

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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An ability to meet the changing demands associated with development promotes purpose in life, a defining feature of psychological well-being. Midlife adults consistently report higher purpose in life compared to older adults. However, less is known about the dynamics of purpose in life in the transition from middle to older adulthood. This mixed methods study first examined quantitative trajectories of purpose in life over a five year period and explored the extent to which individuals' psychosocial characteristics predicted different trajectories. A qualitative inquiry followed to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative results by exploring ways in which midlife adults define, pursue, and adjust their purpose in life over time.

This study used a sample of late midlife adults who took part in the Foley Longitudinal Study of Adulthood during a five-year period between 2008 and 2014. The sample included 70 African Americans and 90 White Americans (age=55–58 at Time 1). Purpose in life was measured annually with the Psychological Well-Being Purpose in Life subscale. Non-normal growth mixture modeling was the statistical procedure utilized to identify patterns of purpose in life trajectories, and to predict

such patterns using baseline characteristics, including gender, race, education, personality traits, and generativity. Results suggested purpose in life was stable and non-normally distributed over the five-year period. Trait conscientiousness significantly predicted higher levels of purpose in life after adjusting for other baseline characteristics. Moreover, African Americans tended to have higher purpose in life than White Americans.

For subsequent qualitative analysis, a subsample of sixteen female participants was purposively sampled to explore how participants with higher and lower trajectories of purpose in life defined their own purpose in life over time. The issue associated with intersectionality of gender and race and an imbalance in high and low trajectories by race and gender led to the decision to focus on female participants. Following the review of their Time 1 and Time 5 life-story interview transcripts, the sections of future script and major life themes were selected for analysis. A thematic analysis across the subsample was used. Seven main themes emerged that captured aspects related to purpose in life. The participants discussed their major life themes as being proactive, being reactive, having faith, and/or centering on relationships. Their sources of purpose in life included self-needs, work, family relationships, personal development, caring for others, and spirituality. The findings indicated similar sources of purpose in life between those with higher and lower purpose in life, such as work, family relationships, personal development, and spirituality. However, the findings also suggested different underlying pathways to higher versus lower purpose in life. Those higher in purpose in life tended to attain a proactive versus reactive major life theme and to be more others- versus self-oriented. Partially

supporting the quantitative result, some racial differences were identified. In terms of family relationships, White participants tended to discuss their romantic relationships with their husbands, whereas African American participants were more likely to be single and hoped to pursue marriage in the future. In terms of spirituality, there were two African Americans actively practicing spirituality by teaching others, while three White participants were searching for more concrete sense of spirituality. The effect of conscientiousness suggested by quantitative findings was not supported.

Consistent with prior research, it is likely that trait conscientiousness is related to certain psychological resources to strive for purpose in life from a variety of sources.

This study is the first longitudinal attempt to explore the trajectory of purpose in life late middle adulthood. A unique strength of the study is the use of mixed methods approach that incorporates survey and narrative interview data, allowing for meaningful discussions between theories of purpose in life and individuals who are experiencing purpose in life in daily lives. Purpose in life among the sample shows a stable non-normally distributed trajectory, in which those higher in conscientiousness and African Americans are more likely to report higher-stable purpose in life. The qualitative findings further provide insights into how participants may pursue purpose in life similarly and differently across trajectories of purpose in life, race, and conscientiousness. Due to the sample selection, the generalizability of these results is limited. Nevertheless, the integrative method enables a more comprehensive understanding of purpose in life in late midlife. Future studies should investigate development of purpose in life from a larger and more diverse sample, which includes men as well as women.

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Pathways to Well-Being: A Mixed Methods Study on Purpose in Life
in Middle Adulthood

by
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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Han-Jung Ko, Author

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Pathways to Well-Being:
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Without the gift of meaning we could never fully appreciate the gift of life. For that reason, if for no other, people should be encouraged to continue to ponder life's meanings. It is the question, not the answer, that is the real miracle. The quest for meaning alone enables us to be fully human.

Roy F. Baumeister (1991) – *Meanings of Life*

If we can find the sources of meaning held by the elderly and see how individuals put it all together, we will go a long way toward appreciating the complexity of human aging and the ultimate reality of coming to terms with one's whole life.

Sharon R. Kaufman (1987) – *Ageless Self*

It is human nature for individuals to seek a way to confirm that their lives have meaning and purpose (Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 2006; Klinger, 1977; McAdams, 2012). However, individuals vary in how they define and pursue their meaning and purpose in life. There appear to be both subjective and cosmic features of meaning and purpose in life (Reker & Wong, 1988). When people inquire about meaning in life, they are actually asking themselves, “What makes my life worth living for? What is my purpose in life? What does my own existence mean?” At its core, the search for meaning and purpose in life is derived from one's commitment to positive development, goal-directedness, personal meaningfulness, and engagement in the world beyond the self (Bronk, 2014; Damon, 2009). Over time, the forms of meaning and purpose in an individual's life may remain the same or change in reaction to developmental experiences. Individuals strive to integrate their meaning and purpose in life with normative and non-normative developmental tasks and challenges throughout the lifespan (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Ryff & Singer, 2008). That is, individuals continuously work toward fulfilling their goals associated with chronological ages, social and historical contexts, and unique life experiences (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006). Through this process of negotiating developmental

contexts and making coherent connections with self, individuals form beliefs about what their lives mean, who they are, and where they are headed in their remaining, yet unknown, future (McAdams, 2012).

Meaning and purpose in life are key to promoting well-being, especially in transitions into older adulthood (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Busch & Hofer, 2012; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989a). Older adults, however, have consistently reported significantly lower sense of purpose in life than midlife and younger adults (Pinquart, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Furthermore, inferences about development of meaning and purpose in life could not be made in previous studies because most were cross-sectional studies (for an exception, see a two-wave study by Springer, Pudrovskaya, & Hauser, 2011). The present mixed methods study examined quantitative changes in one's overall sense of purpose in life over five years during late-middle adulthood and explored the extent to which one's psychosocial characteristics may predict such changes. Qualitative inquiries were subsequently followed, in the midst of changes in one's overall sense of purpose in life in late midlife, to explore the process of how individuals define and pursue purpose in their life stories. Examining the development of purpose in life during late-middle adulthood is important for theoretical, empirical, and practical reasons.

