Anthony L. Burrow
Patrick L. Hill *Editors*

The Ecology of Purposeful Living Across the Lifespan

Developmental, Educational, and Social Perspectives

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Chapter 1
Introduction: The Purpose of Studying Purpose and the Need for an Ecological Perspective

Patrick L. Hill and Anthony L. Burrow

> Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.
> —Zora Neale Hurston (1942).

Abstract The empirical study of purpose in life has been a booming industry over recent decades. As such, the current volume provides a reflection on this past work with an eye toward future endeavors across academic disciplines. To start, this introductory chapter provides a brief overview of central topics in the field of purpose. First, we discuss what it means to have a purpose in life, providing different academic lenses through which to consider the construct. Second, we describe the value of purpose in life, as a construct that appears to be associated with wide ranging benefits for individuals across the lifespan. Third, we conclude by setting the stage for the upcoming chapters, providing an organizational scheme that builds from ecological perspectives on human development.

The value of living a life with direction and purpose is not difficult to communicate to most audiences. Indeed, in our work on the topic, we have spoken with groups across the world, both in the academic realm and very far from it, and it is a rare occurrence that anyone contradicts the suggestion that having a purpose promotes personal well-being and development. However, while discussions on the value of purposeful living date back to Aristotelian times, the academic conversation around purpose has grown considerably in recent years. After multiple, relatively "simple" demonstrations that having a purpose (or a sense of purpose and direction in life) is a valuable commodity, academics have started to poke and pry at the construct of purpose along three primary fronts. First, definitional issues remain at the forefront, with inquiry centering on

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how purpose is distinct from related constructs, particularly when efforts are made to extend purpose into a new research guild. Second, researchers have examined why purpose appears so vital and valuable to successful development across the lifespan. Third, and perhaps most important, what can we do to help others develop a sense of purpose, while properly taking into account their given context and background? The "we" in this case goes far beyond the authors of this and the other chapters in this volume, and instead speaks to the far-reaching implications for society and its prominent institutions.

The current volume reflects our efforts over the years to bring together prominent thinkers and scholars from multiple seemingly disparate fields, to have an open discussion across these and other important questions regarding the construct of purpose. As such, this book reflects a formalization of the multiple researchers' curiosity into the construct of purpose. We begin here with a brief overview of the extant literature on purpose in life. First, we provide the reader with multiple perspectives on the construct, several of which are echoed in the chapters that follow, with the understanding that there is no one dominant definition of what it means to have a purpose or feel purposeful. Second, we discuss why this construct has accrued greater attention in recent years, by briefly outlining some of work linking purpose to valuable life outcomes. Third, we conclude with an organizational framework for the chapters that follow, and the types of questions the authors in this volume seek to address.

1.1 What Is Purpose?

This question alone could take the entire book to answer, and indeed others have written volumes that are significantly dedicated to address this question (e.g., Bronk, 2014; Damon, 2008). Given the variety of perspectives taken by authors in the current volume, here we describe two important perspectives on defining purpose. One comes from a lifespan developmental perspective that starts with considering how children develop purposeful action and the perception that their actions have consequence on the world. The second recognizes perhaps the most well-known account of purpose in life, namely as a facet of psychological well-being and marker of adaptive development. These perspectives overlap to significant degrees, and both have roots in the seminal work of Viktor Frankl (1959), whose powerful narrative provided a first-hand account of why living a purpose-driven life can provide hope in even the most desperate of circumstances. However, in addition to their commonalities, we hope that briefly describing these perspectives provides the reader with insight into how different guilds have handled the construct, a theme relevant to the rest of the volume.

1.1.1 Purpose Through a Lifespan Developmental Lens

Erikson's (1959, 1968) classic theory of identity development across the lifespan provides a valuable context for considering the precursors of having a purpose in life. To start, Erikson suggests that the development of purposeful living starts prior to even entering kindergarten. Specifically, the ability to develop goal-directed action is the successful resolution of identity development for children as young as four-to-six years of age, reflecting the potential for personal initiative. The knowledge that one's actions have consequences is an important, but often overlooked starting point to setting goals that direct one's short- and long-term activities. As such, the roots of purposeful living start very early insofar that Erikson uses the term "purpose" to describe the positive outcome obtained via the successful resolution of this early identity crisis of initiative.

However, most people likely think about purpose more in line with how it is treated during Erikson's later discussion of how individuals develop a fuller sense of identity during adolescence and young adulthood. At this point, the discussion turns to how determining where one wants to go is an integral component of knowing who one is (see also Burrow & Hill, 2011; Hill & Burrow, 2012; Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2015); in other words, finding a direction in life may help individuals commit to a personal identity. In this sense, purpose in life can be described as the identification of the life direction that one deems personally meaningful, to the extent that individuals view this life path as self-defining and self-descriptive. Support for the claim that this period is formative for finding a life path comes from the developmental trends ongoing with respect to how people are setting personal goals. During adolescence and emerging adulthood, individuals appear to start winnowing down their goal pursuits to focus on those goals of greater personal relevance (Roberts, O'Donnell, & Robins, 2004), counter to earlier developmental period where individuals have a tendency for widespread, rather than focused goal endorsement. The purpose development process likely occurs as an ebb-and-flow between focused activity on certain personally-important goals, with reduced engagement regarding those goals that provide less personal definition (see also Moran, this volume).

