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What Makes Life Meaningful? A Study of Urban Youth and the Relationship Between Prosocial
Tendencies, Civic Engagement, and Purpose in Life

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Abstract

While some suggest that humans are fundamentally driven towards ruthless or self-serving behaviors as a means of promoting their genetic characteristics throughout the larger population, others suggest that other-oriented behaviors emerge just as naturally. Despite the immediate advantages of acting selfishly, acting prosocially results in long-term health benefits (e.g., reducing mortality rates) while enhancing psychological functioning. Theorists have suggested that one psychological advantage is an augmented sense of purpose that a helper may identify in his or her life. This study examines the process by which urban, Hartford-residing, youth develop meaning in their lives and express prosocial behaviors throughout their communities. Participants originated in and around the Hartford urban area, and were recruited either through a community service organization in which they were participating, or through an organization from which they were receiving supportive services. Results showed that the participants who provided community service through their organizations were more civically engaged than those who had been the recipients of a social service organization. Furthermore, for highly civically engaged youth, a measure of prosocial tendencies correlated with a measure of identified purpose. Implications for future social service implementation are discussed.

Introduction

The accumulation of wealth is, in most Western societies, understood to be a means to an end as individuals seek to secure the resources necessary to survive in their environments. The relationship between resources and survival could be conceptualized as such: the fewer resources an individual obtains, the lower his or her chances become to thrive in society. It seems plausible that those of lower socioeconomic status might adopt behaviors that maximize the use of the resources they do have, by selfishly hoarding those resources, and minimizing the degree to which they are spent addressing the needs of others. Self-serving behaviors would seem to be most prevalent amongst individuals living in the greatest extremes of poverty who, it might appear, could not afford to pursue anything but their own survival. That supposition, however, is not supported by a number of investigations in economics and sociology. In their New York Times op-ed, Emily Smith and Jennifer Aaker suggest that American millennials, those born after 1980 also known as Generation Y, have been accused of being selfish, lazy, and narcissistic (Smith & Aaker, 2013). As they point out, however, several survey initiatives have uncovered contrasting viewpoints. For instance, a report by the Career Advisory Board conducted by the Harris Interactive (Career Advisory Board, 2011) found that 31 percent of millennials identified meaningful work as the single most important determinant of professional success, and a cumulative of 71 percent rated meaningful work to be among the top three essential factors defining successful career. Other response options included “securing a high pay,” and the authors concluded that, “although compensation is important, it is a secondary concern for Millennials” (Career Advisory Board, 2011, p. 3). It is possible that millennials are indeed more socially aware and other-oriented than previously thought, and a more recent study seeks to explain this trait by implicating the importance of the economic conditions characterizing their

formative years. Park, Twenge, and Greenfield (2014) analyzed changes in the values of cohorts of 12th graders since 1976 to the present, assessing things like concern for others, environmentalism, and materialism. They found that uniquely for generations reaching emerging adulthood during economic strife, such as the Great Recession of 2008, survey responses manifested values that were significantly more other-oriented (Park, Twenge, & Greenfield, 2014). As Smith and Aaker (2013) write, “there are certain benefits to economic deprivation” (p. 2).

Periods of economic downturn may be characterized by a general decline in the availability of resources necessary to sustain or revive a struggling society. During such times, some individuals are left with compromised or limited resources for survival. While the aforementioned research indicates that individuals cope with poverty by deviating from more selfish behaviors, other theorists suggests the opposite. According to Stanley Milgram’s (1970) Urban Overload Hypothesis, urban spaces are perpetually in a state of “overload”. He posits that qualities of cities, such as overpopulation, result in demands for resources that the ecosystem cannot deliver. Thus Milgram’s city is not unlike the society whose economy is in attrition. To explain, he shows that people living in cities demonstrate a diminished sense of social responsibility, giving rise to antisocial behavior, the bystander phenomenon, impersonal anonymity, hurried interaction, and a disregard for the needs of the vulnerable.

In the United States, while the Great Recession starts to turn around, remarkable expressions of social responsibility and other-orientation abound as individuals find meaningful ways to mobilize in the service of others. Just after the New Year in 2015, a publication in the New York Times profiled founder and principal Nadia L. Lopez’s Brownsville, Brooklyn’s Mott Hall Bridges Academy as a diamond in the rough of New York’s poorest community. Shortly

thereafter, traveling photographer and humanist Drew Stanton initiated a fundraising campaign to establish a scholarship fund for students of the gateway institution. By the end of January, the campaign raised more than \$1 million dollars, and it remains the most lucrative fundraising campaign of Stanton's career (Hu & Bromwich, 2015). In the summer of 2014, when economic recovery seemed more precarious to some, the "ALS Ice Bucket Challenge" swept the nation, raising more than \$80 million to support research on Lou Gehrig's disease (Worland, 2014). These examples establish a relationship between moderate and severe deprivation and prosocial cognitive and behavioral expressions that preclude social disintegration and antisocial diversion. Moreover, that it is precisely those individuals living in the most trying environments who are prone to protect the lives of others suggests the existence of fundamental human drives that are evolutionarily counterproductive. While some have argued that humans, as members of the animal kingdom, are like other animals and merely geared towards securing their own survival (Slote, 1964), the investigations to follow explain that man is not only capable of generous behavior, but also instinctively attentive to the needs of others. Challenging the stereotype of the billionaire philanthropist, research in psychology suggests that altruism and prosociality are borne not out of excess, but hardship.

Meaning and Purpose

Scholarly considerations in psychology of the importance of a meaning in one's life are understood to have begun with Victor Frankl's (1963) *Man's Search For Meaning* (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler, 2006). Building on this work, Maddi (1970) argued that meaning in life is a fundamental human motivation, while Baumeister (1991) posits that attaining a sense of meaning in life requires one to meet "needs for value, purpose, efficacy, and self-worth" (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006, p. 80). These perspectives suggest the potentially integral role that

meaning in life could play in shaping psychological development or functioning. According to Steger et al., (2006) meaning in life is defined as “the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence” (p. 81).

The construct has received attention in the field of positive psychology for the “substantial and consistent relation between meaning in life and psychological well-being” (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992, p. 10). To elaborate, meaning in life is found to correlate positively with social support from one’s family and/or significant other (Dunn & O’Brien, 2009), post-traumatic growth (Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun, & Reeve, 2012), life satisfaction, happiness and psychological well-being (Kleinman & Beaver, 2013; Triplett et al., 2012). These findings demonstrate that meaning in life is associated with primarily positive mental states, and the specific relationships therein deserve further exploration.

Meaning in life has also been associated with positive health outcomes in more specific contexts. For patients considering suicide, identifying meaning in one’s life is negatively correlated with thwarted belongingness (i.e. feelings of isolation), depression, perceived burdensomeness (i.e. sense of worth vis-à-vis others), anxiety, and history of attempted suicide, while protecting against suicidal ideation, and promoting feelings of gratitude and social support (Kleinman & Beaver, 2013). These relationships suggest that meaning in life may be active in inspiring positive mental states, or even inhibiting negative behaviors.

Like suicidal thoughts or behaviors, traumatic events present risks that may lead to negative health outcomes. Some have explored the role that meaning in life may play in preventing at-risk individuals from falling victim to their circumstances. For example, trauma can be a profoundly stressful experience that leads to disturbing outcomes such as the shattering of one’s assumptive world-view (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Those processing trauma, however, may

also cope in ways that promote psychological well-being (Aldwin, 2007), through processes known as post-traumatic growth (Triplett et al., 2012). Triplett et al. (2012) tested the degree to which their participants had experienced psychological distress as the result of a recent traumatic event they might have experienced, measured their feelings of life-satisfaction, and administered a measure of meaning in life. They found that post-traumatic growth acts positively on one's life-satisfaction, and the relationship is mediated by meaning in life such that greater meaning in life caused greater life satisfaction. The results also showed that those participants who reported greater levels of meaning in life had self-reported lower levels of post-traumatic distress, suggesting perhaps that meaning in life prevents post-traumatic stress, or that post-traumatic growth enables meaningful and healthy outcomes. This demonstrates that in these settings meaning in life plays a mediating role between multiple psychological constructs in ways that promote psychological well-being.