Theoretically, purpose in life promotes well-being across the lifespan (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Bronk, 2014; Damon, 2009; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff & Singer, 2008) and has been linked with better health (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003; Ryff, 2014), higher positive emotions (Hicks & King, 2009), higher life satisfaction (Steger & Kashdan, 2007), higher social engagement (Heintzelman & King, 2014), and lower mortality (Hill & Turiano, 2014; Krause, 2009). During midlife, adults become increasingly motivated to

strengthen their connections with others, reconcile life experiences in relation to self and others, and, ultimately, establish a clear sense of purpose in life (Bühler, 1968; Erikson, 1963; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Neugarten & Datan, 1996; Staudinger & Bluck, 2001). In many cases, midlife adults are prompted to search for purpose in life when confronting their own mortality and that of aging parents and friends. With maturity that accompanies age, late-midlife and older adults tend, or at least are developmentally expected, to have a clearer comprehension of their own life purposes as well as a greater sense of directedness and intentionality (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2012; Ryff, 1989b). They are seen as keepers of personal and cultural values and can outlive themselves by transmitting their experiences to others.

However, contrary to theoretical assumptions of maturity with age, midlife adults on average reported higher levels of purpose in life than older adults (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; Pinquart, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Although it is difficult to disentangle age effects from cohort effects in such differences, the empirical drop in purpose in life between midlife and older adult samples heightens the importance of exploring development of late-midlife adults' purpose in life. Yet, without precise identification of what purpose in life is, and without a consensus for its definition or measurement among scholars, research on purpose in life is more challenging and less prevalent than other research attempts to understand well-being. For example, Hicks and King (2009) conducted a search of empirical research entered into the PsychINFO database since 1967 and found that the number of studies on meaning and purpose in life is *10 times less* than the number of studies of life satisfaction, optimism, happiness, and hope, respectively.

In terms of practical applications to society, with increasing longevity and declining fertility, middle adulthood is increasingly seen as a normative developmental period in the life course (Lachman, 2004; Moen & Wethington, 1999; Willis, Martin, & Rocke, 2010). Midlife is

roughly defined between one's mid-30s and mid-60s, and one's subjective exit of middle adulthood depends on whether, and the extent to which, one experiences physical decline, health problems, and retirement (Lachman, 2004). The exact transition also reflects social and economic instability in modern society. For example, during the recent Great Recession, many midlife adults changed their retirement plans to ensure better financial security in transition to older adulthood (Willis, Martin, & Rocke, 2010). Moreover, most Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, remain healthy in their 60s and still consider themselves to be middle aged (Staudinger & Bluck, 2001). It is in this mix of individual developmental, social, and cultural contexts that midlife adults experience more years in middle adulthood currently than prior generations did. Studying changes of purpose in life during late-middle adulthood may have profound implications for understanding social roles, life events, health, and psychological well-being, with an eye toward optimizing the process of forming purpose in life with age (Lachman, 2004; Pinguart, 2002; Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Since Erikson's (1963) seminal writing on lifespan psychosocial development, researchers have often conceptualized one's life purposes as prominent goals that change during different developmental periods (Baumeister, 1991; Emmons, 1999; McAdams, 1993; Reker & Wong, 1988). Essentially, life purposes are a moving target, where individuals may have various goals across their lives that may be consistent or distinct, and through the process of achieving these life purposes they gain a sense of overall purpose in life. Based on this theory, generativity has been theorized as *the* major developmental purpose in middle adulthood. Midlife adults are considered important actors of generativity—caring for younger and older generations and contributing to society as a whole (Lachman, 2004; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Demonstrating generativity further supports midlife adults' quest for purpose in life (Reker,

Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989b). Researchers have examined the processes through which generativity may promote purpose in life (McAdams, 2006, 2012). Over the past 15 years or so, McAdams and his colleagues have empirically identified a consistent narrative pattern, termed *the redemptive self*, among American adults with high generativity (McAdams, 2006, 2012; McAdams & St. de Aubin, 1992; McAdams & Logan, 2004). American adults tend to see their lives as recovering from negative suffering to a current positive state or trend. Therefore, they believe they carry the responsibility of redemption; they find positive resolution in suffering and see giving back to others and society as their purpose in life. Each society and culture, however, has distinct expectations about the timing of generativity for its residents (Kotre, 2004; Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2012). As a result, individuals tend to express generativity in various forms, including biological, parental, technical, and cultural generativity (Kotre, 1984), and each form of generativity seems to peak at different time points during middle adulthood (Stewart & Vandewater, 1998). It remains an empirical question whether such a pattern of redemptive self to purpose in life among highly generative American adults could be applied to people in other societies and cultures.

The findings of many forms of generativity, however, may imply *multiple* purposes in life for midlife adults across time and context, rather than generativity as *the* primary purpose in life. In fact, researchers have argued for the differentiation between global meaning and situational meaning to address the inquiry of multiple versus primary purpose in life (Reker & Wong, 1988, 2012). *Global meaning* refers to individuals' overall conceptualization of meaning, often also termed as existential meaning, ultimate meaning and purpose, meaningfulness, and purpose in life. *Situational meaning* refers to the meaning individuals make from life experiences on a daily basis. Moreover, individuals are hypothesized to derive deeper meaning

and purpose in life, global and situational, from sources transcending oneself versus focusing mostly on oneself (Reker & Wong, 2012). However, problems of “structural lag” are now becoming even more apparent as the Baby Boomers transition from middle adulthood to older adulthood (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994). With age adults have increasing societal challenges to find meaningful roles and opportunities to fulfill purpose in life (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Yet, they do not have structured paths for how their future should be compared with their parents’ generation, and they have to actively seek their purpose in life in such transitions. It is therefore necessary to relax the conceptualization of life purposes during midlife to encompass both shared developmental purposes, such as generativity, and idiosyncratic purposes depending on individual contexts of development. Moreover, just as there are multiple patterns for positive adult development demonstrated in other longitudinal studies (e.g., Helson & Srivastava, 2001; Phelan, Love, Ryff, Brown, & Heidrich, 2010), there could be multiple pathways to pursue these life purposes and, eventually, achieve higher sense of purpose in life.