Accordingly, this lifespan developmental perspective alerts us to three important points regarding what it means to have a purpose in life. First, the precursors to purpose manifest early in the lifespan, perhaps even starting with merely the understanding that one can initiate purposeful action with consequence to the world. Second, individuals may start to deliberate on what their personal purpose is in earnest during adolescence and emerging adulthood, given that this period is a point of profound self and identity development, as well as a time of more focused goal endorsement. Third, committing to a purpose in life involves deciding upon a critical element of what one deems personally meaningful and valuable, and disengaging from those activities and goals that are less descriptive of the self.

1.1.2 Purpose as a Component of Psychological Well-Being

Another perspective is perhaps the one most widely adopted in recent scientific inquiry around the construct of purpose, namely that having a sense of purpose has been described as one component of psychological well-being in adulthood (Ryff, 1989a; 1989b; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In her effort to provide the field with a context for understanding individual well-being beyond only the discussion of hedonic well-being, Carol Ryff's model of psychological well-being has provided the starting point for most empirical studies of purpose in the past three decades. Indeed, Ryff's measures have been included in several of the most prominent large-scale studies of aging and development across the world.

We leave the bulk of the discussion of psychological well-being to the progenitor herself (see Ryff & Kim, this volume). However, this view of purpose brings three new definitional elements that merit attention. First, as mentioned earlier, this view of purpose (or at least the typical measurements associated with it) focuses primarily on the extent to which individuals feel they have a purpose and direction, rather than on the content of the direction itself. Though there is a clear tradeoff in the idiographic depth acquired about participants, this measurement strategy has provided the opportunity for researchers to delve into the topic of purpose with more cost- and time-effective methods that avoid the need for thematic coding of specific purpose contents. Indeed, the value of this approach comes from the assumption that regardless of the path one chooses, and the extent to which one can fully describe that path, purposeful living involves believing that one has a direction in life, and that one's activities are personally meaningful. By focusing on this measurement strategy, researchers were given the opportunity to examine the correlates of sense of purpose in large-scale samples, which has directed much of the work described below.

Second, this view of purpose couches it within the realm of "well-being." Though not orthogonal to the lifespan developmental perspective, this terminology does carry some new implications for researchers. Given that constructs like happiness and positive affect hold positive effects on health and life outcomes (Pressman & Cohen, 2005), as do other components of Ryff's psychological well-being scale (see Ryff, 2014), researchers are left with the challenge of demonstrating that benefits associated with purposeful living are not better described as simply the artifacts of positive well-being more broadly. Research using bi-factor modeling approaches (see Hill, Allemand, & Burrow, 2018 for discussion) has demonstrated that sense of purpose appears uniquely associated with early family relationships, distinct from the effects of these relationships on life satisfaction and (lack of) perceived stress (Hill, Schultz, Jackson, & Andrews, 2019). What this work suggests is that sense of purpose captures something unique from general subjective well-being, a point that merits further attention in future empirical studies on the construct. In sum, the psychological well-being perspective on purpose brings both great value for researchers, and some unique challenges for rigorous scientific inquiry.

As you will see, authors throughout the volume will borrow from these perspectives throughout their entries, with some guilds focusing more on one perspective than others. Other chapters will add to this brief review by presenting entirely different theoretical and scientific perspectives on what purpose means for individuals (e.g., Moran, this volume; Pfund, this volume; Wingfield, this volume). Although the field benefits considerably from having multiple viewpoints and perspectives on what purpose means, one overarching challenge for future research remains the issue of how to measure purpose, as the reader will see how different authors have dealt with this challenge in unique ways.

1.2 Why Study Purpose?

Though defining purpose is difficult, the task proves well worth the challenge given the multitude of benefits associated with the construct. We highlight a few of these points below, but they are sprinkled across every chapter in the volume, with the authors providing new insights into the value of a purposeful life. Moreover, we alert the reader to our recent reviews of these benefits for additional details (e.g., Hill, Burrow, & Sumner, 2013; Pfund & Hill, 2018). For now, we will focus on the value of purpose for leading individuals toward promoting health, wealth, and cognitive functioning, support for the centuries' long claims that leading a purposeful life is a sign of adaptive development (see Ryff, 2014 for a review).