One important characteristic of traumatic events is that they are acutely stressful. Studies have explored the possibility that meaning in life may serve to reduce stress in other contexts as well, predicting that greater meaning would engender more adaptive outcomes. For instance, researchers measured the affective states of two groups of Chinese post-graduate students. Some had been studying in Hong Kong, and others were studying internationally in Melbourne, Australia. They concluded that those living in Australia had experienced significantly more acculturative stress, and compared the two groups' levels of meaning in life to determine how it related to their affective states. Meaning in life was found to mediate the relationships between acculturative stress and affect, preventing negative affective tendencies and promoting positive ones (Pan, Wong, Chan, & Joubert, 2008). Thus, meaning in life is not only associated with a

number of positive psychological constructs, it also acts to prevent various negative health outcomes, even for those living especially risky or distressing lives.

Studies have also served to diversify our understanding of the impact of meaning in life on behavior and functioning. Two studies in particular used large samples to explore the impact of meaning in life on the behaviors and psychological functioning of adolescents. For instance, Brassai, Piko, and Steger (2011) measured various behavioral tendencies of a group of 1,977 adolescents, finding that low meaning in life predicted relatively greater drug use, sedative use, unsafe sex, lack of exercise, and lack of diet control for both males and females. Males lacking meaning in life expressed poorer quality of life and higher psychosomatic symptoms, while females lacking meaning in life demonstrated poorer psychological well-being. By the same token, Schwartz, Keyl, Marcum, and Bode (2009) tested 1,872 adolescent males and females between the ages of 12 and 17 for their expressions of meaning in life as well as other markers of psychological well-being or distress. They found that those with higher expressions of meaning in life demonstrated greater degrees of general- and family-helping behaviors compared to those who believed their lives to be relatively less meaningful. This supports the notion that meaning in life may be an important component of prosocial behavior. This indicates that meaning in life is either a means or a product of contributing positively to one's social group. Thus, for adolescents of both genders meaning in life serves to predict positive behaviors, and appears to prevent negative ones, in specific ways.

In light of these findings, some researchers have sought to distinguish meaning in life from purpose in life. Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch (2009) write that "a purpose in life represents an intention to act in the larger world on behalf of others" (p. 501). This differentiates it from the self-referential sense of meaning that arises from fulfilling one's own fundamental

psychological needs. Bronk and Finch (2010) further explain that “a purpose is a part of one’s personal search for meaning, but it also has an external component. Specifically, a purpose in life represents an intention to contribute to matters larger than the self” (p. 35). Indeed, Bronk and Finch (2010) found that adolescents who strongly directed their goals both at themselves and others reported higher levels of purpose in life and greater expressions of the “Big 5” (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998) personality dimensions of extraversion and openness. Other research shows that purpose in life predicts agreeableness and conscientiousness (Hill & Burrow, 2012), optimism (i.e. hope) and life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009), beyond-the-self long-term life goals (Mariano & Vaillant, 2012), and positive affect (Burrow, O’Dell, & Hill, 2010). Authors who identified “identity commitment” as a primary source of life satisfaction for adolescents also find that purpose in life mediates the relationship therein, while promoting positive affect and diminishing negative affect (Burrow & Hill, 2011). Like meaning, lacking purpose in life can prove detrimental, as it attenuates the impact that self-derogation has in influencing substance use (Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986). These researchers also found that lacking a sense of purpose was related to suicidal ideation. Thus, scholars have determined that this specific conception of purpose relates to the lives of adolescents and those around them in specific ways, while many authors corroborate its beneficial effect on psychological functioning in general.

Prosociality

Prosocial behavior is “any purposive action on behalf of someone else that involves a net cost to the [helper]” (Barr & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2007, p. 232; Hoffman, 1973, p. 3). More succinctly, they occur “when people act in ways that benefit others” (Keltner, Kogan, Piff, & Saturn, 2014, p. 427). One crucial component of sense of purpose is the commitment to matters beyond the self, an attention to the needs of others or one’s community, society, or world. Some

studies have explored this other-orientation in the context of meaning research. For instance, Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, and Garbinsky (2013) set out to sketch a profile of the meaningful life by recording the daily life activities of 357 adults and correlating them with the participants' reported experiences of meaning. They found that caring for children, self-identifying as a giver (but not a taker), buying gifts for others, waiting on others, and working were positively correlated with levels of meaning in life. They concluded that, "helping others makes the helper's life meaningful" (Baumeister, et al., 2013, p. 511). To contextualize these findings, they also recorded participants' feelings of happiness; they found that for all the above items, happiness was negatively correlated (when controlling for meaning). Thus, it appears that sacrificing one's time and resources in the assistance of another may be uniquely characteristic of the purposeful or meaningful experience, and in the absence of drives to fulfill one's own happiness, humans are motivated to act prosocially to acquire this sense of purpose.

This could potentially explain the positive psychosocial outcomes that are associated with experiences of purpose and meaning. It has been shown that prosociality itself can impact physical and mental health outcomes for certain populations. For instance, Oman, Thoreson, and McMahon (1999) found that for populations between the ages of 55 and older, volunteering in two or more organizations decreases the mortality rate by 76 percent, while merely volunteering in one organization significantly decreases mortality rates by 50 percent. Furthermore, Schwartz et al. (2009) demonstrated that for male teenagers aged 12 to 17, exhibiting an inclination towards altruistic behaviors engendered greater self-acceptance and personal growth, while promoting personal growth and positive social interactions for female teens. Thus, prosocial behaviors may contribute to the psychological development of adolescents, promoting positive

growth and fostering other adaptive traits. In adults, prosocial behaviors enhance vitality and life expectancy during the mid-life and into old age.

Prosociality can be conceptualized as a stable characteristic or dispositional trait that is expressed differentially across individuals. Van Lange, De Bruin, Otten, and Joireman (1997) attribute these differences to variability in *social values orientation*, which they describe to be “stable preferences for certain patterns of outcomes for oneself and others” (p. 733).

Furthermore, another study found that individuals would engage in helping behaviors to different degrees depending not only on their social values orientation, but also the social context in which they were acting (Van Lange, Klapwijk, & Van Muster, 2011). Here, the researchers surveyed their participants for their degree of social values orientation, and then tested the degree to which they behaved charitably towards an anonymous partner in a simulated computer game. Some participants were made to believe that their partner would have the chance to respond to their actions, either reciprocating the charitable act or withholding resources in punishment of a small donation. Others believed they were engaged in a one-time decision-making task. The researchers found that regardless of the situation, participants embodying a highly prosocial social values orientation behaved equally altruistically, while those whose surveys had deemed them to be more individualistic only donated as much as the prosocials when they believed the anonymous other would be given the choice to reciprocate. Gender differences may also contribute to variation in prosociality. In a cross-sectional study of adolescent boys and girls, Barr and Higgins-D’Alessandro (2007) found that females expressed more altruistic values and empathic concern for others, a significant correlate and motivation of prosocial action. To contextualize these findings, a later study at the same high school demonstrated that prosocial behaviors significantly increased across a one-year span (Barr & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2009).

These studies indicate that some are naturally more motivated towards altruism. At the same time, prosocial emotions and behaviors may grow through development, or emerge as products of an ephemeral social situation.