Understanding the pathways through which midlife adults define and pursue purpose in life has implications for interventions not only for the current middle-aged generation but also for younger and older generations. With the expected physical and psychological declines as one enters older adulthood, anxiety about losing purpose in life and having nothing to transmit to future generations may be mitigated by acknowledging that multiple pathways of pursuing shared and idiosyncratic life purposes exist. It is possible that individuals could find a personalized, positive transition to later adulthood as a result of this knowledge. For families, the increasing number of intergenerational households makes research related to purpose in life more important because generations are increasingly connected to each other (Allen, Blieszner,

& Roberto, 2000). Each generation works together to help construct life purposes and achieve purpose in life for middle-aged and older generations, which reciprocally promote well-being for younger generations.

To date, empirical findings on purpose in life primarily demonstrate cross-sectional age differences rather than longitudinal changes with age. To gain a deeper understanding of the development of purpose in life during late-middle adulthood, this study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design with quantitative and qualitative data embedded in an existing longitudinal study (Creswell, 2014; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). The advantage of using a mixed methods approach is to model changes in purpose in life over time and, further, to incorporate perspectives of study participants into quantitative findings for a more detailed understanding of purpose in life development. This study investigated how midlife adults' purpose in life changed over five years and analyzed their life stories to explore how they defined life purposes and pursued purpose in life. Quantitative and qualitative findings were incorporated to discuss the development of purpose in life.

My two main research questions were as follows:

1. How do changes of purpose in life vary across individuals—that is, do the intercepts and rates of change in purpose in life vary? Are there different patterns of trajectories among midlife adults?
2. Can the identified patterns in trajectories of purpose in life be explained by a) baseline social demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, and level of education, and personality characteristics, such as traits and generativity, and b) life-story narratives representing each pattern?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The current knowledge regarding meaning and purpose in life with age is that meaning is important to everyone, though with various degrees of importance, and meaning making is a lifelong process (Krause, 2012; Reker & Wong, 2012). From a lifespan perspective, the increasing heterogeneity with age is evidence that individuals develop less like others and more like themselves (Murray & Kluckhohn, 1953; Neugarten & Datan, 1996). Indeed, meaning and purpose in life may become more important as people grow older due to increasing need for self-integrity, self-transcendence, and death acceptance (Erikson, 1963; Krause, 2012; Tornstam, 1997). However, little is known about the developmental process of meaning and purpose in life by individual subjectivity and context over time. In this study, I aim to contribute to the gap in research on the development of purpose in life by focusing on how purpose in life develops, quantitatively and qualitatively, during a five-year period in late-middle adulthood.

In what follows, I first review two theoretical frameworks guiding this dissertation study: lifespan developmental framework (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006) and an emerging integrative three-level personality framework (Hooker, 2002; Hooker & McAdams, 2003; McAdams, 1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006). The former emphasizes development as a lifelong and multidirectional process, in which earlier life experiences shape individuals' development throughout the lifespan. The latter, building on the promises of lifespan developmental framework, provides a structure-process perspective to understand how individuals develop their own personalities across time and context. Next, I address theoretical and empirical research on how establishing meaning and purpose in life is important for human development (Baumeister, 1991; Krause, 2012; McAdams, 2012; Reker & Wong, 1988, 2012). Specifically for middle adulthood, purpose in life is synthesized as one salient component in

psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989b) and may be derived through one of the main developmental purposes, generativity (Erikson, 1963; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Lastly, I demonstrate the importance of applying a mixed methods approach in this study. By examining how purpose in life changes in midlife quantitatively and exploring how systematic qualitative analysis of selected life stories helps explain the quantitative results, a mixed methods approach provides a deeper and richer understanding of the development of purpose in life.

Theoretical Frameworks

Lifespan Developmental Framework

Researchers have long attempted to understand the extent to which people grow to be like all others, like some others, and like no others, as well as the possible processes underlying these individual commonalities and differences (Heatherton & Weinberger, 1994; Murray & Kluckhohn, 1953). According to lifespan developmental theories, individuals develop within various and dynamic micro-macro systems along with where they are in the course of their lives (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Lerner, 2006). With experiences over the lifespan, individuals evolve to adapt to their developmental tasks and challenges and to create balance between growth and loss. In particular, biological, psychological, and sociocultural forces shape development through normative age-graded influences, normative history-graded influences, and non-normative influences. Normative age-graded influences typically correspond to social norms and roles associated to a particular age. For instance, many consider graduating from high school as the significant marker for transition to young adulthood, termed as emergent adulthood (Arnett, 2000); getting married as a capstone in young adulthood for symbolizing independence from family of origin and establishing interdependence with significant others; and retiring from formal employment as a turning point in transition to older adulthood. Moreover, through

normative history-graded influences, each generation experiences specific social and cultural events and therefore creates a unique identity. Most of the Baby Boomer generation recall the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968, as well as the Civil Rights Movement and Women's Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, as important experiences in their lives (McAdams, 2006). To echo the uniqueness of individuals in Murray and Kluckhohn's statement (1953), non-normative influences are unpredictable, idiosyncratic events that make individuals like no others.

Such contextualism and temporality shape diverse trajectories among individuals and possible patterns of these trajectories among subgroups. It is theorized that the observed trajectories and patterns may vary as a result of developmental plasticity and adaptability driven by agentic and goal-oriented development (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006). These developmental forces further situate individual development in the context of the development of others. As a result, the lifelong interactions between individual, place, and time contribute to systematic yet successive continuity and change in human behaviors and functions. Applying this lifespan developmental framework guide me to identify quantitative trajectories and patterns of one's sense of meaning and purpose in life in late midlife, that is, during normative transition to older adulthood. This framework may also help qualitatively understand how late-midlife adults commonly, yet uniquely, pursue meaning and purpose in life in respect to their own developmental continuity and change across time and context.

