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Exploring the role of religion and spirituality in the development of purpose: case studies of purposeful youth

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This study investigated the role of spirituality and religion in supporting purpose during adolescence. Two case studies of adolescents who were coded as purposeful in the religious and/or spiritual domain as part of a larger study at the Stanford Centre on Adolescence were analysed and discussed. The results showed religion and spirituality as overlapping domains with authenticity to self as expressed through spirituality as a distinguishing factor between the two cases. Authenticity fosters one of the key elements of purpose – meaningfulness to the self – but only if done with equal attention to the world beyond the self.

Keywords: purpose; adolescence; spiritual development; positive youth development; religious education

Introduction

Adolescents all over the world have spiritual and religious concerns. Their questions about the meaning and purpose of life are related to identity formation. Young people are asking questions such as ‘Who am I?’ ‘Where do I belong?’ ‘What is my purpose?’ ‘To whom or with what am I connected or responsible?’ (Tirri, Tallent-Runnels, and Nokelainen 2005). These questions point to an opportunity to provide ways for young people to explore their developing identities.

At the Stanford Center on Adolescence, purpose has been examined through studies with young people across the USA. Purpose is defined as a stable, long-term goal to contribute to the world beyond the self that is also meaningful to the self (Damon, Menon, and Bronk 2003; Damon 2008). According to this definition, only about 20% of youth between the ages of 12 and 22 are purposeful, and those youth express purpose to varying degrees (Damon 2008).

In this paper we investigate the role of religion and spirituality in supporting purpose in the lives of adolescents by presenting two case studies of

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ordinary American youth with purposes related to religion and/or spirituality. We adhere to the viewpoint presented by Reich (1996) that religion and spirituality are unique domains that potentially overlap and to the ideas of Hay and Nye (1998) and Roehlkepartain (2008) who suggest that spiritual development is a human condition that may or may not be fostered within a traditional religious setting. We analyse the variation of spiritual development between our cases and reflect on the developmental importance of religious and/or spiritual context for youth.

Religion and spirituality

Within the field of positive youth development, spiritual development is proposed as a ‘look inward to create and recreate a link between “my life” and “all life” ... a constant, active, and ongoing process to create and re-create harmony between the “discoveries” about the self and the “discoveries” about the nature of life-writ-large’ (Benson 2008, viii–ix). King (2008) suggests that spirituality within a religious community might be fertile ground for positive youth development because it offers a way to explore identity in the rich context of a community that engages the larger questions of life. Following the thought of Reich (1998), spirituality involves transcendence or a ‘commitment to ideas and/or institutions that go beyond the self in time or place’ (Lerner, Roeser, and Phelps 2008, 7). Religious practice may emerge from spirituality as a ‘subordination of the self to institutions that are believed to have relations with the divine’ (Lerner, Roeser, and Phelps 2008, 8). Reich (1998) describes religion by noting its doctrine about the divine, organised faith and prescribed rituals. Religion is usually defined as the organisational, the ritualistic and the ideological (Reich 1996). The spiritual then refers to the personal, the affective, the experiential and the thoughtful. However, one can be quite ‘spiritual’ in the way in which one engages with a religious community (Reich 1996). Religion and spirituality share common areas but also have their own boundaries (Stifoss-Hanssen 1999), an understanding foundational to this study.

Spiritual sensitivity

Hay and Nye (1998) identify three categories of spiritual sensitivity. *Awareness sensing* indicates an experience of a deeper level of consciousness when we choose to be aware by ‘paying attention’ to what is happening. This category coincides with Gardner’s notion of being ‘spiritual as achievement of a state of being’ (1999, 60). According to Hay and Nye, this kind of awareness refers to a reflexive process of being attentive towards one’s attention or ‘being aware of one’s awareness’ (1998, 60).

The second category of spiritual sensitivity is *mystery sensing* which is connected to our capacity to transcend the everyday experience and to use imagination. For instance, the experience of the beauty and wonder of sunrise

and sunset include a sense of mystery even when one is aware of the scientific explanations of such phenomena. Someone who has a strong *mystery sensing* spiritual sensitivity accesses the ordinary as a rich symbol of the sacred and profound. This category relates to both Gardner's (1999, 54–60) understanding of spiritual intelligence as the 'achievement of a state of being' and the 'concern with cosmic or existential issues' while emphasising the mysterious nature of such experiences.

