for participants' achieving their purpose. In particular, Charlotte highlighted how her experience attending an urban high school and witnessing systemic racial and socioeconomic injustice, including in the context of privilege as a White student despite being in the racial minority at her school, informed her pursuit in a career as a teacher working in urban education settings. This experience in urban education felt espe-

cially salient to her in contrast to the predominantly White, affluent university that she was attending. She noted her rationale for teaching in urban settings, stating:

It's because I've seen it and I went through it. I know exactly what happens. I know how racial injustice can exist even when a school is predominantly Black and Latino, which is absolutely crazy to me... I just can use what I did and what I saw and what I actually experienced in my past to fuel what I'm gonna do in my future and be effective at that.

Charlotte emphasized how her passion for urban education was informed by her personal experience in high school, especially in comparison to her undergraduate life. She noted how her personal witness to racial injustice during high school made her distinctly motivated to support students in urban settings.

Redefined Prosocial Direction

Throughout the study, participants redefined the scope of their prosocial engagement or benefit to others. They allowed relationships and communities to transform their worldview and how they planned to serve others. Such redefinition in their prosocial direction also informed how they identified and pursued their sense of purpose. For example, Rosa, an 18-year-old African American Latina woman and first-generation college student, wanted to complete her college degree to fulfill a wish for her father, who was elderly and dying of terminal illness. Rosa explained how supporting her father's dream motivated her to continue her pursuit of becoming a nurse despite her academic setbacks and grief over his declining health. She explained how his wish gave her a new motivation to pursue her purpose, stating:

I don't know where it came from, but I just woke up and I decided that I wanted to do this for my father because none of his children have college degrees.... So, for me, it's my dad, and I want to say it's the last wish I could grant him before he passes on. He has cancer and he's only progressively getting worse. For now, he's fine but, it's so

my Dad can see me walk down the graduation aisle
and to see that smile.

Obtaining this college degree was motivated by far more than personal success, but by fulfilling his dream of seeing her graduate.

Adverse experiences also served as an opportunity to redirect prosocial intentions based on experiences that would not have occurred otherwise. For example, Rebecca, an 18-year-old White woman who was raised in a low-income rural community, highlighted how she decided to become a physical therapist in response to learning about the work of physical therapists following a major injury. She described:

In high school, I pulled my quad, so I had to go to physical therapy for that, and just seeing what they do, and seeing all the people that were in there and how they helped them, it just really made me want to be able to help somebody like that, like they do.

Rebecca identified how the response and recovery process following her leg injury resulted in a driven goal to support others who would also need support following major physical injuries, which was a career pathway that she had not even considered before her injury.

Centralization of Purpose Around Adverse Experiences

Some participants also demonstrated how they were able to make meaning out of their experience through centering their purpose on their adverse experience and extending their support to others who have shared in it. As a result of meaning-making, this centralization of purpose around adverse experiences reflects how participants utilized meaning-making to determine the comprehensibility and significance of adverse experiences as they relate to their pursuit of purpose. For example, Laura, an 18-year-old White woman who struggled with an anxiety disorder that inhibited her daily functioning, highlighted how her purpose to become a mental health counselor was

directly tied to her own experiences with mental illness. She reflected her motivation for purpose with the statement, “You don’t want anyone else to feel like that, y’know?” Here, Laura recounted her struggles with anxiety during her transition to college and how she recognized her desire to support others in the way her own counselor supported her.

Another example of such centralization of purpose is Kiara, an 18-year-old Black woman who was raised in a single-parent household. Kiara’s purpose was to enter into the entertainment and entrepreneurship worlds as a way of increasing representation and voices of African American women like herself. She described her commitment to this purpose as related to her identity as an African American woman, as well as to her desire to help those who have experienced racist, colorist, and sexist discrimination similar to her own:

Having an African American mom who’s a completely different complexion than me [and] seeing the differential treatment simply because she’s lighter has had an effect on me, as well as seeing the difference between how she’s treated and my grandmother’s treated, who’s a very dark-skinned woman. So, seeing those struggles make me want to help other African American women, and women in general, because women are overlooked a lot. [I want to] help aid in that and bridge that gap for African American women and just help. I just want to help.