A Three-Level Personality Framework

To examine what midlife adults define as purpose in life and how such life purposes guide their own development across the lifespan, it is critical to incorporate a three-layer

personality framework (Hooker, 2002; Hooker & McAdams, 2003; McAdams & Olson, 2010). Specifically, this person-focused framework adds details to lifespan developmental theories by focusing on how people develop over time as actor, agent, and author of their own development. Moving beyond the classic definition of personality as static traits, this framework integrates personality structures with personality processes (Hooker & McAdams, 2003). There are three levels of personality—dispositional signatures, characteristic adaptations, and narrative identity—all of which are embedded in cultural contexts (McAdams, 2012; McAdams & Pals, 2006). In particular, the three levels are interrelated but not reducible. Each level includes a relatively stable structure and a time-variant process: for the first level, traits and states; for the second, personal action constructs (e.g., goals and motivation) and self-regulation; and for the third, life story and self-narration (Hooker & McAdams, 2003). Both structures and processes are dynamic over time in that lifespan development is a series of person-context transactional processes (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Rothermund & Brandstädter, 2003). To date, however, most published research has focused on the first layer of personality, as trait measures have been extensively developed. It is still under debate whether the observed dynamics of personality traits result from social role changes with age in the domains of family, work, and civic involvement (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006) or whether individuals are programmed to reach personality maturity (Costa & McCrae, 2006). One possibility for resolving this research gap is to incorporate the other two layers of personality structure and process in studies to gain a more holistic understanding of stability and change in personality over time.

With inherent and developing dispositional traits, individuals navigate motivational and social-cognitive abilities to adapt to changes in their daily lives and to accomplish their life goals

(Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Hooker, 1999; McAdams & Olson, 2010). For example, in individuals pursuing a higher level of life goals, research has shown the critical simultaneous occurrence of stability and change in structure and process over time (Ko, Mejía, & Hooker, 2014) and the structure-process implications to making daily progress in health goals (Hooker, Choun, Mejía, Pham, & Metoyer, 2013). At the same time, the person-as-agent who possesses distinct personality dispositions enables the person-as-actor, regulating oneself toward goals and purposes, to become the person-as-author (McAdams & Olson, 2010). Through the process of constructing and revising life stories, individuals are able to create meaning, purpose, and a sense of continuity in life coherent with their identity and cultural contexts (McAdams, 2012). Therefore, the integrative three-level personality framework is consistent with the lifespan developmental framework in that individuals envision their life goals and organize their goal pursuit behaviors in accordance with developmental tasks and challenges that come with age (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Hooker & McAdams, 2003). In other words, individuals are self-determined and self-regulated in pursuing their life purposes with personality resources (Hooker, 1999; McAdams, 2012). Studying personality structure and process across the three levels of personality could enable one to thoroughly examine the diversity of ways in which midlife adults pursue meaning and purpose in life over time within various social and cultural contexts, and to identify the significance of personality structure and process in promoting lifespan development of purpose in life.

Making and Searching for Meaning and Purpose in Life

People use meaning every time they speak, think, plan, or make decisions in life to refine their perceived connections between self and context (Baumeister, 1991; McAdams, 2012). My understanding of meaning and purpose in life was inspired by Dr. Victor Frankl's account of his

own and many others' suffering in a Nazi concentration camp and his realizations from the experiences. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, he proposed that each individual is born with a motive to search for life meaning, and he later developed logotherapy (Frankl, 2006). As its name implies—*logos* means “meaning” in Greek—logotherapy focuses on “the meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for such a meaning” (Frankl, 2006, p. 98). Since his emphasis on search for meaning, there has been increasing research on meaning in life.

Historical changes in society and science have boosted the drive for meaning and purpose in life. With the erosion of community culture and religious bonds, and the escalation of individualism, people have been confronted with more responsibility for making choices in life, and this has made it more difficult for people to evaluate and judge their meaningfulness in life (Baumeister, 1999). Due to the focus on positive psychology, the research has shifted its attention from the mere elimination of mental illness to proactive and reactive sources of human motivation and well-being, including life meanings, goals, and values (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003).

Meaning in life is increasingly regarded as an important psychological variable related to well-being and protecting individuals from negative outcomes (Morgan & Farsides, 2009). People interpret and evaluate their life experiences and integrate them into self-concept. A person with a higher sense of meaning in life is presumed to have a stronger sense of fulfillment and goals, consistent with self-concept among experiences. There is a consensus in contemporary psychological and gerontological research that meaningfulness is a strong component for successful adaptation in late life (Reker & Wong, 1988, 2012), consistent with the self-integration stage proposed by Erikson (1963).

Although current researchers still have no agreement on a definition of meaning in life, the one proposed by Reker & Wong (1988, 2012) provides a comprehensive and useful

conceptualization for understanding human development of meaning and purpose in life in this study. Meaning and purpose in life consist of two different, yet interrelated personal meanings. *Global meaning* refers to individual cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose of existence, and the pursuit, attainment, and fulfillment of goals (Reker & Wong, 2012, p. 434). It is a personal experience of meaning and a search for meaning within a larger interpersonal, rather than intrapersonal, context. Other terms consistent with this concept include existential meaning, ultimate meaning and purpose, meaningfulness, and purpose in life. On the other hand, *situational meaning* refers to the attempt to understand the meaning of experience in life on a daily basis. Their conceptualization underscores continuous, hierarchical interactions between global and situational meaning (Reker & Wong, 2012, pp. 436–438). With global meaning and purpose in life, individuals reflect on their life experiences and integrate coherence among situational experiences. The meaning that individuals make out of daily experiences ultimately contributes to maintaining their overall meaning and purpose in life.