The third category of spiritual sensitivity is *value sensing*. This category emphasises the importance of feelings as a measure of what we value. Among such things are the issues that touch our existential questions and meaning seeking (Hay and Nye 1998, 70–4). *Meaning* is a subcategory in *value sensing* that may form an aspect of developing spirituality. According to Hay and Nye (1998, 74), a task for spiritual education may be to help children to investigate their identity and to delight in other forms of meaning making and meaning sensing. This category resembles Gardner's definition of spiritual intelligence as the 'concern with cosmic or existential issues' (1999, 58).

Tirri, Nokelainen and Ubani (2006) add a social dimension to Hay and Nye's three categories of spiritual sensitivity. Gardner (1999) also suggests a social aspect of spirituality. This fourth subscale of spiritual sensitivity is called *community sensing* and is based on the work of Bradford (1995). Individuals with this type of sensitivity talk about sharing time with others, the experience of the community and other forms of communal spiritual experience (Tirri, Nokelainen, and Ubani 2006).

Relationships between religion and spirituality

Reich (1996) offers four possible relationships between religion and spirituality: (1) religion and spirituality as identical to each other, (2) one as a subdomain of the other, (3) entirely separate domains, or (4) as unique domains that potentially overlap. Given the wide variety of religious and spiritual experience among adolescents, we take on the call of Benson, Roehlkepartain and Rude (2003) to adopt the last of Reich's options – religion and spirituality are overlapping domains. Furthermore, we draw upon important features of this working definition of spiritual development: spiritual development is a condition of being human, one that is not necessarily dependent on participation in a particular religious tradition, but that might be fostered within a traditional religious setting (Roehlkepartain 2008).

Relationships between spirituality, religious faith and purpose in adolescence

Mariano and Damon's (2008) models of the relationships between spirituality, religious faith and purpose proved invaluable in the analysis of the two

individuals selected for this study. By examining interview and survey data of both normative and exemplar samples of American young people, Mariano and Damon (2008) proposed five working models to describe these relationships in young people. Model 1 suggests that spirituality helps young people learn that they want to contribute, which eventually leads to contribution. Model 2 suggests that spirituality infuses the extant personal goals of young people with meaning and value, and that this opens the pathway for these goals becoming purposeful. Model 3 imagines spirituality as a support for the desire young people have to develop moral character, which then leads to the actual development of such character. Model 4 suggests that the community of religious faith provides a community in which purpose is shared, which, in turn, supports the purpose of the young person. Finally, Model 5 represents the integration of all of these aspects; spirituality, religious faith and the goals of the young person are inextricably linked to a coherent purpose for the young person.

An important caveat to this analysis is that the spiritually or religiously purposeful young person is not necessarily an *exemplar* of spirituality, religion or purpose. Theoretically, and certainly practically, one can find meaning, develop and act on long-term goals, and engage productively with the world beyond the self in a consistent manner while remaining fairly ‘ordinary’ in both the content and level of cognitive or emotional complexity involved in that purpose. This spectrum of possibility applies in all domains of purpose, spiritual and religious purpose included. While the body of faith development literature (for a recent overview see Fowler and Dell 2006) is not within the scope of this study and is open to critique (Streib 2003, 2005), it is applicable to the two American young people in this study in that it is worth remembering that one can be purposeful through religion and/or spirituality while in any individual stage and/or style of faith.

Data and methods

The participants ($N = 249$) in the foundational study (see Damon, Menon, and Bronk 2003; Damon 2008; Mariano and Damon 2008 – for work that examines the larger sample) for this case analysis were adolescents between the ages of 11 and 21 from different parts of the USA. Researchers from the Centre on Adolescence interviewed participants using a semi-structured interview format. From the 68 young people determined to be purposeful, the authors chose two individuals whose interviews illustrated different possibilities for the integration of spirituality, religion and purpose. While the initial choice was based on a desire to demonstrate religious *versus* spiritual purpose, the analysis of the cases revealed the presence of spirituality and religion in varying degrees in both cases.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in case methods in education, especially with respect to spiritual and religious issues (Shulman 1992;

Strike and Ternasky 1993; Hostetler 1997). It is believed that they show how abstract concepts and actions develop in concrete situations. According to Shulman (1992, 21), cases have certain shared characteristics:

- (1) Cases are particular and specific. They are not statements of what generally or for the most part is or has been.
- (2) They place events in a locally situated frame of place and time.
- (3) Human agency and intention are central in the data. Cases can reveal the working of human minds, motives, needs, conceptions, misconceptions, frustrations, faults, etc.
- (4) Cases reflect the social and cultural contexts within which the events occur.