Research focusing both on socioeconomic status and prosocial behavior has emphasized this developmental process, and the variable outcomes that result from different environments. In a series of experiments, Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, and Keltner (2010) found that undergraduates of lower socioeconomic status, or those whom were made to believe temporarily in their own relative deprivation, were more generous, charitable, trusting, and helpful than their upper-class peers, or those who had been made to believe in their own privilege relative to others. In this investigation, the authors also found that greater commitment to egalitarian values and compassion for others mediated the relationship between social class and prosocial behavioral expression. By manipulating their participants' perceptions of their social rank relative to others, the authors strongly suggest that social environments inspire and influence individuals to behave altruistically. They reasoned that, "lower-class individuals are more contextual and other-oriented" (Piff et al., 2010, p. 780). To highlight these differences in prosociality, Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, and Keltner (2012) found through a series of lab experiments that compared to lower class individuals, upper-class individuals were more likely to exhibit unethical decision-making, take valued goods from others, lie during a negotiation, cheat during a competition, and espouse unethical behaviors at work. Accordingly, research has also focused on the motivations of low-socioeconomic status individuals for completing prosocial acts, whether during or after trying times. Mattis, Hammond, Grayman, Bonacci, Brennan, Cowie, & Ladyzhenskaya et al. (2009) found that individuals who had faced financial stress, crime, and police brutality around the New York City housing project in which they lived subsequently

justified prosocial acts towards members of their communities as fulfilling either a calling in life, a commitment to humanistic values, or an understanding of another individual's personal worth regardless of their social standing. Together these studies demonstrate that prosociality is enhanced in lower-class individuals. Thus, in addition to changes occurring during adolescence, prosocial behaviors develop as individuals interact with their environments.

Prosocial behaviors have been found to be important to social scientists exploring issues of trauma and chronic stress. These trajectories of research have implicated prosocial behavior as a key facilitator of recovery as individuals are forced to make sense of their struggles in the aftermath of dire situations. In her book, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman (1992) writes:

Although there may be numerous possibilities for positive interpretations of traumatic events, two types of interpretations are particularly common. . . . The second entails understanding the traumatic experience in terms of its long-term benefits for others. This involves turning the victimization into a personally altruistic act. (p. 135)

More recently, this process, by which individuals suffering traumas “reclaim meaning and turn toward others, becoming caring and helpful” (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008, p. 267), has been referred to as *altruism born of suffering* (ABS). Social scientists have observed ABS in a variety of settings, as the result of a diversity of challenges. For instance, natural disasters that are potentially both traumatizing and materially debilitating inspire community members to form informal networks between friends, neighbors, and religious congregations in order to deliver important resources to victims in need (Kaniasty & Norris, 1995). Those who have received life-threatening medical diagnoses or have suffered potentially fatal medical disasters may likewise face debilitating traumatic stress (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Gillen (2005) found that patients who

had suffered strokes in the past six years reported feeling more capable and willing to use their experience to alert others of potential health risks. Similarly, a study found that the most common positive outcome resulting from potentially fatal spinal cord injuries was an enhanced sense of compassion for others (McMillen & Cook, 2003).

Furthermore, for those actively or passively engaged in a trying experience, or who are perpetually struggling with hardship, prosocial behaviors may be employed as a coping mechanism to manage distress (Aldwin, 2007). For instance, in a case study of a terrorist bus-hijacking in Israel, Kleinman (1989) found that one survivor reported feeling most at peace with her treacherous predicament when she was able to lend support to the children sitting around her, and act as a human gauze pad for a man who had been shot nearby. Macksoud and Aber (1996) found that for kids in Lebanon who had witnessed family members tortured or harassed by local militia, seen relatives or neighbors die from distant artillery fire, or had been separated from family members as a result of the violence that persisted in their country exhibited more prosocial behaviors through their sensitivity to altruistic issues, condemnation of injustice, commitment to others, and protection of the vulnerable compared to children who had been unaffected by the violent conflict. Kahana, Kahana, Harel, and Segal (1986) interviewed 300 Holocaust survivors and found that while detained in camps during World War II, victims of the Holocaust engaged in selfless acts that supported one another. Ultimately these behaviors served as a means of coping with the stresses of their nightmarish environment. Janoff-Bulman (1992) concludes from this correlation that, “[t]hrough changes in their own lives, survivors often transform the trauma into altruistic acts that provide some basis for meaning and value in their lives” (p. 139).

These examples demonstrate how common prosocial behaviors are for individuals predisposed to altruism, and those who are inspired by their environments or context. Healthy development, inordinate stress, and serious loss and harm facilitate the development and establishment of prosocial tendencies, which beget positive health outcomes, including a sense of meaning in life for the giver. Whether unremarkable or traumatic, life presents the opportunity or necessity to make meaning and find purpose. In so doing, humans often develop inclinations towards prosocial ends.

Civic Engagement

One way in which people can effectively express prosocial or altruistic motives is by becoming involved in their communities. One common way in which adolescents do so is by engaging in extracurricular activities. In their review, Marsh and Kleitman (2002) introduce various theoretical perspectives that seek to explain the benefits of extracurricular school activities (ESAs) on the academic, social and psychological functioning of adolescents from different demographic backgrounds. According to the authors, the Social Inequality Gap Reduction Model posits that “ESAs will have more positive benefits for socioeconomically disadvantaged students than advantaged students (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 473). Moreover, the “Identification/Commitment Model” (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 471) posits that as students become involved in ESAs they identify as students and adopt school values. Theoretically combining these approaches, it might follow that socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ self concepts and value systems are only loosely aligned with academic achievement goals, compared to socioeconomically advantaged adolescents, and thus reap larger benefits from programs and activities that would serve to foster their involvement in school. Indeed, Marsh’s (1992) longitudinal analysis demonstrated that involvement in ESAs enhanced academic

self concept, educational aspirations, and grades for adolescents over a two-year span from grades 10 to 12, and the effect was significantly greater for low SES students.

One limitation of the research on ESAs is it primarily takes into account activities that are organized by, or affiliated with, scholastic institutions. Extracurricular activities, however, take on many forms, some of which require students to become active in their communities and/or civically engaged. Other researchers have included such activities in their analyses of extracurricular involvement. For instance, Fredricks and Eccles (2010) explored the developmental outcomes associated with involvement in sports, school clubs, prosocial activities (e.g., volunteering), and out of school activities (e.g., hobbies). The results suggested that involvement in a diversity of activities (i.e., up to five commitments) predicted lower internalizing and externalizing behaviors, measured by the Child Behavior Checklist, a measure of overall psychological health. Moreover, two years after high school, involvement in extracurricular activities predicted greater political activity, and engagement in charitable and social issues. Additionally, such involvement predicted improved academic achievement during high school, as well educational status and educational expectations two years after graduation.

Other studies have sought to differentiate between the various types of extracurricular activities in which adolescents engage. For instance, Eccles and Barber (1999) examined levels of problem behaviors for students in grade 10, and then again at grade 12. They found that while alcohol use increased with age, it did less so for students who were involved prosocially in their communities outside of school. Furthermore, at grades 10 and 12, these prosocially engaged students were less likely to skip school, or use drugs. The authors conclude that, “prosocial involvement is a protective factor with regard to age-related increases in risky behavior” (Eccles & Barber, 1999, p. 18). Similarly, Barber, Eccles, and Stone (2001) asked 10th grade students to

report the degree to which they were involved in a multitude of extracurricular activities, and then administered follow-up surveys at ages 18, 21, and 24 to assess some basic behavioral outcomes. They found that the students who had been involved in prosocial activities (e.g., church attendance, volunteering) graduated from college at higher rates, increased their drinking and marijuana use at flatter rates, and reported higher self-esteem at age 24.

As these studies suggest, volunteering may be conceptualized as a form of civic engagement, and should be expected to positively impact the lives of adolescents who volunteer. Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer, & Snyder (1998) asked their participants about the frequency with which they volunteered at grade nine and again at grade 12. Firstly, the authors found that higher educational plans, further educational aspirations, higher grade point averages, and enhanced intrinsic motivation towards school predicted involvement in volunteering at grade 9. These findings suggest that students most likely to volunteer are those who already exhibit positive values and tendencies with regards to school. Over the course of their high school careers, however, volunteerism had a positive effect on intrinsic work values; interestingly, volunteering decreased students' attitudes about the importance of career. As the authors conclude, this suggests that that "volunteering might expose adolescents to a more altruistic side of work" (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 326). This finding lends support to the theory that engagement in extracurricular activities impacts the identity of the engaged student, and may alter their values. From this, one might infer that later in life, students who had volunteered or become civically engaged as adolescents may be more disposed to further their prosocial commitments in adulthood. Indeed, studies have used longitudinal design to explore the behavioral antecedents of civic engagement during young adulthood. Chan, Ou, and Reynolds (2014) used data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS) to observe behaviors of a sample of African-American (93%)

and Latino (7%) at-risk youth from the Chicago area. They found that students who had been civically engaged at age 16 were more likely to be civically engaged, report greater optimism about the future, report greater life satisfaction, and have completed more years of school six and eight years later. These findings also support the claims and corroborate the findings that extracurricular activities may have profound outcomes for adolescents of lower socioeconomic status. Taken together, these findings support my prediction that at-risk youth may especially benefit from civic engagement, where civic engagement constitutes expressing prosocial values by turning one's attention to the social issues of the greater community. Moreover, the positive outcomes that result may be explained by changes in commitment to academic pursuits, or self-concepts that incorporate new values regarding the importance of educational attainment and place in society. These changes are fundamental, and may have broad implications for an adolescent's or young adult's psychological functioning.