Researchers have repeatedly identified certain sources of meaning in life among participants in quantitative and qualitative studies (Debats, 1999; O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker, 1991). Reker (1991) summarized the most common sources of meaning in the literature and surveyed people aged between 18 and 98 using his scale, the Sources of Meaning Profile. The sources of meaning in life include personal relationships, altruism, religious activities, personal growth and achievement, basic and financial needs, enduring values or ideals, traditions and culture, social and political causes, and relationship with nature. In addition, by incorporating the historical and social contexts of 60 older adults in their 80s and 90s, Kaufman (1987) found four to six themes from their past to the present. Although the sources may vary to a certain extent by individuals' age, and cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds, "relationships

with people” has been the most mentioned source of meaning in life (Debats, 1999; Krause, 2012; O’Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker & Wong, 2012). Moreover, for older adults, personal relationships with family and friends are the most important, while the preservation of health and contributing self to service for others are also found to be meaningful.

Incorporating the sources of meaning and the hierarchical structural model of global and situational meaning (Reker & Wong, 2012), there are four major factors with correspondent sources of personal meanings. From the lower to the upper levels, *self-preoccupation* focuses on sources mainly related to self, such as maintenance of basic needs on a daily basis, and financial security. *Individualism* emphasizes not only self but also opportunities for self-growth, including leisure activities, creativity, personal achievement, and personal growth. *Collectivism* recognizes the interconnectedness between self and others and broadens sources of meaning to social and political causes, traditions and culture, generativity, and humanistic concerns. Finally, consistent with Erikson (1963) and Tornstam (1997), the highest level is a focus beyond oneself, *self-transcendence*, including existential values and ideals, service to others, religious beliefs, and relationships with nature. In a study, Reker (1991) showed empirical evidence that individuals tended to report a higher sense of global meaning if they experienced situational meaning in the levels of self-transcendence and collectivism compared with those experiencing individualism and self-preoccupation. Moreover, age-group comparison studies have shown less significant difference in global meaning between young, middle-aged, and older adults, but suggested both stability and change in individuals’ sources of situational meaning. Prager (1996) compared his study with Reker and Wong’s (1988). On one hand, he found five common sources of meaning important for all age groups, such as personal relationships, meeting personal needs, preserving values and ideals, leisure activities, and personal growth. On the other hand, the importance of

transcendental aspirations increased with age, and desires for self-realization and exploration decreased with age (Van Ranst & Marcoen, 2000). Longitudinal studies are currently needed to explore how people experience meaning through common and unique pathways along with their developmental context and time (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Prager, 1996; Reker & Wong, 2012).

In summary, the conceptualization of global and situational meaning guides the present study on the development of meaning and purpose in life. It allows individuals to evaluate the extent to which their lives are meaningful and with a purpose. It considers meaning and purpose in life as a lifelong process in which people internalize and enact values and beliefs and thereby attain meaning and purpose in life. Importantly, this process is dynamic from one time to another, as the development of meaning and purpose in life is different from person to person (Guttmann, 2008). There is no universal model or standard for meaning in life, and people may define and pursue their own meaning in life through similar yet individualized process. For the clarification of terminology, in the following I will use the term *purpose in life* to refer to global meaning and *life purposes* for situational meaning.

Midlife Development of Purpose in Life and Life Purposes

It is important to examine purpose in life during middle adulthood for both theoretical and practical reasons. Middle adulthood seems to be a critical turning point for purpose-in-life development due to the lower levels of purpose in life consistently found in older adults (Lachman, 2004; Pinquart, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008). With the population aging, middle adulthood is increasingly seen as a normative developmental period in the life course (Moen & Wethington, 1999; Willis, Martin, & Rocke, 2010). From a theoretical standpoint, however, relatively little is known about midlife development compared with the other two developmental

spectrums, early and late life (Lachman, 2004). No consensus exists in terms of a precise chronological age range for middle adulthood, roughly between the mid-30s and mid-60s with an average 10-year range of variation (Lachman, 2004; Willis, Martin, & Rocke, 2010). In particular, midlife adults tend to define their subjective exit of middle adulthood upon experiencing physical decline, health problems, and retirement. The conventional assumptions are that midlife adults experience little change in personality development and that their lives are mostly centered on work and family.

At a practical level, developed societies and government agencies have emphasized the ongoing rapid demographic shift of a larger midlife and older adult population. Importantly, the Baby Boomer generation, between 1946 and 1964, now composes around 26% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2013). Members of this generation are currently in their chronological transition from midlife to older adulthood and remain healthier than their parents' cohort. It is in this modern context that adults experience more years in middle adulthood, both subjectively and chronologically, than in other developmental periods. Along with increasing life expectancy, about half of Americans would still consider themselves middle-aged into their sixties and even seventies (Lachman, 2004).

In addition to biological forces, sociocultural forces have a significant impact on middle adulthood (Staudinger & Bluck, 2001; Willis, Martin, & Rocke, 2010). The balance between stability and change in development varies by personal characteristics, social contexts, and social roles acquired at a given point in middle adulthood (Heatherton & Weinberger, 1994; Lachman, 2004; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006; Newton & Stewart, 2012). A salient example is the recent economic recession and recovery, during which many midlife adults are delaying their retirement while their adult children are returning home for temporary economic support. Given

that midlife is a period of peak physical and psychological function, social responsibility, and plasticity in self-concept development (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Hooker, 1999; Neugarten & Datan, 1996; Ryff, 1995), studying midlife development brings opportunities to optimize aging by understanding the developmental processes preceding older adulthood. The blurring boundaries between subjective experiences and chronological age in middle adulthood have profound implications for social roles, life events, health, and psychological well-being for later development (Lachman, 2004; Ryff, 1995).

Midlife Developmental Life Purposes: Generativity and Beyond

Midlife adults are valued for their socially constructed roles (Kotre, 1984; Lachman, 2004; McAdams, 2001; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998). According to Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory (1963), the normative developmental life purpose for midlife adults is generativity, which involves commitment to future generations and societies (Lachman, 2004; McAdams, 2001). Research has shown that the extent to which midlife adults fulfill generativity not only has a positive effect on their concurrent psychological and social well-being (Keyes & Ryff, 1998), but also potentially continues to affect later health, well-being, and successful aging (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams, Hart, & Manura, 1998; Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2012). At the same time, midlife adults may have more constraints in the negotiating processes than younger or older adults do. Midlife adults constantly face conflicts between their own self-concepts and age-related social roles when navigating their developmental tasks and challenges across life domains such as family, employment, personal growth, and interpersonal relationships (Lachman, 2004; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Moen & Wethington, 1999; Whitbourne & Connolly, 1999). The complexity of individual development and sociocultural contexts in middle adulthood suggests that midlife adults may have multiple purposes of

development in addition to Erikson's grand assumption of generativity.