In our study we used the interviews and accompanying demographic data of two individuals demonstrating religious or spiritual purpose as cases, and located them within the framework of spiritual development.

Shulman (1992) proposes case reports as optimal methods of teacher education. Due to their situated and contextual nature, case reports integrate what otherwise can remain separated:

[C]ontent and process, thought and feeling, teaching and learning are not addressed theoretically as distinct constructs. They occur simultaneously as they do in real life, posing problems, issues and challenges for new teachers that their knowledge and experiences can be used to discern. (1992, 28)

We use the case study approach to the participant interviews as a vehicle to communicate the complexity of the relationship between spirituality, religiosity and purpose at any level or in any style of faith development.

Results

Case studies reflecting the role of religion and spirituality in supporting purpose

We present two case studies of adolescents who find purpose related to religion and spirituality. Jim's spiritual development is strongly influenced by his religion. His religion guides all his choices in life and functions as his ultimate purpose. On the other hand, Carrie's spiritual development is not closely connected to Western religion, but she draws on Zen Buddhist traditions that concretise in spiritual practice. In the following section we present and analyse these two cases and discuss the spiritual development of these adolescents in relationship to the purpose they have identified for their lives.

Purpose related to religion*Jim: Christianity as a purpose in life*

Jim is a college student from the USA. He identifies as Christian and is from a Christian family background. He attends the same church his parents belong to, causing him some frustration, but remains faithful to his religion. He describes his Christian faith as being tied to his family, beginning his description of it with the fact that the faith of his family is what he has always known. However, characteristic of his age, his loyalty to the church of his family is accompanied by some level of dissonance:

Sometimes I don't feel like I'm growing, but at the same time things change and then I start feeling okay maybe this is the church I'm supposed to be in because sometimes I get angry because I don't get to go to the church I want to go to, but instead I'm forced to go to this church that they want to go to.

While Jim is being pulled by conflict in a direction other than that he has inherited from his parents, he chooses to respect his background and the values he has been raised with. In this instance, Jim demonstrates a strong sense of religiosity while seemingly making a decision to put aside the spiritual growth that might occur from following through on some of the conflicts that he experiences.

Jim also wants to obey his church's interpretation of the rules of Christianity. In the following excerpt Jim shows how this directs his choices about activities on Sunday:

I attend church every Sunday. I recently decided to stop working on Sundays because the seventh day was the rest day so Christianity believes that you're not really supposed to work on Sundays ... we shouldn't be working because six days a week you're already working your life off so that last day you're supposed to rest at least.

In the above explanation, Jim potentially demonstrates *awareness sensing* spirituality by connecting church attendance on Sunday to a day of rest. While his description of his practice indicates the prescriptive effect of the church – a more religious endeavour – he is able to articulate this need for a different kind of day in the routine of life, which suggests a glimmer of a spiritual concern.

Jim's purpose derived from his religious faith is more developed as he discusses the call to convert those around him. Jim wants others to be a part of God's community in the way his church has instructed him, which involves being saved from hell by accepting God. Jim explains his desire to enlarge God's community in the following ways:

Christianity believes that if you don't believe in God ... then there's only two places you can go, either heaven or hell and that's important to me because I

don't want to see my friends go somewhere where it's, I guess, burning and on fire constantly it's a horrible image and I had the image in my head one time and it just tore me apart to see my friends, I guess, crying out like, 'How come you never told me about God?' kind of thing and I'm just looking down on them and it's kind of sad to have that feeling upon you and I guess Christianity that's – I guess that's the purpose of Christianity, to reach out to people to evangelise and that's why it's important to me.

Jim's desire to share his religion is very much a sign of a *community sensing* dimension of spirituality. He wants his friends to belong to the community in heaven that his church has taught him about. Significantly, this is also one way in which Jim demonstrates purpose through religious faith – the outward engagement of bringing more people into this community of the saved.

Jim shows a sustained sense of purpose in his statements about educating his future children. He wants to give his children the same faith he has. He gives reasons for this belief in the following ways:

When I have kids, it's kind of sad because I don't want to say like I'm not giving them the choice, but to tell you the truth, I'm going to make them go to church. A lot of people reject that; a lot of people think they should have their own decisions on a free will and stuff like that, right. But to me, now that I know what I guess my faith is, I would definitely want my kids to have the same faith too. I wouldn't want to go to my church while they go to the temple or to something or believe in something else because it could distract the family, it can cause distractions and stuff like if you talk about something, arguments can arise and stuff like that.