First, sense of purpose predicts a reduced risk for a wide array of health issues, including cardiovascular problems and stroke (Kim, Sun, Park, Kubzansky, & Peterson, 2013; Kim, Sun, Park, & Peterson, 2013), infirmity and disability (Mota et al., 2016), and even sleep issues (Kim, Hershner, & Strecher, 2015). Moreover, it even appears associated with greater longevity across multiple samples (Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, & Bennett, 2009; Cohen, Bavishi, & Rozanski, 2016; Hill & Turiano, 2014). Having a purpose in life may lead individuals to focus on health maintenance, because regardless of the purpose one holds, being in better health will likely assist in any type of goal pursuit. One rationale for these effects comes from evidence suggesting that purposeful individuals have healthier lifestyles; sense of purpose has been associated with engagement with positive health behaviors, such as eating a healthier diet and oral health care (Hill, Edmonds, & Hampson, 2019), having regular checkups (Kim, Strecher, & Ryff, 2014), and being more active as assessed by pedometer counts (Hooker & Masters, 2016).

Second, living a purpose-driven life requires that individuals possess the ability to allocate resources, tangible and intangible, toward their goal pursuits (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Toward this end, researchers have investigated the role of purposeful living on financial asset accrual (Hill, Turiano, Mroczek, & Burrow, 2016). In a longitudinal study of adults, individuals who reported a higher sense of purpose tended to have higher income and net worth. Moreover, purposeful individuals tended to increase their wealth more over the nine years following the first assessment. These effects held over known predictors of wealth, such as personality dispositions and

demographics. Interestingly, research also shows that positive associations between purposefulness and economic outcomes are present at the level of individual states in the U. S. (Baugh, Pfund, Hill, & Cheung, in press) and broader societies and nations (Hill, Cheung, Kube, & Burrow, 2019). Collectives with more purposeful citizens, at multiple levels of aggregation, thus appear to benefit financially. Though work is needed to better understand the directionality and mechanisms involved in these associations, one explanation follows a similar logic to the purpose-health connection. Namely, regardless of whether one's purpose is focused on financial and occupational success, building financial assets is likely to help scaffold progress toward a life direction.

Third, having a purpose requires switching between more or less goal-relevant tasks, as well as remembering next steps toward short- and long-term goals (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). In line with these propositions, researchers have found that individuals who report a higher sense of purpose tend also to score higher on objective tests of memory and executive functioning (Lewis, Turiano, Payne, & Hill, 2017; Windsor, Curtis, & Luszcz, 2015). Moreover, research has suggested that sense of purpose may prove a resilience factor against risk for later dementia (Boyle, Buchman, Barnes, & Bennett, 2010). Greater discussion of this point will come in later chapters as well (Wynn, Dewitte, & Hill, this volume), but this research points to how purposeful living may help build cognitive resilience, as well as health and wealth resources.

1.3 Outline of the Book

These findings provide broad support for the notion that purposeful living may produce a wide array of positive life outcomes. Building from this empirical foundation, the following chapters will provide additional details on how people develop a purpose and the value of doing so across life domains. The volume has been organized in a format befitting a more ecological perspective on human development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which underscores the importance of contextualizing developmental trajectories as interactions between the individual and broader social, sociological, and societal structures.

To start, we present three chapters focusing primarily on how purpose impacts the "person in the center of the circles" (Darling, 2007). Pfund starts by describing how purpose in life fits within personality science, a discipline sometimes referred to as the "study of the person" (Funder, 1997). Ryff and Kim then discuss how purpose plays a role in the virtuous development of individuals, and what it means for one to hold a prosocial or noble purpose. Wynn, Dewitte, and Hill conclude this section by underscoring the importance of purpose in life for older adults, ending with a description of what social structures can do to impact the purposefulness of persons later in the lifespan. Indeed, though these chapters are primarily focused on the purposeful *person*, all allude to fact that the discussion of purpose cannot be contained solely at the person-level.

The four chapters that follow consider the role of close relationships in the purpose development process. Larson begins by describing the potential impact of one-on-one apprenticeship programs on helping youth find a purpose. Kiang, Malin, and Sandoz then describe how these purpose-building interactions play out within the school context. Yu and Deutsch continue this theme with respect to adult-child relationships more broadly. MacTavish then bridges the arenas of close relationships with broader sociological factors, in considering whether and how youth develop purposeful aims when growing up in more culturally-closed, impoverished settings. This final chapter provides an interesting counterpoint wherein the ecological context shapes whether close relationships are in fact valuable to maintain, insofar that MacTavish's work also presents occasions where youth may be better served by leaving their developed social ties.

The next section considers societal and ideological structures and their influence on purpose in life. Sumner explores the context of gender identity and how society may press individuals into circumscribed purposes based on their gender. Rogers builds from the discussion of gender, adding an intersectionality angle by presenting evidence of the challenges for Black boys to disconfirm the negative stereotypes attributed to them. Wingfield enhances this conversation by describing her research with adult samples, noting the challenges faced by Black professionals and the potential scaffolding provided by social networks. Combined, these three chapters provide perspective into how our societal demands and expectations differentially impact individual's purpose development based on their social identities.