The multifaceted nature of generativity implies a process component of generativity and further emphasizes a variety of developmental purposes in middle adulthood. Importantly, generativity is multifaceted and can be present in different forms, such as biological, parental, technical, and cultural generativity (Kotre, 1984), agentic and communal identities (McAdams, 1993), and role-specific generativity (Peterson & Stewart, 1990). McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) first proposed a seven-featured theory of generativity, and the process by which midlife adults pursue generativity in Western society has been elaborated in further studies (e.g., Jones & McAdams, 2013; McAdams, Hart, & Manura, 1998). With age, midlife adults are gradually stimulated by *inner desire* for social immortality and to be needed, and by *societal and cultural demands* for generativity. In middle adulthood, people are most likely to consciously develop *generative concerns*, strengthened by *belief in the human species*, which posits that human beings are supposed to support each other across generations. They form *generative commitment*, defined as goals and decisions centered on caring for younger people or making contributions to others and society. They then perform *generative acts* to assist younger generations, which could be regular actions such as teaching a skill or attending neighborhood or community activities, as well as less frequent behaviors such as inventing a product or becoming a parent. Whether an action can be considered generative depends on individuals' intentions and contexts. For those with high levels of the aforementioned generative features, life stories are constructed with salient themes of generativity, termed *generativity narration*. Overall, the theory of generativity emphasizes the multifaceted features of generativity as well as opportunities for individuals to fulfill generativity within social contexts.

To date, researchers have not been able to include all seven features of generativity in a

single study. Based on cross-sectional studies, different age groups show variety in terms of generative concerns, commitment, actions, and narration (McAdams, Hart, & Manura, 1998). For example, midlife adults ages 37 to 42 have higher generative concerns and actions than both older adults between the ages of 67 and 72 and younger adults from 22 to 27 (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993). Midlife and older adults both express higher generative commitment and more generative themes in their life stories compared with younger adults. However, whether and how midlife adults continue to foster their features of generativity toward older adulthood has still not been explicitly examined longitudinally. Moreover, sociocultural factors and contextualism provide advantages and hindrances for individuals striving for generativity and well-being (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Elder & Johnson, 2003). Based on a cross-sectional study, midlife U.S citizens with higher education and generativity were more likely to report higher well-being as a result of being able to transmit resources to future generations and others (Keyes & Ryff, 1998). Therefore, consistent with the assumption that there are midlife developmental life purposes besides generativity, being able to fulfill both normative and idiosyncratic developmental life purposes in middle adulthood contributes to well-being in midlife and beyond.

Purpose in Life: An Indicator of Well-Being in Midlife

Researchers have investigated the relationships between developmental tasks and well-being (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Busch & Hofer, 2012). They demonstrate the importance of short-term, hedonic aspects of well-being for health in daily life, generally termed subjective well-being and usually referred to as happiness and life satisfaction, as well as positive and negative affect. On the other hand, long-term, eudaimonic well-being, which expands to concerns and existential meaning beyond individuals themselves, seems increasingly

important in later development (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989a). Challenges arise, however, because empirical operationalization of well-being is not necessarily theory driven and varies across disciplines (Ryff, 1995; Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2012).

A widely recognized theoretical definition and empirical tool of well-being is the Psychological Well-Being scale (PWB, Ryff, 1989b). Ryff (1989a, 1989b) reviewed positive psychological functioning in adulthood from literature in lifespan development, personality, and mental health and synthesized six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Studies have examined the overall and dimensional differences of psychological well-being across age groups (Keyes & Ryff, 1998). There are increasing trends in environmental mastery and positive relations with others when comparing younger adults with midlife and older adults. Midlife adults tend to have higher autonomy than younger adults but similar degree of autonomy to older adults. There is no significant age-group difference in the dimension of self-acceptance. Surprisingly, younger and midlife adults on average have a similar sense of personal growth and purpose in life, whereas older adults show lower means in these two dimensions. Although it is difficult to disentangle such age differences from cohort effects, the drop in purpose in life from younger to older adulthood points out the importance of exploring the development of midlife adults' purpose in life and of optimizing the process toward purpose in life with age (Pinquart, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Pathways to Purpose in Life: Structure and Process

To best capture the dynamic nature of lifespan development, it is necessary to examine structure and process across three layers of personality (Hooker, 2002; McAdams, 1995). Most studies have been conducted at the first layer of personality, traits and states. In particular,

extraversion, neuroticism, and generativity have shown significant effects on well-being (Cox, Wilt, Olson, & McAdams, 2010; de St. Aubin & McAdams, 1995). Moreover, distinct personality traits are correlated with purpose in life, mostly through links to promoting health and meaning making (McAdams, 2012; Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). For example, people high in conscientiousness tend to pursue healthy behaviors as well as meaningful, prosocial activities, such as church attendance and volunteer service. People high in extraversion tend to experience positive emotion, both while alone and with people, which contributes to their feeling that life has meaning and purpose (Hicks & King, 2009). On the contrary, people high in neuroticism are more likely to feel vulnerable and insecure and report alienation in life. However, studies have focused primarily on well-educated, White, middle-class Americans. Little is known about how the associations between psychosocial characteristics and well-being differ by sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status. To date, empirical findings on purpose in life primarily demonstrate cross-sectional age differences rather than age changes. It is necessary to apply the second and third layers of personality, personal goals and life stories, to investigate the extent to which these psychosocial characteristics promote purpose in life over time, as well as how individuals pursue purpose in their daily lives.