The Present Study

The present study examines a novel combination of three theoretically similar constructs, with a novel population, in order to clarify the relationship between prosocial tendencies, purpose in life, and civic engagement amongst Hartford-residing youth. In the current analysis, I conceptualize the impoverished urban lifestyle as a key source of stress with which Hartford-residing adolescents may cope. I also examine the expressions of prosociality and purpose in life of such youth, as they may relate to behaviors of civic engagement. First, I hypothesize that the more civically engaged youth are in their communities the higher they will score on a measure of prosocial tendencies. Specifically, in a group comparison between highly engaged youth and their less engaged counterparts, those demonstrating more civic engagement will score higher on the prosocial tendencies measure. Second, as past research suggests that individuals may cope

with stress by expressing prosocial behaviors (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), that coping with stress often entails a meaning-making procedure (Aldwin, 2007), and that exhibiting generosity towards others may fuel a sense of purpose (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013), I predict that for high-civically engaged youth the measure of prosocial tendencies will be correlated with that of purpose in life.

Method

Recruitment and Procedure

After receiving IRB approval in November of 2014, I recruited participants with the cooperation of the Connecticut Youth Forum (CTYF) first. The CTYF is a “community outreach” program organized by the Connecticut Forum, a nonprofit organization based in Hartford, Connecticut. These organizations seek to serve the Hartford community by bonding organizations therein while generating progressive discourse amongst the people of the Greater Hartford. I requested and received consent from the CTYF program directors indicating their willingness to coordinate with me and aid in my recruitment of their participants for my research (see Appendix A). The Leadership Network is a program organized within the CTYF and attracts groups of adolescents who seek to build the skills necessary to emerge as leaders effecting positive change in their communities and lives. I attended a Leadership Network meeting in November 2014 where I distributed adolescent assent and parental consent forms to the youth (see Appendix B). Three weeks later the program directors at the Youth Forum distributed a recruitment flyer to those who had received assent/consent forms previously (see Appendix C), and a month after distributing the assent/consent forms I returned to a Leadership Network meeting to receive completed consent forms and begin data collection.

An additional goal of mine was to identify an adequately matched comparison group to accompany my participants from the CTYF Leadership Network. In my study, I hoped to compare students from similar demographic backgrounds, but who may differ in the degree to which they have become active in their communities. Neighborhood friends of the Leadership Network participants could be expected to possess the characteristics necessary to make the ideal comparison. When I distributed consent forms to the Leadership Network participants, I handed them extra consent forms, and instructed them to try their best to find a neighborhood friend to whom they could distribute the extra form. I informed Leadership Network participants that they should tell their friends to complete the consent form, and that they and their friend would receive \$10 each for their participation. The Leadership Network participants were also told that they would receive the opportunity to enter a raffle for an additional \$10 if they successfully convinced a friend to attend the data collection session with a signed consent form.

In a second wave of data collection, I coordinated with program directors at three community organizations in Hartford, Connecticut. First I scheduled to meet with Grow Hartford (GH), an organization, now in its tenth year, that mobilizes Hartford youth to participate in urban farming initiatives that supply thousands of pounds of food to residents in the Hartford area. I then visited their venue on Wednesday, March 18th of 2015 to distribute assent/consent forms, which the participants were told to complete and return the following Wednesday. The following week, I returned and engaged those who had returned signed assent/consent forms in the completion of the survey.

Additionally, I electronically delivered assent/consent forms to a co-founder of the RiseUp Group, Inc (RU). RU was founded in 2012 and seeks to forge inspiring mentorship and networking relationships between high-school students living in Hartford and members of the

local business community throughout. After the students had the opportunity to receive parental consent and indicate their own assent, and once I had received consent from my community partner, I returned on April 1st to administer surveys.

Lastly, I contacted the COO of Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), an organization based in Hartford, Connecticut that is dedicated to supporting over-age, under-credited students so they may complete high-school and become academically successful. I distributed parental consent/student assent forms electronically through my community partner, and planned to visit one of OPP's programs on April 6th. At that time, I collected assent/consent forms, distributed, and then collected surveys booklets. After each testing session at GH, RU, and OPP, I handed participants \$10 in cash for their participation.

Measures

Civic Engagement. I adapted a three-question prompt from Ludden (2011) to get at the degree to which participants were engaged in their communities (see Appendix D).

Prosocial Tendencies. I adapted the Prosocial Tendencies Measure-Revised (PTM-R; Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, & Randall, 2003) by omitting two of the original 25 questions in order to maximize the measure's relevance for my sample (see Appendix E).

Purpose in Life. I obtained a measure of purpose in life from the Stanford Center on Adolescence. With their permission, I selected a 20-question survey aimed at measuring self-reported purpose in the lives of adolescents called the Revised Youth Purpose Survey (Bundick, Andrews, Jones, Mariano, Bronk, & Damon, 2006). The survey was divided into two subsections: "Searching for Purpose" consisted of 5 items, and "Identified Purpose" consisted of 15 items. The instrument is assessed on a seven-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree; 7 = "strongly agree"). Bronk et al. (2009) report a Cronbach's alpha of .94 for each subscale.

Demographics. I obtained basic demographic information indicating age, gender, race and ethnicity, familial structure, and general area of residence (see Appendix F).

Characteristics of Participants

Only two participants, recruited as friends of CTYF participants, were unaffiliated with any of the organizations targeted, and thus both were dropped from the analysis. One such friend indicated they were involved with OPP, and were categorized as such for the analysis. Table 1 describes the demographic characteristics of the sample according to organizational affiliation. All participants ($N = 40$) were from Hartford or the surrounding towns of Glastonbury, Simsbury, or Vernon. The total sample was 40% female, while one individual did not report gender. Most individuals were from Hartford, CT, while some individuals recruited through the CTYF originated from Vernon, Glastonbury, or Simsbury, CT. The CTYF and OPP participants were on average 17 years old, while the other two groups were younger, averaging 15 years of age each. The total sample was 43% African-American, 35% Hispanic, 15% percent Caucasian, and 3% Asian, and one person did not report race/ethnicity.

Results

Correlations Among All Measures in the Study

Before splitting the sample into groups based upon participants' level of civic engagement, I ran a correlation examining the scores of all participants on all measures ($N = 40$; see Table 2). Considering the correlation between civic engagement and prosocial tendencies for all participants in the full sample allowed me to test the hypothesized relationship between these two variables. The correlational analysis shows that with few exceptions, the subscales of the PTM and the Overall PTM scores were the most prominently correlated scales, and no

correlations between civic engagement and any other scale. Importantly, the correlation between civic engagement and Overall PTM was weak and not significant ($r = .09$). This disconfirms my first hypothesis, which stated that greater civic engagement would be related to greater prosocial tendencies. This insignificant correlation may be due to the method with which I calculated civic engagement, where I only counted numbers of activities in which participants were involved, but not their level of commitment to such activities. This unexacting procedure may also have hidden some of the variation in civic engagement, making the statistical analysis less precise. It is statistically more appropriate to test for correlations between two variables on which participants vary greatly (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2005).