The final two chapters provide efforts to capture purpose development at the intersection of multiple ecological levels. To start, Moran presents a theoretical foundation for how future research can incorporate dynamical systems approaches to understanding how individuals advance their purpose development through interactions across levels. Bronk and Mitchell then provide an overview of their lab's efforts to understand purpose from cultural and historical lenses, developing upon the themes presented earlier with respect to how the individual person's development is impacted by their close associates, social identities, and broader societal structures. Overall, this volume showcases the widespread curiosity into purpose in life, with a demonstration of different methods, perspectives, and directions future researchers can take for poking and prying further into the construct.

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Chapter 2
We Meet Again: The Reintroduction and Reintegration of Purpose into Personality Psychology

Gabrielle N. Pfund

Abstract The current chapter posits that sense of purpose and purpose in life are individual differences that find a natural home in personality science. Situating these constructs within personality psychology allows for an abundance of future research opportunities to illuminate clearer answers to questions such as what the daily life of a purposeful person looks like, what behaviors purposeful people enact, and the unique lifespan trajectories of purpose. Before discussing the research questions personality psychology methodology will support answering, I begin by defining the two main purpose constructs of interest: sense of purpose and purpose in life. From there, I integrate these constructs into three main personality frameworks to provide initial evidence for purpose being an important factor in personality theory. I then discuss the history of purpose within personality science, and why it is distinct from the work that has previously been done in the field. I close the chapter by describing essential questions that exist in purpose research, and offering recommendations for addressing them using personality methodology.

Keywords Sense of purpose · Purpose in life · Personality psychology · Personality science · Traits

The current chapter posits two simple, but potentially transformative, ideas. The first idea is that what you want for your life—the goals that move you and the extent to which you feel that they propel for you forward—is not simply a desire you have, but is actually part of who you are. Articulating that you have a purpose in life, or that you are a purposeful person, are actually inherent to what makes you "you." The second idea is that by taking this perspective—by embracing purpose as a part of oneself, i.e. one's personality—the current trajectory of purpose research can be elevated. By turning to personality science, some of the inconsistent definitions, unclear mechanisms, and unanswered questions prevalent in purpose research can be addressed. We can gain construct clarity, methodological advancement, and an

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abundance of empirical opportunities when viewing purpose through a personality psychology lens.

Personality psychologists work to define what makes up an individual, and what these differences within and between individuals mean for our life outcomes. With purpose being something that differs between people, both in the extent to which they feel purposeful as well as the specific purposes one pursues, personality psychology becomes a natural mold for these constructs. The chapter begins by discussing two main components of purpose research: sense of purpose and purpose in life. From there, I posit why these components can fit into personality science by integrating them into well-known personality psychology models. By doing this, a foundation is created to investigate purpose using a personality psychology framework. I also discuss the history of purpose in personality psychology. I mention previous misconceptions of where purpose fits into common personality theory, as well as provide evidence to show that purpose is distinct. Finally, this chapter concludes by considering specific personality psychology methodologies that could be utilized to answer possible research questions, such as how purpose functions and fluctuates in day-to-day life, the kind of behaviors a purposeful person enacts, and the consequences of atypical purpose lifespan trajectories. However, before delving into these questions, I first define what I mean by purpose.

2.1 Conceptualizing Purpose

Purpose is a multifaceted construct that has previously displayed its aptitude to promote desirable outcomes, as well as to mitigate negative effects (see Pfund & Hill, 2018 for review). In order to appreciate its predictive abilities, it is first important to understand the nature of it as a construct. Purpose is composed of two main components: purpose in life and sense of purpose. *Purpose in life* is often more challenging for both individuals to articulate and researchers to empirically evaluate. Someone's purpose in life can be understood as the large-scale goal or goals that generate an individual's sense of purpose. Put more concretely by McKnight and Kashdan (2009), "Purpose is a central, self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning" (p. 242). Researchers can assess purpose in life by 1) simply asking participants for its presence or absence, or by 2) taking a more qualitative approach and focusing on the content of one's purpose in life (Hill, Burrow, Brandenberger, Lapsley, & Quaranto, 2010). In this regard, some have suggested that purpose in life should not be accomplishable, but rather more of a general intention that directs smaller goals as one pursues it (Damon et al., 2003; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). For example, becoming a medical doctor may not qualify as a purpose in life, whereas aspiring to help heal sick people would. In this way, purpose in life is the overarching goal that guides us as we journey through the pursuits of our lives.

Relatedly, *sense of purpose* can be understood as the extent to which an individual feels that they have personally meaningful goals and directions guiding them through

life (Ryff, 1989). It is often assessed via self-report, wherein individuals respond the extent of their agreement to items such as "I have a sense of direction and purpose in my life" (Ryff, 1989), or "To me, the things I do are worthwhile" (Scheier et al., 2006). Because of the quantitative assessment approach for this construct, sense of purpose is often the focal point of research evaluating the implications of purpose and different outcomes it may promote. While the measurement and nature of these constructs differ, both components of purpose are consistently associated with desirable well-being, health, and social outcomes throughout the lifespan (Pfund & Hill, 2018; Pfund & Lewis, 2020). Both components of purpose also fit into prominent theories of personality psychology.