Jim's desire to raise his children the same way he has been raised is typical of American teenagers in their view of religion as not worth fighting about within the family (Smith and Denton 2005, 122–4). While Jim may not find high levels of spiritual fulfilment in this community, he does not see the potential integrity of separating from it – or allowing his potential children to separate from it – to be worth the conflicts that would arise. While this does not demonstrate complex forms of *community sensing* spirituality that truly inspire individual spiritual growth, this desire for lack of conflict is an indication that Jim might be nurturing a nascent form of *community sensing* spirituality.

Jim acknowledges that he needs to make some sacrifices to fulfil his purpose in life. Potential sacrifices include friends, materialistic things and leisure activities. The following demonstrates Jim's thinking in this area:

I think I was always scared of giving my whole life to God, my whole life to Christianity because I know that if I give my whole life ... I'll lose so much of my life like materialistic and also just things in life like friends. I'll probably lose a lot of friends with that influence ... friends who like smoke, who drink, smoke weed and ... a lot of things that I love to do on leisure time ... things like that I know that I will have to give up as soon as my life is like fully given.

Jim's religion provides values that are non-materialistic and pure. This *value sensing* type of spirituality challenges Jim in terms of an authentic acceptance of the teachings of his religion.

Jim thinks that God will guide him in his choice of a career as well. He believes that everybody has a calling in life. He wants to be a cop but also remain open to God's will. He is not thinking about being a pastor but he is open to this possibility if that is God's plan:

Everyone has a calling in life like for those who are pastors, right, like they were called to pastor. I can look at myself right now, I can never think of myself being a pastor, but God works in weird ways. He always just makes things happen in the end anyways, you know. And I was thinking well, I want to be a cop, right, and then I was talking to my pastor about it and he goes, 'Well, there are still pastors who are cops as well, you know it doesn't matter.'

Jim's thinking about his career shows just how much his purpose is integrated with his religiosity. While he has expressed some discontent with the religion of his parents, he still turns to his pastor – and the concept of 'God's will' to help him understand how he might respond to a call from God that departs from his own interest in being a cop. While it is not clear that Jim is completely attuned to God's plan, he does appear to attempt to accept the *mystery sensing* spirituality that guides his religion's understanding of the 'weird' ways God works.

Accordingly, Jim's ultimate goal in life is to evangelise the message of Christ while waiting for the time when Jesus comes back. He describes this wait in the following ways:

It's a matter of waiting for Jesus to come back. In the meantime bring my people to Christ and having that faith that Jesus is going to come back any time soon. So, I think that's what I have to do on my own is to prepare for that time.

In part, the case of Jim reflects a model of spiritual development identified by Mariano and Damon (2008), where religious faith supports and inspires the adolescent's purpose in life. For Jim, all things in life are measured in the light of Christianity. Religion gives him rules he follows, for example, not to work on Sundays or to entertain himself with materialistic things. More importantly, religion is *the* truth in his life and gives answers to eternal questions. The ultimate goal is to wait for Jesus to come back and be prepared for that visit as well as possible. Religion also guides Jim's career and family plans – he remains open to the possibility that God will call him to something different than his current desire to be a cop and he is intent on raising his future family in the religion of his family of origin. Jim also exemplifies another model of spiritual development discussed by Mariano and Damon (2008), where religion is associated with character development goals, which, in turn, support character development. Jim's obedience to his parents and respect of their

church, even if he has some doubts about it, acts as a protective factor against some of the negative behaviours in which his peers engage.

The case of Jim shows how a young person might become purposeful through a religious commitment that does not necessarily align with a great degree of spiritual exploration of that commitment. However, the immature spiritual authenticity of his religious commitment makes the weakest component of his purpose that of personal meaning. While he does seem to derive meaning from the stability of the religion of his family of origin, legitimate questions can be raised about the sustainability of this commitment as he continues to mature and possibly grow less connected to this particular church.