Although she described various challenges associated with her racial identity, Kiara’s hardships have motivated her to support fellow African American women in increasing their representation in entertainment and entrepreneurship.

DISCUSSION

Given that each participant was able to identify at least one meaning-making process and one meaning-making outcome, the present study highlights how (1) a previous sense of purpose was used to inform how participants would make meaning out of adversity, and (2) a sense

of purpose was formed out of making meaning from adversity. The study's findings are consistent with other research on how students develop purpose as a result of adverse experiences (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). In particular, the results affirm key connections between concepts of meaning-making and purpose that have been previously suggested in literature (Malin et al., 2019), with a greater focus on the specific relations that can be observed between purpose and meaning-making during adverse experiences. Such connections between meaning-making and purpose can provide insight into the ways young people develop resilience, seek opportunity, and grow from their experiences of adversity. In particular, understanding the relations between purpose and meaning-making can inform how meaning-making can be utilized to support purpose development and purpose commitment in college students who have faced or are facing adversity. It is important to note that the participants in this study identified developmental assets, for example, their sustained enthusiasm (i.e., passion) and supportive figures (i.e., people), that were integral to their purpose development and most likely aided their abilities to effectively respond to adverse experiences. Interestingly, the participants in this study identified adverse experiences as significant experiences that shaped or influenced their purpose. It denotes the possibility that, upon reflection, participants identified specific adverse experiences as opportunities for growth connected to their purpose.

Participants identified that a sense of purpose guided their process of meaning-making, helping them reflect on moments when they were resilient, adaptive, and persistent. When adversities occurred in their lives, participants were able to remain steadfast and resilient because of the purpose they found in looking toward a potential future beyond their present and previous challenges. This motivation toward a better future reflects the clarity in moving toward one's goals that is characteristic of purpose and its development (George &

Park, 2016). Such a clarity is likely refined through meaning-making processes that help students consider the significance and strength of their purpose to overcome and grow from adverse experiences (George & Park, 2016; Lachnit et al., 2020). These results also confirm ideas posited in previous research about how purposeful youth learn to endure and overcome adversity by using their purpose to give them a source of strength, motivation, and meaning (Gutowski et al., 2018; Malin et al., 2019; Sumner et al., 2018). Furthermore, an existing purpose informed how participants would assimilate their adverse experiences into a meaningful part of their continuing path and pursuit of their purpose, such as in Melissa's increased motivation to focus on her next goals following her grandfather's death (Park, 2010). Within the study's sample, purpose enhanced the resilience and ability to make meaning through assimilation during and following adversity.

When participants were faced with adversity that created unprecedented and unavoidable barriers (e.g., loss, illness, injuries) against their future goals and sense of purpose, they learned how to continue their purpose by adapting it to potential alternatives for achieving future goals. James, for example, redirected his professional goals and purpose to accommodate new realizations and limitations following his knee injury. He had not changed his purpose but learned to adapt it to the forced change his injury caused. Students recognized their barriers as signs for new opportunities to pursue their purpose, even when such considerations were not part of their original plans for their futures.

The adaptation of purpose to inevitable circumstances was a process of increasing the ubiquity of purpose in their lives (Sumner et al., 2018) even when they could no longer pursue the same goals or career path they had intended to pursue before their adverse experiences. It highlights the process of accommodation, a known facet of meaning-making (Park, 2010), which suggests that openness to new roles and responsibilities is a positive potential

outcome following adversity (Calhoun et al., 2010). This adaptation to adverse experiences and ingenuity is an important quality of purpose because it enables individuals to redirect and redefine their goals or actions despite setbacks that arise in pursuing purpose (George & Park, 2016; Yeager, et al., 2014). In the process of forced exploration about new potential purpose pathways, participants changed existing ideas about themselves and their futures to fit new information and realities following adverse experiences.