Before diving into the ways in which purpose fits into a personality paradigm, it is important to discuss how this construct has been categorized up until this point. Currently, there is no consensus. While Ryff's work is a cornerstone for the broader field, sense of purpose is but one of several indicators of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Although purpose is consistently predictive of well-being components like positive affect and life satisfaction (Hill et al., 2018; Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2015), more recent sense of purpose measures have specifically tried to measure purpose without conflating it with well-being (Scheier et al., 2006). A personality psychology framework will allow for this construct to both be understood as a promoter of well-being, while also giving it opportunities to flourish in a variety of other life domains. Some scholars have characterized purpose a virtue or a character strength (e.g., Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; Han, 2015), which often invites construing the contents of one's aspirations as either good and nobel or bad and ignoble. Personality psychology, by contrast, allows for the existence of these individual differences without moral implications regarding where one falls on the purposefulness spectrum. Others still have suggested purpose is a component of one's identity (Bronk, 2011; Burrow & Hill, 2011). This perspective may not be entirely discrepent from the view discussed below, given identity is often part of personality frameworks (Roberts & Nickel, 2017). However, taking a broader view of purpose will likely allow for a wider range of research opportunities. Besides the new empirical endeavors a personality science framework will provide, this framework will also create a united and less constrained narrative around the purpose construct itself.

2.2 Purpose and Personality

Personality science focuses on the study of individual differences, that make up a person, ranging from tendencies toward certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to values, motives, and abilities (Roberts, 2009; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007). Understanding the ways in which purpose fits into personality science theory allows for utilization of personality science's unique approaches, methods, and techniques to broaden future research endeavors. To illustrate that purpose can function from a personality psychology perspective, I will discuss three related but

distinct models of personality: the Neo-Socioanalytic Model of Personality (Roberts & Nickel, 2017), the Five Principles of Personality Psychology (McAdams & Pals, 2006), and the Systems Framework of Personality (Mayer, 2005).

2.2.1 Neo-Socioanalytic Model of Personality

When considering the Neo-Socioanalytic Model of Personality, the way in which purpose fits into personality psychology is quite complex. This model posits that there are four unique domains that capture the main aspects of our individual differences: traits, motives, abilities, and narratives. Though these four domains of personality are generally argued to be separate entities (Roberts & Nickel, 2017), purpose finds a place in each of them. When discussing each of these components, I will mention how purpose conceptually fits into it, how purpose connects to constructs typically assessed in that domain, and how it predicts related outcomes.

Traits. The first domain in this theory is *traits*, which are dispositional characteristics that maintain relative consistency of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors throughout similar situations across time (Roberts & Nickel, 2017; Roberts, 2009). Sense of purpose finds its niche in the personality science literature due to its dispositional nature, with differential levels of purposefulness promoting distinct thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Regarding thoughts, people with a higher sense of purpose generally feel greater hope (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib & Finch, 2009), which is comprised of individuals feeling that they can think of clearer pathways to overcome obstacles as well as believing that they have the agency to take those pathways (Snyder, Rand & Sigmon, 2005). Furthermore, the affective nature of purpose is captured by work that has found individuals who report a higher sense of purpose feel more positive affect, less negative affect, and also are less reactive to stress (Bronk et al., 2009; Hill, Sin, Turiano, Burrow, & Almeida, 2018). Fewer studies have evaluated the behavioral nature of sense of purpose, though theory has suggested that purposeful individuals may be more effective in organizing their daily and long-term activities than their less purposeful counterparts (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Motives. Purpose also finds a natural categorization in the domain of *motives*, or the things we want to do, pursue, and have (Roberts & Nickel, 2017). Purpose in life is not simply a goal; it also "provides a broader motivational component that stimulates goals and influences behavior" (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009, p. 243). If individual differences in motives are captured by the things we desire to do and have, purpose in life is a direct influencer of an individual's motives, guiding their short-term goals as they follow their long-term desires. The role of purpose on motives can also be understood through purpose orientations, which reflect the general nature of one's purpose in life. Purpose orientations are defined as the broader content of one's purpose in life. Examples include having a *prosocial orientation*, which focuses on helping others, or a *personal recognition orientation*, which emphasizes the desire to be recognized and respected by others (Hill et al., 2010). Referring back to the example of the medical doctor's purpose in life, their overarching goal

was to heal sick individuals, which would fit into the prosocial purpose orientation. However, if they decided to become a medical doctor due to the desire to become a world-renowned brain surgeon, their purpose in life would better fit under the personal recognition orientation. While the presence of a purpose in life exists in both cases, the motivations and smaller actions that the pursuit of that purpose guides will shift depending on the purpose orientation itself. Purpose influences motives both narrowly, in the daily goals an individual sets as they pursue their purpose, as well as broadly, in the large purpose orientations they have.