The relationships among the various scales of the PTM, including the Overall score, suggest some consistency within the PTM as a reliable measure of prosocial tendencies. Most subscales of the PTM were highly correlated with one another, and with the Overall score. This has been reported by the test developers and in past research (Carlo et al., 2003). Still, a closer look reveals that the Public PTM and Altruistic PTM scales did not follow this rule. The Public subscale only weakly correlated with the Overall score ($r = .35, p < .05$), while the Altruism subscale was not significantly correlated with the Overall scale ($r = -.04, ns$). This may be due to an inconsistency during the development of the measure. Carlo et al. (2003) sought to test the validity of the measure by correlating it with another measure of global prosocial behaviors. The authors only found a significant relationship for the PTM's Compliant, Anonymous, Dire, and Emotional subscales with the measure of global prosocial tendencies, but not between the global prosocial behaviors measure and the PTM's Public or Altruistic subscales.

In addition, Identified Purpose correlated with the Dire subscale of the PTM ($r = .34, p < .05$). The Searching for Purpose subscale of the YPS was positively correlated with the Public

subscale of the PTM ($r = .31, p < .05$), and negatively correlated with the Altruism subscale of the PTM ($r = -.42, p < .01$).

It is interesting that the Public and Altruistic PTM scales did not fit the general pattern of correlations among PTM scales. The two scales did not correlate with any other subscales, but did negatively correlate with one another ($r = -.58, p < .01$). Moreover, they were not strongly related to the Overall score. Meanwhile, while the Public scale was correlated positively with the Searching for Purpose scale of the YPS ($r = .31, p < .05$), Altruism and Searching for Purpose were negatively correlated ($r = -.42, p < .01$). The Public and Altruism subscales of the PTM could be conceptualized as theoretically opposite to one another, in that altruism relies upon the intrinsic motivations of the helper regardless of any cost the helper might incur through helping behaviors, while public helpers may assume some extrinsic reward for their actions due to public recognition. The inverse relationship that these two scales have with the Searching for Purpose scale may reflect this personal-social dichotomy. This may be expected as past research has found that only Identified Purpose, but not Searching for Purpose is related to feelings of social connection (Dunn & O'Brien, 2009). Seeking public recognition and seeking a purpose may be related processes, but different from following one's internal compass towards altruistic helping. Nevertheless, these two scales alone do not constitute prosocial tendencies themselves, and their relation to any measure of purpose in life does not indicate a relationship between prosociality and purpose in life.

Gender Differences

Next I examined differences that occurred as a result of grouping the sample by gender. Means and standard deviations for males and females on each scale are listed in Table 3. Figure 1 presents all the significant mean differences that were found between males and females.

Females scored significantly higher than males on the Overall PTM scale, $t = 2.16, p < .04$. This is in large part due to the significant differences between the genders on the Compliant subscale, $t = 2.84, p < .01$, the Dire subscale, $t = 2.10, p < .04$, and the Emotional subscale $t = 2.21, p < .03$ of the PTM.

Group Differences by Organizational Affiliation

Next, I grouped the sample based upon the kind of organization with which study participants were affiliated. Here, I pooled the responses of participants who I recruited through the CTYF, GH, and RU. I did so because, compared to OPP youth, they were already involved in their communities, through their allegiance to their organizations, in at least one prosocial way; they were either providing, or learning how to provide, community services to others.

Meanwhile, OPP participants were distinctive due to the fact that in many cases they were struggling to become productive members of their communities and in their schools. These participants were involved with OPP as a means of receiving supportive services. As such, the two groups were demographically similar, though I had reason to believe that one group was more motivated towards civic engagement than the other.

Descriptive Statistics. OPP participants constituted 19 respondents, and the pooled CTYF, GH, and RU group consisted of 21. The means and standard deviations for each group's performance on all the measures are listed in Table 4. I ran independent samples t-tests to determine which mean differences were significant between the groups, and I presented the significant mean differences in Figure 2. As would be expected, the number of activities in which each group was engaged was significantly different. The OPP group was involved in an average of 1.16 ($SD = 1.21$) activities, while the other participants averaged 2.67 ($SD = 1.62$)

activities. The other significant mean difference was found with regards to each group's scores on the Compliant subscale of the PTM, $t = 2.06, p < .05$.

High-Civically Engaged Group. After finding a significant difference in civic engagement between the groups, I continued on to correlate all measures for both groups separately. This allowed me to test my second hypothesis, which stated that for high-civically engaged adolescents, prosocial tendencies would be correlated with identified purpose in life.

The correlations for the CTYF, GH, and RU group are listed in Table 5.

Supporting past research utilizing the YPS, Identified Purpose and Searching for Purpose were not significantly correlated ($r = .19, ns$; Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010). Again, civic engagement and prosocial tendencies were not correlated ($r = -.18, ns$), nor were civic engagement and any other scale. A similar pattern between PTM subscales and PTM Overall scores emerged once again. A moderately weak correlation, in relation to the correlations between other subscales of the PTM, was found significant between the Public and Overall PTM ($r = .50, p < .05$). In addition, the Public PTM subscale was only correlated with two others, one being Dire PTM ($r = .53, p < .05$), and the other being the Altruistic PTM ($r = -.68, p < .01$). First, this shows that the Public and Altruistic subscales of the PTM are not related to other PTM scales in the ways that they would be expected to, given the strong correlations between other subscales on the measure. In future analyses, it may be useful to omit these scales when compiling the Overall PTM score. Second, The negative correlation between the Altruism and Public subscales might reflect a dichotomous relationship between public and altruistic prosocial behaviors. For instance, altruism entails helping others in the absence of external rewards (Sober & Wilson, 1999), whereas public prosocial behaviors require said external rewards, by way of public recognition (Carlo et al., 2003). Still, as is expected, the Complaint, Anonymous, Dire, and Emotional

subscales of the PTM were moderately or strongly correlated with the Overall PTM score, suggesting some consistency for the measure.

Supporting my second hypothesis, this group showed a significant correlation between Overall prosocial tendencies and Identified Purpose in life ($r = .49, p < .05$). This seems due in large part to be the result of correlations between Identified Purpose and the PTM subscales of Compliant ($r = .46, p < .05$), Dire ($r = .55, p < .05$), and Emotional ($r = .49, p < .05$) prosocial tendencies. Unlike identified purpose, no PTM subscales were related to the Searching for Purpose subscale. The Overall PTM was significantly correlated with Identified Purpose, and as such, would not be expected to correlate with the other subscale of the YPS. Interestingly, the Altruism subscale of the PTM was significantly and negatively correlated with Identified Purpose ($r = -.44, p < .05$). This may be expected given the Altruism subscale's insignificance with regards to the Overall PTM, which indicates that the subscale is not reflective of prosocial tendencies. Comparing the two subscales of the YPS with the measures of the PTM may support past research suggesting the relationship between social support and identified purpose (Dunn & O'Brien, 2009). These authors found social support to be related to Identified purpose, and it is a key component of the Compliant, Dire, and Emotional PTM subscales.

Low-Civically Engaged Group. OPP participants' group correlations are presented in Table 6. Supporting the nature of the YPS, Identified Purpose was not correlated with Searching for Purpose ($r = .17, ns$). Supporting the consistency of the PTM, the Compliant, Anonymous, Dire, and Emotional subscales were all strongly and significantly correlated with the Overall score. Mirroring the inconsistencies I have found thus far, Public and Altruistic were not correlated significantly with any measure of the PTM, including the Overall score.

As was the case in the pooled-sample analysis, the Public and Altruistic subscales of the PTM were both correlated with Searching for Purpose, though in opposite directions. I did not find any correlations between Identified Purpose and the Overall PTM score, lending additional support to my second hypothesis, which stated that high-civically engaged adolescents would exhibit a relationship between prosociality and purpose in life, compared to low-civically engaged youth. Additionally, civic engagement was unrelated to all other measures, except for Public PTM ($r = .51, p < .05$). This may lend support towards my hypothesis suggesting that prosocial tendencies may underpin civic engagement, given the public-service nature of civic engagement activities. Nevertheless, such a conclusion cannot be drawn by only assessing one subscale of the PTM.

Discussion

Civic Engagement and Prosocial Tendencies

My first hypothesis predicted that prosocial tendencies would be related to civic engagement. Specifically, I predicted that the measure of prosocial tendencies, the PTM, would be correlated with the measure of civic engagement. I hypothesized that this relationship would emerge for all members of the sample, regardless of their group affiliations. As such, I tested this hypothesis by examining the correlations between the PTM and the measure of civic engagement for the entire sample ($N = 40$). I found that these two measures were not significantly correlated ($r = .09, ns$). This suggests either that the theorized relationship between these two variables is counterfactual, or the method with which I assessed the proposed relationship introduced measurement error or was methodologically invalid.