Participants also utilized meaning-making during and after adverse experiences to remain determined and flexible as means of actively motivating and achieving goals toward purpose despite potential barriers that would have set them back. This process was heavily influenced by an understanding of one's propensities, which includes relevant strengths and skills to pursue one's purpose (Liang, White & Mousseau et al, 2017). Such persistence to overcome these barriers suggests that purpose can inform deliberate meaning-making processing, in which participants actively address adverse experiences with their sense of commitment toward a purpose in life beyond their present circumstances (Malin et al., 2019; Park, 2010). Active persistence to overcome barriers to purpose, when possible, enabled participants to strengthen their sense of purpose and drive their meaning-making processes toward supporting their purpose and its potential pathways for overcoming the barriers they faced and foresaw.

In exploring meaning-making outcomes, participants identified several ways to create meaning from adverse experiences that resulted in the formation of a new sense of purpose. Consistent with previous literature (Lachnit et al., 2020; Park, 2010), the present study found that participants utilized meaning-making to form purpose through the development of insight, discovery of how they want to help others, and commitment to the significance of their impact in supporting those who have experienced similar adversities. One such outcome was a renewed outlook and apprecia-

tion for their present experiences and relationships. This expressed perspective and appreciation is consistent with literature that reports how many college students view stressful events to be turning points or opportunities for wisdom (Jayawickreme et al., 2017).

Previous literature has also documented individuals' increased appreciation for life following hardship (Calhoun et al., 2010). Participants reported a similar shift in perspective, expressing gratitude for their life experiences and the people in their life that emerged from meaning-making. Additionally, participants' appreciation of existing social supports and relationships is consistent with research findings on adolescents' sources of social support (Gutowski et al., 2018). These relations also may serve as motivators for a prosocial purpose orientation in line with existing research demonstrating that personal relationships shape a sense of social responsibility (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Through self-reflection, participants came to understand and appreciate their own resilience, resources, and privilege, and social support systems as a result of persevering and overcoming the circumstances of their adversity.

Literature also suggests that individuals may adapt to new roles and responsibilities following a traumatic experience (Calhoun et al., 2010). Participants in the current study experienced a similar outcome following adversity, as they redefined what it meant for them to benefit others with their purpose (i.e., redefined prosocial direction). The process of this change in purpose can be conceptualized within the framework of the four Ps of purpose development (Liang, White & Mousseau et al., 2017). Two Ps in particular relate to this process of redefined prosocial direction: participants' purpose was transformed through relationships and communities (i.e., people); and they were driven by a desire to make a positive contribution to others (i.e., prosocial benefits). The current findings are also consistent with previous literature that suggests that youth have an increased prosocial orientation following adversity (Hill et al., 2014). This

finding confirms the ways prosocial direction and purpose can be developed through adverse experiences, especially when students are able to realize from such events how they can make a difference in other's lives.

Another meaning-making process that arose in the findings was the centralization of purpose around adverse experiences. Many participants committed their purpose to helping others who have experienced the same or similar adversities to themselves. Such a process reflects how meaning-making serves an important role in directing one's purpose toward and around one's adverse experiences as a means of growth and other-oriented impact. When participants referenced how their personal adversities informed the development of their purpose, they were able to appreciate their experiences and their present moments more than if they had not gone through those experiences (Groleau et al., 2013). Additionally, many participants voiced how they focused around their adverse experiences in their purpose so that others who are currently facing similar experiences could have support and future opportunities they might not have received. These intentions reflect participants' prosocial orientation as they develop purpose around hardships they have faced (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Participants' reflection on their adverse experiences also seems to indicate that their adversity can create comprehensible and significant meaning to their purpose that motivates them to help others based on their own experiences of overcoming that adversity.