Abilities. The third domain of the Neo-Socioanalytic Model is *abilities*, or our cognitive, physical, and emotional aptitudes (Roberts & Nickel, 2017). While purpose itself is not necessarily an ability, previous research has found associations between purpose and different kinds of abilities. For example, a higher sense of purpose is positively associated with better memory, executive functioning, and general cognitive ability in adults (Lewis, Turiano, Payne & Hill, 2017). Furthermore, some work has shown higher cognitive ability in adolescence to be associated with a higher sense of purpose (Minehan, Newcomb, & Galaif, 2000). Other work, meanwhile, has found that differences in ability are rooted in an adolescent's purpose orientation, not the presence of a purpose in life. In particular, while ability did not predict the presence of a purpose, specific purpose orientations differed in a study of high ability youth, which was defined as adolescents attending schools that required students to score two standard deviations about the mean on a common youth-oriented intelligence test. Those who were high ability youth were more likely to subscribe to a more other-focused purpose than adolescents tending non-selective schools (Bronk, Finch, & Talib, 2010). Research has indicated that sense of purpose is associated with abilities such as better cognitive functioning, and one's purpose orientation may differ based on one's abilities.

Narratives. Purpose can also fit into the fourth domain of the Neo-Socioanalytic Model. *Narratives* are rooted in how someone authors and understands their own life story (Roberts & Nickel, 2017), a part of which is determining the events that someone defines as significant and important (McAdams, 2013). There is a foundation of literature showing that sense of purpose is related to individuals' narratives (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005; McAdams & Guo, 2015), with the kinds of memories people express relating differently to sense of purpose. For example, memories that reflect experiences that are more personally meaningful to an individual are more strongly associated with a higher sense of purpose than memories focusing on integrating one's life experiences (Bauer et al., 2005). The kind of narrative someone creates may influence how purposeful they are, or how purposeful they are may shape the way they develop and understand their own narrative.

Bringing the domains together. Each of these domains influence, and are also influenced by, our *identity* (how we see ourselves) and our *reputation* (how others see us). To have an identity, individuals often explore different aspects of themselves before committing to the personal and social identities that they feel best describes them (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Sim, Goyle, McKedy, Eidelman, & Correll, 2014). Alongside this process occurs purpose development, wherein individuals explore goals and causes that are important to them before

narrowing in on and committing to their specific purpose in life (Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2015). Research has illustrated that these processes co-occur, and that individuals who are high on purpose commitment also report being more committed to their identity (Hill & Burrow, 2012). In fact, some preliminary findings have shown that purpose may be higher on days in which individuals participate in activities related to their identities (Kiang, 2012). The structure of the Neo-Socioanalytic Model provides a valuable reference to understand how and why purpose predicts life outcomes.

The way in which purpose is easily and systematically interwoven into this model extends beyond its simple categorization and into the way in which these domains, perceptions of self and others, and even social roles influence each other. The fluidity of this model allows for the same flexibility that individuals might encounter in their own experience of purpose. For example, if someone greatly values family and is motivated to prioritize their familial relations, they could identify themselves as family-oriented, which may lead them to taking on roles in which they support and take care of their relatives. Then, if a parent were to get sick, this scenario could lend an individual to embracing the role of caretaker, which would further solidify their identity as family-oriented and now the caretaker of their parent. This new development could then influence some of the main personality domains: their narrative may be impacted as the diagnosis of their parent's sickness becomes a significant memory for them, their motives and values may further shift toward this family-oriented caretaking role, and possibly even become their purpose in life, which would further heighten their trait-level sense of purpose. While this situation is hypothetical, it encapsulates the thoroughness with which purpose as a multifaceted construct can be integrated into the Neo-Socioanalytic Model.

2.2.2 Five Principles of Personality Psychology

Another theory of personality to consider is the Five Principles of Personality Psychology (McAdams & Pals, 2006). This model contains two components that are similar to the model just reviewed: *dispositional traits* and *life narratives*. In addition, the model mentions characteristic adaptations, human nature, and differential role of culture. *Characteristic adaptions* envelope individual differences like goals and motives, as well as an individual's plans. This extends beyond the motives piece captured in the previous model and considers how an individual characteristically interacts with their environment. This principle integrates well with McKnight and Kashdan's (2009) description of a purpose in life as something that directs behaviors and may influence the organization of one's day-to-day life.

Another principle proposed by McAdams and Pals (2006) focuses on *human nature*, which posits that we share a basic human design that has experienced slight variations throughout evolution. When discussing evolutionary needs that individuals share, McAdams and Pals (2006) mention innate desires to *get along* with others as well as a basic need to *get ahead*. Previous theory has connected the purpose literature to evolutionary work by suggesting that purpose may promote more effective resource

allocation (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). With sense of purpose being positively associated with better personal relations with others and better romantic relationship outcomes (Pfund et al., 2020; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), there is support for the purposeful resource allocation that promotes getting along. Furthermore, earlier sense of purpose is positively associated with income and net worth later on (Hill, Turiano, Mroczek, & Burrow, 2016), which may lend support to the way purpose helps in the evolutionary desire to get ahead. Finally, the fifth principle is the *differential role of culture*, which elaborates on the impact culture can have on the rest of this personality model (McAdams & Pals, 2006). With a growing literature on the cross-cultural context of purpose, there is accruing evidence that both the development and manifestation of purpose can differ across countries, but having a purpose is not bound to the culture from which an individual is (Damon & Malin, 2020). Purpose can be more thoroughly understood through the lens of the Five Principles of Personality.