It is possible that prosocial tendencies do not predict civic engagement, as past research has suggested other alternative motivations to explain the behaviors of civic engagement. For instance, Bowles and Gintis (2002) analyzed real-world examples of community governance, or the proclivity for communities to proliferate rewards and punishments to its members so as to promote adherence to social norms that prioritize collective wellbeing. They argue against altruistic motivations, however, and suggest that game theory explains the motivations underpinning the civic engagement of different members as they communicate rewards and punishments that monitor the behaviors of other community members. Game theory indicates that individuals are motivated to maximize their personal gains, in the context of the decisions that others make, necessitating compromise. For a whole community, individual members can act in ways that maximize the gains of the group, which in turn benefit each individual. In this way, members of such communities are both self-oriented, and other-oriented, and the authors call this state “other-regarding” (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. F424). These behaviors may appear generous at times, but in actuality serve to support the survival of each person as an individual. Punishments, for example, may come at a cost to the punisher’s reputation within his or her group, but may serve the needs of others in the group. Yet at the same time, promoting group norms that support the common wellbeing through altruistic punishment serves to support the punisher, by way of his or her connection to the group. Thus, becoming active and involved in maintaining ones community may be a self-driven endeavor. In my sample, the high-civically engaged participants could be promoting commonwealth norms by setting an example for their peers. This in turn could serve to create a more nurturing community within which my participants may more easily thrive. As such, a measure of underlying prosocial motivations such as the PTM may not correlate significantly with a measure of civic engagement.

In other instances, researchers have set out to understand the motivations behind more clearly defined prosocial behaviors. For example, Hao, Armbruster, Cronk, and Aktipis (2014) studied the gift-giving networks of the Maasai people of East Africa called *osotua*. *Oсотua* relationships consist of unconditional gift-giving. Specifically, when a Maasai individual is in need of some resource, he or she asks an *osotua* partner for exactly what is needed, and his or her *osotua*-partner invariably fulfills the request. These networks are need-based, and as such, debt is not incurred, and exploitation is precluded. *Oсотua* represents a network of *osotua* relationships that bind *osotua*-partners and their families across generations within the Maasai community. The authors' field work showed that borrowing and debt did exist in these communities, but that *osotua* transactions were unique because they served to pool the risk that the entire community incurred in its ecological context. For instance, many of the Maasai are pastoral herders of livestock. The authors explain that possessing large number of livestock is a risky endeavor, and gift-giving procedures may result in sharing resources that contribute to reducing that risk. Thus, generous acts may benefit an entire community in addition to the specific recipient at hand. In the case of *osotua*, and despite the clear gains for the direct recipient, prosocial acts may not always be motivated by an other-orientation.

Still, these examples seek to explain the motivations of individuals acting in ways that benefits entire groups, while prosocial behaviors can include interpersonal interactions as well. Thus, it is possible that I failed to find a relationship between prosocial tendencies and civic engagement due to some error that my method of measurement introduced. For instance, when I calculated the level of civic engagement for each participant, I counted each organization in which they claimed to be a part because past research has suggested that many different types of organizations result in beneficial psychological outcomes for those involved (Marsh & Kleitman,

2002). Despite this, it is reasonable that the motivations underpinning an adolescent's decision to join an athletic team is very different from the one which compels him or her to join the student council or local gay-straight alliance. Importantly, I had only hypothesized a relationship between prosocial motivations and civic engagement in humanitarian organizations. Thus, I may have included some individuals who did possess any humanitarian goals in my analysis of high-civically engaged participants. This undiscerning approach makes it harder to statistically assess the individual differences that exist within the sample, and relate these differences in scores to the individual differences that exist within the sample with regards to another measure.

Assessing these individual differences, however, is the basis for statistically determining correlation (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2005). Thus, while I could not be sure of the nature of the relationship between civic engagement and prosocial tendencies, it is understandable for a number of theoretical as well as methodological reasons why the correlation was not significant.

Group Differences

Understanding the methodological challenges underlying my effort to measure civic engagement contextualizes my group analysis, in which I did discover that some participants were more engaged in their communities. Firstly, participants who had been recruited at an organization through which they were contributing positively to their communities (i.e., CTYF, GH, and RU) were more civically engaged than those who had been recruited at the organization that was serving them with supportive programming (i.e., OPP). This distinction is potentially important as it may show that these organizations are serving the adolescent populations that they hope to reach. Specifically, CTYF, GH, and RU attempt to give youth the opportunity to effect their own positive change in their communities and become proactive. The participants in my study who were affiliated with these organizations were in fact more active than a group of

students from OPP. While there is no reason to believe that OPP students should not be as active in their communities, it is not the mission of the organization to engage youth in community involvement. Thus, my study may serve to validate the recruitment methods of the directors of the organizations whose participants I assessed.

It is also possible that through self-selection, interested participants found organizations that helped them further develop their proactive tendencies. Individuals who have a high level of interest in civic engagement may be more likely to join the CTYF, GH, or RU. Meanwhile, past research has documented the widespread benefits of civic engagement (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002), and as such, participating in one organization may make youth more active in general. Additionally, this literature on the benefits of civic engagement has also found civic engagement to be correlated with success in high school (Marsh, 1992; Johnson et al., 1998). OPP participants, on the other hand, had found OPP because they were already struggling in school. As such, these students may be struggling to become involved in their schools, as well as their communities. In these ways, students and their organizations contribute in different ways to shape the behavioral and psychological tendencies of participants.

Purpose in Life and Prosocial Tendencies

The group distinctions I found were even more important to my second hypothesis than they were in establishing differences between the organizations I worked with. This is because the cross-sectional design I used precludes a conclusion about a causal relationship between the features of my participants, and the organizations from which they were recruited. As such, the more fruitful analysis is in the correlations I was able to find for one group of participants, compared to the correlations I found for another, on the key measures in my study. Specifically, for the more civically engaged participants in my study, prosocial tendencies were correlated

with identified purpose. This did not hold true for the participants who were less civically engaged. This could be interpreted as supportive of Bronk and Finch's (2010) claim that purpose in life is a devotion to matters beyond the self, and is therefore inherently other-oriented. Past research has also shown that completing prosocial actions leads to the identification of this purpose within the helper or helpers (Aldwin, 2007; Baumeister et al., 2013; Bronk et al., 2009; Bronk & Finch, 2010; Frankl, 1963; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Mariano & Vaillant, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2009; Staub & Vollhardt, 2008). It is likely to be the case participants who had scored higher on the PTM would be more likely to find avenues for expressing their prosocial tendencies, and, through these actions identify purpose in their lives.

The relationship between purpose in life and prosocial tendencies can also be attributed to the differences that I found in civic engagement. For example, past research has shown that prosocial engagement in one's community leads to decreases in risky behaviors such as drug use (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Barber et al., 2001). Independently, studies have found that drug use is associated with lower levels of purpose in life, while avoiding drugs is correlated with high scores on measures of meaning (Harlow et al., 1986; Brassai et al., 2011). Thus it is possible that prosocial tendencies did not bring about a sense of purpose itself, but that through civic engagement, participants in my study found their way to less-risky, and more meaningful, behaviors.