In all, the theme of meaning-making *processes* reflected how purpose informed meaning-making processes to help understand and overcome adverse experiences, whereas the theme of meaning-making *outcomes* reflected how participants developed new purpose from their adverse experiences. The relations between purpose and meaning-making seem to mutually influence one another. When participants either used purpose to inform meaning-making, or meaning-making to form

purpose, their reflections of adverse experiences suggested that the two processes are connected and inform each other in participants' understanding of their journey to their purpose and where they hope to go in the future. Purpose seems to serve as a guide for how meaning is constructed, and meaning-making appears pivotal to enabling participants to strengthen, explore, and redefine their purpose.

Strengths, Limitations, and Further Directions

This study makes an important contribution to purpose literature, as it incorporates the meaning-making framework to inform underlying processes of how purpose can emerge from adverse experiences among college students. In particular, the findings shed light on how purpose develops from adversity, as well as on how college students gain fresh and adaptive perspectives on their experiences of adversity through their purpose. By bridging the concepts of meaning-making and purpose, this study provides a sense of college students' agency and resiliency in the face of adversity.

It is important to note several limitations to the findings of this study. First, the sample lacked racial, gender, and socioeconomic diversity. A predominantly female sample can be a limitation because female college students may leverage developmental assets (e.g., supportive figures, university resources) differently from those with other gender identities (e.g., male, gender nonconforming) in response to adversity or their purpose development (King et al., 2005; Liang et al., 2018). Spencer et al., 2018) Further research is needed on the experiences of other genders. All participants attended private undergraduate institutions; further research is needed to explore how purpose develops in students attending other types of institutions, including public universities, community colleges, and vocational schools as well as same-aged people who do not attend college. These other institutions and settings might vary from pri-

vate colleges due to their cultural environments as well as the resources and opportunities available for emerging adults to identify and explore their purpose (Kenny et al., 2019). More research also needs to be done on populations of college students of different racial backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses beyond White and middle-class students, as research has identified how these students can utilize their experiences and identities as marginalized populations in distinct ways from their White peers in developing purpose (Bronk et al., 2020; Malin et al., 2019). Additionally, it is important to recognize that the study sample is limited in generalizing its findings beyond students in psychology and education-related fields, as students in this sample are likely informed by their learning oriented around human services. Therefore, future research should consider students in other fields of study to consider their sense of purpose in the context of their college education.

The current study examined adversity as a broad construct. Further research is needed to explore how less intense daily stressors versus traumatic experiences influence adolescents' meaning-making processes and purpose development. Additionally, further research about purpose and adverse experiences should be explored through longitudinal studies, as purpose is an enduring intention that cannot be fully explored within the constraints of a cross-sectional study. There were also limitations to the Method. In particular, the exemplar methodology can be limited because it lacks the perspectives of those who do not identify a sense of purpose, which could be important in identifying other pathways for coping with adverse experiences when one does not have purpose (Gutowski et al., 2018). Additionally, as a qualitative study, the findings are based on the subjective experiences of participants, rather than exploring external factors that inform outcomes of meaning-making from adverse experiences beyond what participants report (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2017). Future studies therefore should consider the role in which sampling recruitment and quantitative

measurement can further inform the relation among meaning-making, adverse experiences, and purpose development. Future studies exploring purpose and adversity should also specifically explore the role of developmental assets, in informing purpose development and meaning-making processes, as this study lacked exploration of these direct connections.

CONCLUSION

In summary, findings revealed that purpose development and meaning-making can be overlapping processes that may help individuals following adversity. This sample of college students persisted through adversity with purpose as their guide and often had to be flexible and creative in working toward their goals. Participants recognized barriers as opportunities for growth, and also oriented their purpose pro-socially around helping others who experienced similar barriers. These emerging adults demonstrated persistence and flexibility as they sought to make meaning out of their challenging experiences and reported a renewed gratitude for their relationships and experiences. This study provides rich insight into the interconnected processes of meaning-making and purpose development among college students.