2.2.3 Systems Framework of Personality

Purpose also fits within Mayer's (2005) Systems Framework of Personality. This framework incorporates the larger ecology surrounding individuals, such as their social groups and overarching cultures. As previously mentioned, past work has found that purpose is a valued construct in a variety of cultures, though its definition and the specific purposes in life individuals articulate may vary cross-culturally (Damon & Malin, 2020). After taking this bigger picture context into account, Mayer (2005) posits we can then begin to understand an individual's personality. Mayer believes one's personality is comprised of *major psychological subsystems*. Recognizing the challenge of summarizing and separating these subsystems, Mayer took a more fluid route in crafting this theory. This fluidity, in turn, allows for other models of personality as described above to be incorporated into it rather than be superseded by it.

The major psychological subsystems are broken into four broad areas within which they are organized working on two spectrums, one of which reflects smaller, simpler subsystems versus complex, learned systems, while the other reflects internal processing subsystems versus external aspects of personality. However, due to the expansive and exhaustive nature of this model, I will highlight factors of the model that are most relevant to purpose research. For example, the *models of the self* subsystem from the *knowledge works* area is broken into components such as self-concept and life-story memory. These aspects relate back to the *identity* and *narratives* components of the Neo-Socioanalytic model, as well as the *life narratives* component of the Five Principles of Personality Psychology. As previously mentioned, purpose and identity development co-occur (Hill & Burrow, 2012), and purpose is related to the narratives we create (Bauer et al., 2005). Purpose plays a clear role in the different facets of the model of the self subsystem.

Another relevant aspect of this model focuses on the more people-oriented parts of personality. Specifically, the *social actor* area is described as "the expression of

personality in a socially adaptive fashion," (Mayer, 2005, p. 10), as is comprised of elements such as *social role knowledge* and *attachment systems*. Social role knowledge refers to one's own understanding of their roles, such as being a parent, their job at work, etc. These roles could be used to derive a greater sense of purpose. For example, collegiate volunteerism predicts a higher sense of purpose later on (Bowman, Brandenberger, Lapsley, Hill, & Quaranto, 2010), and greater support from friends, children, and spouses predicts greater sense of purpose in older adulthood (Weston, Lewis, & Hill, 2020). In general, there is a consistent association between social connections and purpose. People with a higher sense of purpose report better relations with other and better romantic relationship quality (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Pfund et al., 2020), and, in fact, those who are married report a higher sense of purpose than those who are not (Hill & Weston, 2019). Unsurprisingly then, purpose fits into the attachment system of the social actor, given sense of purpose is associated with less conflictual parental relationships as well as more secure attachment to parental figures (Hill, Burrow, & Sumner, 2016; Hill, Schultz, Jackson, & Andrews, 2019). Purpose both shapes and is shaped by who we are as social actors.

These examples are a few of the more basic ways purpose can be embraced by this exhaustive personality framework. These three personality models have commonalities off of which purpose can be built. Whether it be how purposeful an individual feels or the way their purpose in life motivates and shapes how they understand and author their own life story, purpose fits into a variety of components both within and across these models. With all three theories, purpose is a construct that has a far reach in the way in which it can be smoothly integrated into personality research, pointing to personality science as a reliable foundation from which research on purpose can be further built.

2.2.4 Narrowing in on Trait Purpose

The current chapter will focus most of its review and suggestions on the more trait-like nature of sense of purpose. It is important to note two limitations before further discussing the history of purpose in personality literature. First, though conceptually sense of purpose appears to be fairly trait-like (Ko, Hooker, Geldhof, & McAdams, 2016; Pinquart, 2002), future research endeavors are necessary to investigate the extent to which sense of purpose is, in fact, a trait. Second, purpose is an intricate construct that can fit into a variety of components of personality theories as discussed above. Therefore, handling it solely as a trait has its limitations when working to exhaustively understand the role it plays in individuals' lives. Within personality psychology, though, traits are the most studied construct of the various personality models and predict a variety of outcomes. Thus, personality traits give us the clearest direction for next steps in purpose research. However, we must first discuss the history of traits and how sense of purpose fits into it before diving into how trait theory can inform future research endeavors.