Purpose related to spirituality

Carrie: spiritual practice as a purpose in life

Carrie is female college student of Armenian descent from the USA who has been exposed to both Christianity and Zen Buddhism. Her biggest passion is the Japanese tea ceremony, an interest sparked in her at the age of 18 and deepened during travel to Japan. Carrie describes the importance of spirituality and Japanese tea ceremony for her:

It's largely influenced by Zen Buddhism ideology ... I'm not really religious as in the western religions ... I prefer to work on my own spirituality and my own sense of realisation. My belief is that regardless of religion, the most important thing is to be a good person.

Here Carrie displays a form of spirituality that echoes Hay and Nye's *value sensing* sensitivity. While different dimensions of her spirituality emerge as she further discusses her practice of the tea ceremony, the motivating element of her own description of her spirituality is the value she places on being a good person.

In her desire to be a good person, Carrie talks about global problems and the importance of tolerance and individual responsibility. Her own approach is to do a little at a time:

I really wish people didn't always have racial preconceptions and prejudices, discrimination against other people, other races. It seems like people pay attention to specific things and they fail to see the bigger picture of why are we here, what's the point of what we're doing everyday? The conflicts that are happening in Israel and Palestine and the war in Iraq, it's unfortunate because both sides have their own reasoning for feeling the way they do, but neither can come to an agreement and see the other side's opinion. I'm not sure of anyone that's doing anything on a broad prospect, but I try to do things, little step at a time. I try to live the way I think people should be.

Carrie shows an interesting blend between Hay and Nye's *awareness sensing* and *value sensing* spiritual sensitivities, as well as alluding to a *community*

sensing spiritual sense. She demonstrates a higher awareness – and a desire that others develop that awareness – when she expresses concern over people failing to see the ‘bigger picture’ of life. However, awareness is also a value – which is most important and meaningful. Furthermore, there is some suggestion when she moves into discussing conflict in other parts of the world that her concern about how communities function is rooted in her placing a high value on people being able to sense what is most important in life.

Carrie ranks tea ceremony and spirituality among the most important things in her life, and explains why she thinks they are important:

Definitely the [most important thing] would be the people in my life, especially having a good love relationship and in the future, marriage. And the second one would be to be able to continue my path on learning more about the spirituality of tea ceremony, because the way, the thought process behind it is really about embracing peace between you and the people around you. I think that’s very important, the whole ideology behind it. I guess you could say that’s sort of my religion. That’s my way of living.

Here, Carrie’s sense of spirituality as communal really comes through, and again, it is highly integrated with what she finds most important, giving it the additional feel of a *value sensing* spirituality. She articulates the thought process behind the tea ceremony as concerning peace between people. In this way, her spiritual practice is about the whole community.

According to Carrie, tea ceremony brings her peace and satisfaction with the present and allows her to escape the reality and experience peace:

It taught me to appreciate this moment that I am here, the weather is great, and every thing’s fine, everyone’s healthy, nothing bad is happening. I can be grateful for that. It’s a way that allows me to think differently about reality and let’s me escape for a little while. That’s actually the purpose of the tea ceremony and the tearoom is to get away from reality and be at peace with your self a little while.

Here, Carrie exhibits signs of Hay and Nye’s *mystery sensing* spirituality in her use of the tea ceremony to focus on the present – and on the beauty and peace in that moment. *Mystery sensing* spirituality requires an imaginative sense – the ability to use symbols, ritual and metaphor to point towards a greater truth. Carrie’s sense of mystery, supported by a well-developed imaginative sense, allows the ritual of the tea ceremony to bring her into greater appreciation for the moment.

In the future, Carrie plans to attain a license to teach tea ceremony and teach at her own teahouse, as well as continuing to translate Japanese. She describes her purpose in life in the following ways:

My purpose is to make the people in my life happy, I think. And to bring as much kindness into anybody that I encounter as I can. Other than that, I think it’s important to live well, as a good person, and things will come your way.

While Carrie does not mention the tea ceremony when she describes her purpose in life, it is clear that the way in which she describes her purpose is intertwined with the lessons of the tea ceremony. Her practice of the tea ceremony is connected to relationship and peace, and these values are present in her description of her purpose. The directionality of this relationship is less clear. Does her spirituality influence her sense of purpose? Or does her sense of purpose gain strength and meaning from the spirituality she has found in the tea ceremony?

Using the models of Mariano and Damon (2008), Carrie's spirituality directly leads to purpose. In Carrie's case, her participation in the tea ceremony leads to a purpose that is about manifesting the communal and interpersonal relationships of the tea ceremony in other areas of life. However, there is also a way in which her spirituality supports a moral purpose – being a good person – that may or may not be dependent on the tea ceremony.