Understanding how midlife adults pursue purpose in life across time and context requires an explicit goal-oriented framework (Hooker, 1999). Consistent with lifespan development and three-layer personality development frameworks (e.g., Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Hooker & McAdams, 2003; Ryff, 1989b; Staudinger & Bluck, 2001), purpose in life implies agentic, goal-oriented behaviors. Goals provide individuals with meaning and purpose (Emmons, 1999), as they represent what individuals try to accomplish in their daily lives and tend to be guided by overarching objectives related to purpose in life (Bolkan & Hooker, 2012; Ko, Mejía, & Hooker,

2014). Therefore, the success of having and maintaining purpose in life also hinges on whether people are able to plan and pursue goals related to development (Carver & Scheier, 2002). Both the content and process behind goals are important in pursuing purpose in life (McAdams, 2013).

Life stories provide a broader perspective to explain multiple pathways to purpose in life. Within ongoing ontogenetic and historical context, individuals as authors create their unique life stories with constant narration and revision as they live (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; McAdams, 2012). Indeed, it is in the third layer of personality, life story and self-narration, that individuals can be best understood holistically as both producers and products of biological, psychological, and social forces (Hooker, 2002). Over the past two decades, an increasing number of researchers have used narratives to study development-related constructs (e.g., McAdams, 1993; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Using the richness of life stories, individuals can be best understood as being agents, actors, and authors for their own lives, and as having stable (structure) and malleable (process) characteristics. The emphasis on both structure and process across the three layers of personality suggests that a longitudinal mixed methods approach is ideal for studying the development of purpose in life.

Few studies have explored development of purpose in life by synthesizing the normative developmental purpose in midlife, mainly generativity, and idiosyncratic purposes (Bronk, 2014; Damon, 2009; Pinguart, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Contrary to positive development in most psychological domains with age, a meta-analysis of 70 studies showed an age-associated decline in purpose in life among middle-aged and older adult samples (Pinguart, 2002). Generativity may not be unique in middle adulthood, but it does significantly contribute to midlife adults' concurrent and subsequent well-being in later development (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). In particular, fulfilling developmental purposes, such as generativity, is

theorized to promote purpose in life, an emerging dimension of psychological well-being with age. Longitudinal studies incorporating perspectives from midlife individuals are required to understand development of purpose in life.

Current Study

Trajectories of and pathways toward purpose in life are still under investigation. One of the challenges lies in how purpose in life is defined in relation to well-being and generativity. Both well-being and generativity are multidimensional constructs (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Ryff, 1989a, 1989b; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Although purpose in life has been conceptualized as an important dimension of psychological well-being, in empirical studies purpose in life tends to be examined as part of grand psychological well-being. In studies focusing on middle adulthood, generativity is predefined as the main developmental life purpose (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). As a result, there have been various measures for well-being and generativity across studies. However, purpose in life has not been the main focus. Another challenge is that the majority of studies have been correlational, which makes it difficult to determine the dynamics between well-being and generativity in addition to related psychosocial characteristics (Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2012). Although some longitudinal studies have been conducted to investigate these links (e.g., Stewart & Ostrove, 1998), without explicitly examining purpose in life over time, whether and how individuals define and pursue their life purposes remains open questions. It is necessary to investigate the extent to which purpose in life could be promoted over time by psychosocial characteristics prominent in midlife, as well as to explore individual processes of pursuing life purposes in daily life. Therefore, further research on purpose in life requires the incorporation of quantitative and qualitative data.

This dissertation is a longitudinal study using an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014), in which qualitative data are analyzed after quantitative analyses; the qualitative data are incorporated into, and further explain, the quantitative results. Development of purpose in life and life purposes is examined over five years during late-middle adulthood. The lifespan developmental and structure-process personality frameworks guide the quantitative examination of the trajectories of purpose in life and the extent to which important psychosocial characteristics predict such trajectories.

The study's two main aims and hypotheses are as follows:

1. The trajectories of purpose in life in late midlife were modeled for their changes over the five-year study period, particularly intercepts and slopes, and were further explored for possible patterns among individual trajectories. At least two patterns were expected, including trends of stability and slow decline as reflected in age-associated changes in most cross-sectional findings. However, due to the lack of longitudinal research in purpose in life, estimating trajectories and patterns was primarily exploratory.
- 2a. The differences among the identified trajectories were further predicted by baseline individual characteristics, including gender, race, level of education, personality traits, and generativity. Consistent with prior cross-sectional findings, lower neuroticism, higher extraversion, higher conscientiousness, and higher generativity were hypothesized to predict a trajectory of higher purpose in life. Due to an insufficient literature base, we did not make a priori hypotheses about the effects of gender, race, or level of education on purpose in life.
- 2b. No specific hypotheses in exploring life stories were formulated, as qualitative inquiry would be guided by quantitative findings as standard in the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. The participants' narratives regarding personal values, future goals and

plans, and major life themes in their life stories guided my inference on how they have defined life purposes and pursued purpose in life throughout the lifespan.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study explored the development of purpose in life during late midlife. Due to the lack of longitudinal studies specifically on purpose in life, this study was mostly exploratory. I used the existing data from the Foley Longitudinal Study of Adulthood (FLSA), conducted by researchers at the Foley Center for the Study of Lives at Northwestern University. The Foley Center has given me permission to use the five-year data collected between 2008 and 2013. The Institutional Review Board at Oregon State University has determined that this proposed dissertation study does not require human subject study review due to the de-identified nature of the data. This chapter outlines the research design and methods the FLSA research team used in recruiting participants, collecting survey data, and conducting interviews. I then focus on summarizing the outcome measures, quantitative predictors, and qualitative materials that were specific to this study. Finally, because I applied a mixed methods approach in this study (Creswell, 2014), I have described quantitative and qualitative analyses and results in tandem in the following chapters.

Study Design

The nine-year FLSA study was designed as the first large-scale longitudinal study of adulthood. The data collection began in 2008 for 71 participants, and in 2009 for the other 92 participants, resulting in a total of 163 participants initially. Due to different starting points of data collection, waves of data are referred to as “Time” instead of the actual years of data collection. For example, Time 1 denotes the first wave of data collection. For the purpose of this dissertation study, I focus on the FLSA study from Time 1 to Time 5 (from 2008 to 2012 for some participants and from 2009 to 2013 for the others).