Socioeconomic Status

One key component to this study is the fact that my sample was overwhelmingly from Hartford, CT. Participants from this sample are likely to live in more impoverished neighborhoods than were the ones assessed in previous research. 90 percent of my total sample originated in Hartford, CT. Based on data from the Connecticut Department of Economic and

Community Development, the per capita income in Hartford is \$16,619 (State of Connecticut, 2013), while the average for all cities in Connecticut in 2012 was \$58,908 (Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 2013). Some of the variation in the scores of my participants may be due to this socioeconomic factor. For instance, I reviewed the results of four studies that asked participants to complete the Identified Purpose subscale of the Youth Purpose Survey (Burrow et al., 2010; Hill & Burrow, 2012; Burrow & Hill, 2011; Bronk et al., 2009), and found that the average mean on the scale was 4.82. Both groups of my participants scored higher on this measure, but the especially the OPP group. At face value, this suggests that socioeconomic stressors may have increased my participants' scores on the Identified Purpose scale. Notably, my OPP group had been involved with OPP because they were struggling in school. OPP delivers support and services to students who are under-credited, or over-age, and thus at risk for high school dropout. Thus, some authors might find it logical that the OPP group scored highest on the measure of purpose in life, due to a conception of purpose as a result of coping with stress. These theorists would suggest that coping with stress provides individuals with a sense of meaning in their lives (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Additionally, authors exploring posttraumatic growth with adolescents in urban environments have framed the impoverished urban environment as a source of stress, and an opportunity for growth (Ickovics, Meade, Kershaw, Milan, Lewis, & Ethier, 2006). One way in which this growth may take place is through the development of meaning in life (Aldwin, 2007). This also may justify why my participants scored higher than the participants assessed in past research, regardless of their group affiliation.

Lastly, the Social Inequality Gap Reduction Model (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) predicts that for students of lower SES, the benefits of civic engagement are greater than for students who are of higher SES. This may potentially explain my findings pertaining to purpose in life, and

even its relationship to prosocial tendencies. For instance, my participants scored higher in general on the measure of purpose in life, but only for those who were civically engaged was it related to prosocial tendencies. In fact, it is possible that the benefits associated with civic engagement come by way of changes in prosocial tendencies, given the psychosocial benefits associated with prosocial behaviors (Schwartz et al., 2009; Oman et al., 1999). This may serve to explain the disproportionate gains reaped by those characterized by low SES through civic engagement, and explain the relationship I found between prosocial tendencies and purpose in life for those in my sample who were highly civically engaged.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1
Demographic Characteristic of Participants

<u>Organization</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Avg. Age</u>	<u>% from Hartford</u>	<u>% Male(Female)</u>	<u>Race(%)</u>
CTYF	8	17	50%	38%(63%)	Asian(13%) Hispanic(38%) African-American(13%) Caucasian(38%)
GH	7	15	100%	86%(14%)	Hispanic(14%) African-American(86%)
RU	6	15	100%	50%(50%)	Hispanic(17%) African-American(67%) Caucasian(17%)
OPP	19	17	100%	58%(37%)	Hispanic(47%) African-American(32%) Caucasian(11%)

Table 2
Correlations Among Key Measures in the Study

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Identified Purpose	-									
2. Search for Purpose	.19	-								
3. Civic Engagement	-.01	.02	-							
4. Overall PTM	.15	.01	.09	-						
5. Compliant PTM	-.06	-.14	.13	.74**	-					
6. Public PTM	.27	.31*	.05	.35*	.10	-				
7. Anonymous PTM	.12	.20	-.05	.80**	.41**	.26	-			
8. Dire PTM	.34*	.06	-.02	.85**	.44**	.33	.76**	-		
9. Emotional PTM	.20	.01	.00	.87**	.60**	.18	.61**	.80**	-	
10. Altruistic PTM	-.30	-.42**	.21	-.04	.01	-.58**	-.28	-.28	-.09	-

Note. Correlations for all measures with the full sample ($N = 40$).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. PTM = Prosocial Tendencies Measure.

Table 3

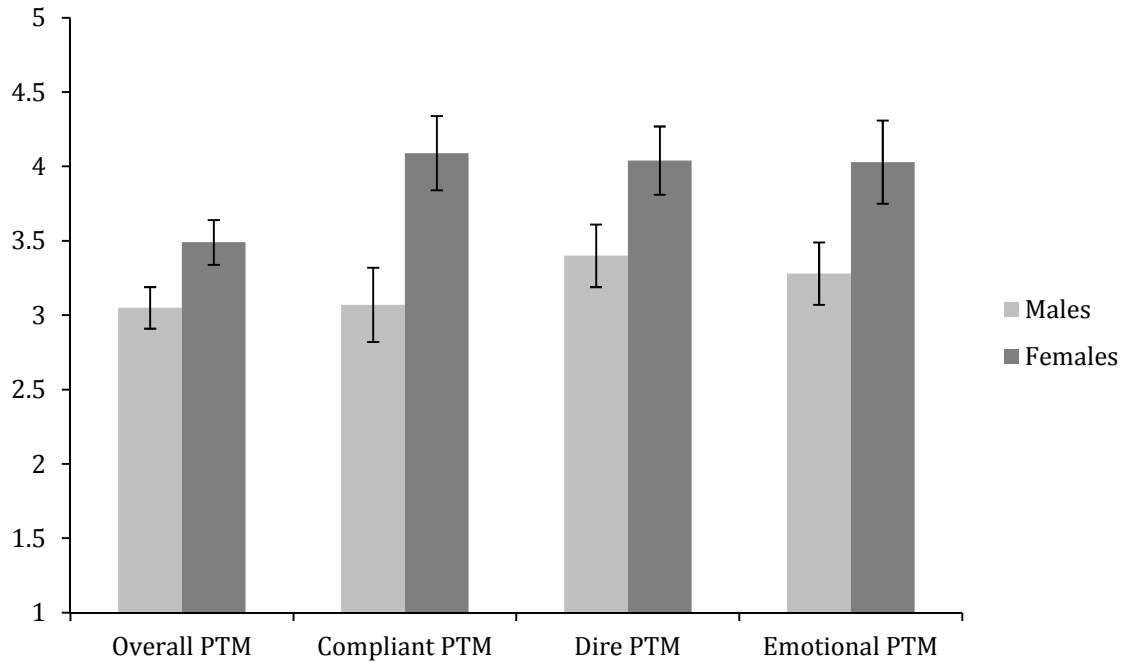
Descriptive Statistics by Gender for Key Variables in the Study

	<u>Females (n = 16)</u>		<u>Males (n = 23)</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Identified Purpose	5.16	.82	5.05	.89
Search for Purpose	5.37	1.31	4.83	1.35
Civic Engagement	2.38	1.96	1.74	1.29
PTM Overall	3.49	.58	3.05	.65
Compliant	4.09	1.00	3.07	1.18
Public	1.94	1.09	2.14	.99
Anonymous	3.29	1.10	2.88	1.15
Dire	4.04	.91	3.40	.99
Emotional	4.03	1.11	3.28	.99
Altruistic	3.55	1.09	3.54	.86

Note. PTM = Prosocial Tendencies Measure

Figure 1

Significant Gender Differences in Prosocial Tendencies



Note. Significant mean differences between men and women ($N = 40$) for Overall PTM ($p < .04$), Compliant PTM ($p < .01$), Dire PTM ($p < .04$), and Emotional PTM ($p < .03$).

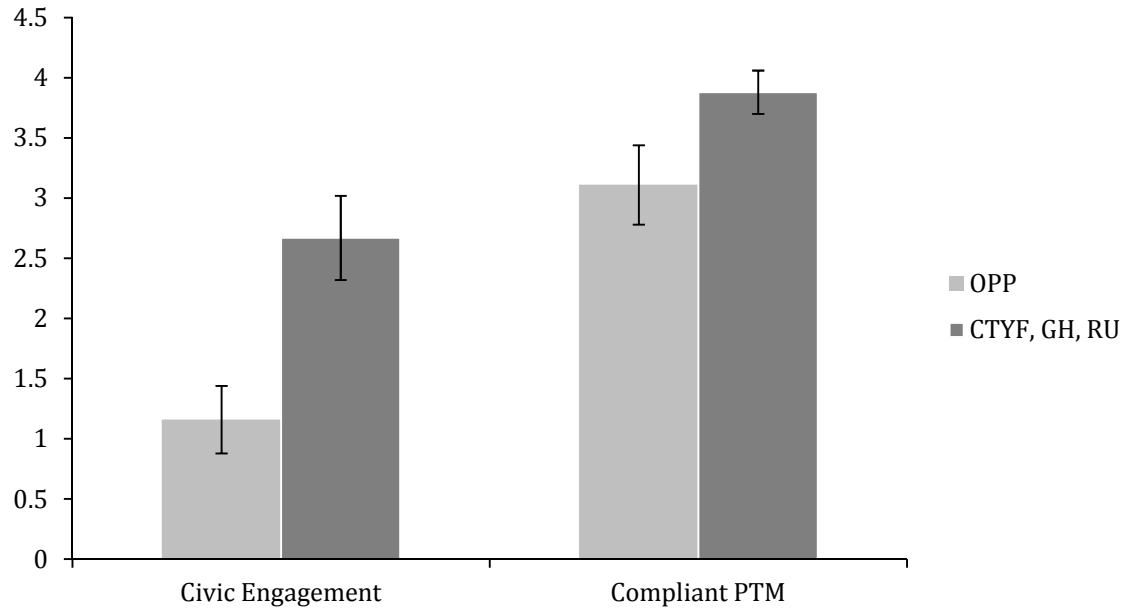
Table 4
Descriptive Statistics by Kind of Organization for Key Variables in the Study