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APPENDIX A: SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

With your permission I'd like to record our conversation. Is it ok with you for me to turn the recorder on now? [*Once the recorder is on, state that it is so that the recording reflects that the participant was aware the conversation is being recorded.*] Some people talk about having a sense of purpose. Purpose can be described as a long-term, big picture goal/passion—something you want to do or be one day that's very meaningful to you. You might think of it as similar to a life dream that you have. In our study, we are thinking of purpose this way: purpose is a stable desire to achieve something that is important to you, and that you believe will make a difference in the world. You can see evidence of purpose in a person's life by the activities that they choose to do over time. These activities have to do with trying to reach this long-term goal. Does that make sense? Do you have any questions? [If students ask for an example, give them a couple different examples (i.e., parent, historical figures, etc.).]

- Do you have a sense of purpose? Or a passion?
- What is your purpose?
- When did this purpose become important to you?
- What about this purpose makes you excited? WHY this?

Time Frame	Primary Question	Follow-Up Questions
Future	Where are you going in your life?	• What is your big picture goal/purpose for this year and next year? What about the next 5 years? • What is your big picture goal/purpose for your life as an adult?
	Why are you going where you are going?	• Why is that long-term purpose or goal important to you? • What do you think is important about your long-term purpose/goal? • Is it helping you to achieve other goals along the way? • Is your chosen purpose/goal personally meaningful to you?
	How did you figure out where you are going?	• Are there certain <i>people</i> that helped you determine where you are going? Who are those people? • Were there certain <i>experiences</i> that help you decide where you are going? What are those experiences? • Are there certain <i>people</i> that have (or tried to) gotten in your way of figuring out where you are going? • Were there certain <i>experiences</i> that have (or tried to) gotten in your way of figuring where you are going?

	How will you get where you are going?	• Are there certain <i>people</i> that you think will be important in helping you get where you are going? How will they help? What role will they play? • Are there certain <i>experiences</i> that you think will be important in helping you get where you are going? How will they help? What role will they play? • Do you think there are <i>people</i> who may get in your way? How? • Do you think there might be <i>experiences</i> or circumstances that get in your way? How?
Present	Where are you now in your life in relation to your pathway?	• Now that you have identified what purpose you want to pursue in life, tell me about where you currently see yourself on your path towards that purpose. • Are you on track to reach that purpose? Are you worried you won't be able to get there? • Have you done things to help you get close to that purpose? Things to help you reach that purpose? • Is there more you could be doing to ensure you are able to fulfill your purpose?
	What things are most important to you right now?	• Why are those things so important? • What role do they play in your life?
	What strengths do you have that will help you reach your purpose?	• What are your strengths? Why/how are they important? • Where did your strengths come from? • How will they help you on your path to purpose?
	What important people are on your path to purpose right now?	• Why are these people important? • How do you know these people? How did you meet them? • What role do they play in your life? • How do you think they might contribute to your path to purpose?
	What important experiences have you had recently that will help you achieve your purpose/reach your long-term goal?	• What were the experiences? • Why were they important? • How have they contributed to who you are now? • How will the experiences shape/contribute to your future purpose?
Past	Where did your purpose come from?	• Where were you 1 year ago? • Where were you 2 years ago? 5 years ago?
	What things were most important to you in the past?	• Why were those things so important? • What role did they play in your life?
	What strengths did you have that have gotten you to where you are?	• What were your strengths 1 year ago? How about 5 years ago? • Why/how were they important? • How have they helped you to get where you are today?
	What important people have gotten you to where you are today?	• Why were these people important? • How did you know these people? How did you meet them? • What role did they play in your life? • How do you think they got you to where you are today?
	What important experiences did you have that got you to where you are today?	• What were the experiences? Why were they important? • How did they contribute to who you were then? How about who you are now? • How did the experiences impact where you are today?