Overall, Carrie's spirituality is integrated with her identity, and this is an important illustration from her story. The way she describes her practice echoes Mariano and Damon's fifth model (2008), suggesting integration between spirituality, character and purpose that leads to a highly intertwined relationship between the three. Carrie's practice of the tea ceremony is much more than empty ritual as she describes it in ways that fit various spiritual sensitivities. It is this integrated aspect that leads to a sense of purpose – her spirituality is a defining element (maybe *the* defining element) of who she is, and because of its basis in the tea ceremony (which ritualises relationship), it cannot help but form a strong sense of purpose. Moving in the other direction, *who* Carrie *is* finds expression in the tea ceremony in a way that might be less salient in other spiritual practices for her. Instead of a strong sense of unidirectionality, Carrie embodies integration.

Discussion and conclusions

We have presented two case studies of adolescents whose sense of purpose is connected to religion and spirituality. Both adolescents are college students and from the same part of the USA. Jim is a religious person with values inherited through the Christian church of his parents. Jim's spiritual development takes place in church that emphasises *community sensing* and *value sensing* dimensions of spirituality. While Jim's spirituality is largely unexamined, his articulation of his religious practice shows how religious practice supports the formation of identity. His practice functions as an 'identity maintenance system' (Gollnick 2005, 114) by giving him the roots and guidance for the future. Jim also struggles to find his own way of expressing his spirituality. Using the models of Mariano and Damon (2008), Jim's case demonstrates religious faith supporting and inspiring the young person's purpose in life because that purpose is connected to the shared sense of purpose at the heart of the religious community. Jim also exemplifies a case in which religion is associated

with character development goals, and these goals in turn support character development. Less clear is how sustainable this form of religious purpose is as it is not well integrated with Jim's nascent spiritual search.

Carrie is a person with less traditional religious identity, but strong integrity between her practice and her spirituality. Her purpose is grounded in spirituality, and the tea ceremony is a supporting, expressive and defining practice for her. She demonstrates high levels of *awareness sensing*, *value sensing*, *mystery sensing* and *community sensing* spiritual sensitivities that all actualise in the tea ceremony. It is pivotal, providing both a celebration of the ideal and spiritual strength to reach it. In the framework of the models of Mariano and Damon (2008), Carrie's spirituality directly leads to purpose, but in the nature of the fifth model where the integration between religious practice, spirituality and purpose is so strong that it is almost impossible to identify directionality in the relationship. Purpose is one element of positive youth development. The two individuals in this study suggest that spirituality – either with or without explicit religiosity – may provide a path to purpose. King (2008) offers two concepts from the positive youth development movement that help explain why spirituality might be what she calls 'fertile ground' for positive youth development: *plasticity* and *context*. Plasticity is the ability of people to change and context emphasises the importance of the relationship between the young person and his or her environment. King argues that because young people positively change over time, spirituality might offer a rich context for this change. This context is provided in three ways: ideological, social and transcendent. The young person who engages the spiritual self has an ideological framework in which to test new discoveries, social support and models of those who do reach greater levels of contribution, and a language and model of transcendence.

The final evaluation is not between traditional religiosity and spirituality as more fertile ground for the development of purpose, but instead is a question of the right balance between the emphases of the self and other (King 2008) in the spiritual community. King suggests that though the community aspect of religious community can seem other-directed, oftentimes the desire for *personal* relationship with the divine is the only goal. This subjugates care for others to the needs of the self. One could also imagine a situation in which the desires of the self are totally subjugated to the needs of the religious community. The adolescent who attends neither to the self nor the other might be considered negligent in their spirituality and thus lacking rich context for the development of purpose. Therefore, in providing this context for the development of purpose, religious communities and educators hit the mark when they are able to provide an optimal balance between commitment to the well being of the self and the well being of others.

By taking into account the range of spiritual sensitivities and by recognising that spirituality emerges from and is supported by these sensitivities, those who wish to encourage purpose in youth have fertile ground on which to plant

seeds for positive youth development. Purpose need not be grounded in either the explicitly religious or spiritual, but youth who engage in their quest for self within a rich spiritual context (which may be a religious community) potentially have the advantages of inspirational ideology, community support and transcendent understanding in striving to achieve the authentic balance between care of self and care for others that sustained purpose requires.

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