	<u>Group I (n = 19)</u>		<u>Group II (n = 21)</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Identified Purpose	5.17	.71	4.98	.97
Search for Purpose	5.12	1.04	5.02	1.57
Civic Engagement	1.16	1.21	2.67	1.62
PTM Overall	3.08	.74	3.37	.53
Compliant	3.11	1.45	3.88	.80
Public	1.83	.87	2.27	1.10
Anonymous	2.92	1.16	3.18	1.10
Dire	3.58	1.04	3.77	.96
Emotional	3.45	1.24	3.73	.92
Altruistic	3.62	.96	3.38	1.02

Note. Group I: participants receiving supportive services (OPP; $n = 19$). Group II: participants were trained for/provided community service themselves (CTYF, GH, and RU; $n = 21$). PTM = Prosocial Tendencies Measure.

Figure 2

Significant Group Differences in Civic Engagement and the PTM



Note. Significant mean differences between the two samples in Civic Engagement ($p < .01$) and Compliant PTM ($p < .05$). OPP sample contains 19 participants; CTYF, GH, RU sample contains 21 participants.

Table 5

Correlations among Key Measures in the Study, when only Participants in Service-Oriented Organizations are Considered.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Identified Purpose	-									
2. Search for Purpose	.19	-								
3. Civic Engagement	.05	.11	-							
4. Overall PTM	.49*	.17	-.18	-						
5. Compliant PTM	.46*	-.11	-.19	.52*	-					
6. Public PTM	.39	.26	-.38	.50*	-.09	-				
7. Anonymous PTM	.21	.39	-.26	.75**	.15	.36	-			
8. Dire PTM	.55*	.13	-.08	.87**	.31	.53*	.64**	-		
9. Emotional PTM	.49*	.17	-.04	.79**	.50*	.38	.38	.68**	-	
10. Altruistic PTM	-.44*	-.36	.39	-.18	.02	-.68**	-.21	-.36	-.31	-

Note. Correlations between all measures for all participants in CTYF, GH, and RU ($n = 21$).

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

Table 6

Correlations Among all Measures in the Study, when only Participants Receiving Services from a Community Organization are Considered

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Identified Purpose	-									
2. Search for Purpose	.17	-								
3. Civic Engagement	.04	-.09	-							
4. Overall PTM	-.13	-.17	.14	-						
5. Compliant PTM	-.43	-.20	.09	.81**	-					
6. Public PTM	.12	.48*	.51*	.15	.13	-				
7. Anonymous PTM	.04	-.07	.08	.85**	.56*	.09	-			
8. Dire PTM	.09	-.04	-.08	.86**	.53*	-.01	.88**	-		
9. Emotional PTM	-.06	-.17	-.12	.92**	.65**	-.06	.78**	.90**	-	
10. Altruistic PTM	-.13	-.58**	.19	.14	.07	-.41	-.14	-.11	.13	-

Note. Correlations for all measures within the OPP sample ($n = 19$).

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

Appendix A

To Whom It May Concern:

Ian Douglas, a student researcher at Trinity College, has explained his proposed investigation on “Developing Leadership and Community Involvement.” I approve this research and will allow current participants in the [name of organization] program to volunteer.

Sincerely,

Signature

Name

Appendix B

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

I, _____ (please print name) hereby consent my child to participate in this research project.

This study investigates high school students' community involvement, leadership experiences, and sense of purpose in life. I understand that my child will complete a survey under the supervision of staff of [name of organization] and a Trinity College researcher. My child's identity will never be revealed with the findings in the report of the study. I understand my child's participation is completely voluntary. I further understand that he/she is free to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty.

The benefits of this project are a \$10 prize, the opportunity for my child to better understand himself/herself, and information to help the [name of organization] improve its leadership programming. There are no anticipated risks of participating in this study.

If I have any questions regarding this project or wish to have further information, I am free to contact student-researcher Ian Douglas at 908-304-8321, or Professor David Reuman, Department of Psychology, Trinity College, 860-297-2341.

Print Your Participating Son's / Daughter's Name

Print Your Name

Son's/Daughter's Signature

Your Signature

Date

Appendix C

Paid Research Participation Opportunity!

Thank you for considering participating in the survey-based study that we will be administering on December 12th! The study will investigate topics such as youth leadership, community involvement, and sense of purpose in life. If you have decided to participate, please remember the following:

You will receive:

- (1) \$10 for completing the survey

In order to participate you must:

- (1) Complete a consent form with your parent/guardian (if you are under 18 years of age)

Also note that if you are 18 or older, you can fill out your consent form yourself.

Appendix D

Please describe your community involvement:

1. Are you involved in a program, club, or organized activity (athlete, tutor, volunteer, etc.)?

Yes / No

2. IF YES, please name the activity or activities below:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

3. How much time do you spend in each of the ABOVE activities?

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Less Than
Once A Year
1 | A Few Times
Per Year
2 | Once A Month
3 | A Few Times
Per Month
4 | Once A Week
(Or More)
5 |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

Appendix E

Below are sentences that might or might not describe you. Please indicate how much each statement describes you by using the scale below.

Does Not Describe Me At All 1	Describes Me A Little 2	Somewhat Describes Me 3	Describes Me Well 4	Describes Me Greatly 5
--	-------------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	------------------------------

- ___ 1. I can help others best when people are watching me.
- ___ 2. It makes me feel good when I can comfort someone who is very upset.
- ___ 3. When other people are around, it is easier for me to help others in need.
- ___ 4. I think that one of the best things about helping others is that it makes me look good.
- ___ 5. I get the most out of helping others when it is done in front of other people.
- ___ 6. I tend to help people who are in a real crisis or need.
- ___ 7. When people ask me to help them, I don't hesitate.
- ___ 8. I tend to help people who are hurt badly.
- ___ 9. I tend to help others in need when they do not know who helped them.
- ___ 10. I tend to help others especially when they are really emotional.
- ___ 11. Helping others when I am being watched is when I work best.
- ___ 12. It is easy for me to help others when they are in a bad situation.
- ___ 13. Most of the time, I help others when they do not know who helped them.
- ___ 14. I believe I should receive more rewards for the time and energy I spend on volunteer service.
- ___ 15. I respond to helping others best when the situation is highly emotional.
- ___ 16. I never wait to help others when they ask for it.
- ___ 17. I think that helping others without them knowing is the best type of situation.

___18. One of the best things about doing charity work is that it looks good on my resume.

___19. Emotional situations make me want to help others in need.

___20. I often make donations without anyone knowing because they make me feel good.

___21. I feel that if I help someone, they should help me in the future.

___22. I often help even if I don't think I will get anything out of helping.

___23. I usually help others when they are very upset.

Appendix F

1. What is your gender (circle one):

Female / Male

2. What is your birthday (Month/Day/Year)? _____

3. What is the zip code where you live? _____

4. With which adults do you live? (Check all that apply).

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mother/Female Guardian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Father/Male Guardian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Grandmother |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Grandfather |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other, please explain: _____ |

5. Which best describes you? (You may check more than one, if appropriate).

- Asian American or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic, regardless of race
- African American, not of Hispanic origin
- Caucasian, not of Hispanic origin
- Other: _____