2.3 The Misunderstood History of Personality Traits and Purpose

While these models have worked to capture individual differences in people, personality science has generally focused on understanding what traits exist and what those traits mean. Nearly a century ago, researchers began to evaluate what adjectives could effectively describe a person (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Cattell, 1943). Through this process, research began to narrow in on five general traits that are now deemed the Big Five personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1987; Peabody & Goldberg, 1989): extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness. Though these traits have slightly varied definitions across research groups, John, Naumann, and Soto (2008) identified common aspects amongst them. For example, those who are high in extraversion are considered to be more sociable, gregarious, and assertive. High agreeableness is comprised of modesty, empathy, and trust. High conscientiousness is consistently shown with high orderliness, industriousness, and self-discipline. High neuroticism, which is often understood as low emotional stability, is represented by greater anxiety, depression, and irritability (John et al., 2008). Finally, openness, sometimes called intellect (Goldberg, 1990), is represented by intellectualism, imagination, and, sometimes, adventurousness (John et al., 2008). There are other components of these traits that are less agreed upon, and, the lack of unanimity regarding these definitions, is one of the main reasons there is a need to consider other traits beyond the Big Five.

While some have stated that these five traits fully capture a person (Digman & Inouye, 1986), others have argued these traits are not exhaustive, and work should consider narrower traits in order to understand a person (Condon, 2018; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001). With this in mind, personality scientists have turned to considering the facets that comprise these traits in order to most effectively capture individual differences and have more precise predictions of experiencing certain life outcomes (Costa & McCrae, 1995; DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007; Soto & John, 2017). Other work has taken it a step further to consider traits that are separate from the Big Five, rather than smaller aspects of which a Big Five trait is comprised (Condon, 2018). For example, going outside the context of the Big Five, researchers have begun to consider other non-facet Big Five traits, like narcissism (Foster, 2009; Wurst et al., 2017), optimism (Assad, Donnellan, & Conger, 2007; Lemola, Räikkönen, Gomez, & Allemand, 2013), and gratitude (Hill, Allemand, & Roberts, 2013), in order to understand how our dispositions predict different life outcomes. While this evaluation of narrower traits is an improvement in understanding both what makes up a person and greater specificity in trait-related predictions, some of these narrower traits have been misunderstood or overlooked, such as sense of purpose.

Given the prominence of the Big Five, it is worth discussing how purpose does and does not fit in, which has been debated over the years. Some have suggested that sense of purpose is a facet of conscientiousness (Goldberg, 1999). Conscientiousness has been defined as "a spectrum of constructs that describe individual differences in the propensity to be self-controlled, responsible to others, hardworking, orderly, and

rule-abiding," (Roberts, Lejuez, Krueger, Richards, & Hill, 2014). While someone who is high on conscientiousness would be hardworking and industrious (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989; Goldberg, 1990), an individual who is high on sense of purpose does not necessarily just work hard, but would also report that they feel greater direction in life and that the activities with which they engage are important to them (Ryff, 1989; Scheier et al., 2006). With some theory suggesting that someone who is high on conscientiousness might be more likely to be passionless (Goldberg, 1990), these traits, though they may appear to lead to similar behaviors regarding the pursuit of goals, likely stem from different motivations regarding those pursuits. Purpose itself is not simply passion, but people with a higher sense of purpose find their activities meaningful (Scheier et al., 2006), something that would likely not be the case for someone without passion. Other work that has evaluated the association between sense of purpose and the aspects of the Big Five found that people who were more purposeful were also more industrious, an aspect of conscientiousness, as well as enthusiastic, an aspect of extraversion (Sun, Kaufman, & Smillie, 2018). However, organization (the other aspect of conscientiousness) and assertiveness (the other aspect of extraversion), were not associated with purpose, indicating that purposeful people may appear to be higher on extraversion and conscientiousness due to their hardworking and enthusiastic natures even when they do not report higher scores on the other aspects of those traits.

Beyond the semantic distinctions between conscientiousness and sense of purpose, research also suggests they are empirically distinguishable. In a recent meta-analysis (Anglim, Horwood, Smillie, Marrerro, & Wood, 2020), researchers evaluated the associations between various aspects of Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being subscales and the Big Five personality traits. One of these subscales is Ryff's measure of Purpose in Life (1989), which conceptually maps onto the current chapter's definition of sense of purpose. In this meta-analysis, when looking at two prominent models of personality trait theory, the Big Five and HEXACO (which includes Honesty/Humility alongside the other Big Five traits), sense of purpose *was* positively associated with conscientiousness. However, with associations of 0.50 (number of people = 5699, number of studies = 15) and 0.47 (number of people = 2003, number of studies = 5) between sense of purpose and the two conscientiousness models (Anglim, Horwood, Smillie, Marrerro, & Wood, 2020), there is clear evidence that sense of purpose is not simply conscientiousness as previously suggested. This quantitative distinction maps on well to other work that has evaluated the predictive ability of sense of purpose predicting desirable outcomes above and beyond conscientiousness as well as the other Big Five traits. To highlight a few examples, work has illustrated that sense of purpose is positively associated with romantic relationship satisfaction and commitment when controlling for the Big Five (Pfund, Brazeau, Allemand, & Hill, 2020). Furthermore, emerging adults with a higher sense of purpose experienced greater well-being, had better self-image, and less delinquent acts when accounting for the Big Five (Hill, Edmonds, Peterson, Luyckx, & Andrews, 2016). Regarding financial matters, when controlling for the Big Five, purposeful people cross-sectionally had greater household wealth and net