Participant Recruitment and Description

The FLSA study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Northwestern University in January 2008, and has undergone continuous IRB renewals. A local consultant company, Metro Chicago Information Center (MCIC), was contracted to recruit middle-aged participants living in the greater Chicago area. MCIC distributed flyers, posted on bulletin boards, and placed paid advertisements around communities, including community centers, public libraries, religious institutions, and grocery stores, as well as in local newspapers.

A total of 163 middle-aged adults, aged 55 to 58 ($\text{Mean}_{\text{Age}} = 56.37$; $\text{SD} = 1.00$), participated in the study initially (one dropped out after being recruited). They considered themselves in good or excellent health and lived in communities in the city of Chicago and surrounding suburbs. There were 58 males and 105 females. Only white Americans ($N = 90$; 56.2%) and African Americans ($N = 70$; 43.8%) were recruited in this study (two participants claimed inter-racial identity and one did not specify own racial identity). The 2010 census estimated there were 45.0% White Americans and 32.9% African Americans in the Chicago metropolitan area (U.S. Census Bureau, Census Summary, 2010). The African American participants were oversampled in the FLSA study with an aim to compare and contrast the developmental experiences between White and African American midlife adults. At baseline, most of them were still working, while 23 participants were retired. Ninety participants were married or partnered, 20 cohabited, and 32 were widowed, while the rest were single or divorced ($N = 21$). Most of the families reported having annual income between \$25,000 and \$100,000 (median income = \$75,000 to \$100,000), while 19% reported an annual income over \$300,000.

Procedures

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected annually. Once per year, participants completed an online survey of demographic and psychosocial measurements,

followed by either a 15- to 20-minute telephone interview (Time 2 through Time 4) or a 1.5 to 2-hour in-person life story interview (Time 1 and Time 5). In the following, I have focused only on the online survey and life-story interview procedures for their relevance to this dissertation study. For details about the entire FLSA study, contact the Foley Center for the Study of Lives.

Online Surveys

Every year, participants used the same confidential codes to complete their online surveys on a secure website. For a few participants who preferred hard copies, surveys were mailed to them and returned to the FLSA research team. Each survey took approximately two to three hours to complete. The surveys included a variety of psychosocial measurements, including psychological well-being (*Purpose in Life* as one of the subscales), generativity, daily goals and evaluations, social activities and involvements, and physical-health-related scales. The survey measures remained the same, for the most part, across years, with some adjustment from year to year. Participants were paid \$75 for each annual survey.

Life-Story Interviews

The participants were interviewed in person every four years—that is, Time 1, Time 5, and Time 9 (expected in 2017). The interviews were based on the life-story interview protocol (McAdams, 1993). (See Appendixes 1 and 2 for the full Time 1 and Time 5 interview protocols, respectively.) In general, there are seven life-story interview sections, as follows: 1) life chapters, in which participants are asked to briefly describe segments of their lives as if they are book chapters; 2) eight key scenes in life, such as high, low, and turning points in life, positive and negative childhood memories, a vivid adult memory, a wisdom event, and a religious/spiritual/mystical experience; 3) future plans, e.g., the next chapter, dreams/hopes/plans for the future, life project; 4) challenges in life, such as life challenge, health, loss, and any

failure and/or regret; 5) personal ideology, including the single most important value to live by, and social, political, and/or moral values; 6) major life themes; 7) and personal reflection on the life-story interview processes. Life-story interviews usually took about 1.5 to 2 hours, mostly on Northwestern University's Evanston campus. The interviews were conducted by either a research professor or a trained graduate student, whose racial identity was White American. Participants received \$75 for each in-person interview. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a typing service.

Participant Retention and Confidentiality

MCIC was responsible for maximizing sample retention from 2008 to 2012. However, the company went out of business in spring 2012. Currently, the FLSA study director and research team are responsible for contacting participants regularly throughout the years, including sending notecards to check in with the participants, as well as holiday cards and annual gifts with the logo of Northwestern University. The retention rates from baseline (2008/2009, referred to as Time 1 in this study) to the fifth year (2013/2014, Time 5) were high (90.2%).

Measurements

This study used quantitative and qualitative data from the FLSA study to examine the changes of purpose in life over the five years and whether such changes could be explained by a) baseline social demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race, and level of education) and personality characteristics (e.g., traits and generativity), and b) life-story narratives. Specifically, I focused on participants' Time 1 sociodemographic characteristics, personality traits, and generativity in addition to their purpose in life scores from Time 1 to Time 5. For qualitative data, I used life story transcripts of Time 1 and Time 5 from the in-person life story interviews.

Quantitative Outcome Measures

Purpose in Life. Every year participants completed a modified 42-item Psychological Well-Being scale (PWB; Ryff, 1989b), the same version administered in the national survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS II, 2004–2006; Ryff et al., 2012). In this study, I used one of the subscales, Purpose in Life (PIL), to assess participants’ overall sense of directedness, goals, and meaning in life from Time 1 to Time 5. There are two positive and five negative items, including “I have a sense of direction and purpose in life” and “my daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me” (reverse-scored). Participants rated all items on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). The scores were recoded with a range from 0 to 5 to facilitate interpreting analyses, with higher scores indicating greater purpose in life. The reliability was acceptable over the five years, with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from 0.72 to 0.75 (comparable with the MIDUS II reliability of 0.70; Ryff et al., 2012). The full Purpose in Life subscale is included in Appendix 3.

Quantitative Predictor Measures

Sociodemographic Characteristics. At Time 1, 64% of the participants were female. Participants were asked to define their racial identity in six categories (1 = White/Caucasian, 2 = African-American, 3 = Asian-American, 4 = Hispanic/Latino, 5 = Interracial, 6 = Other). There were 90 White Americans (55%) and 70 African Americans (43%), with 2% identifying as interracial White-African Americans or unidentified. Those with unidentified race were coded as missing on race for the analyses. Participants also reported their highest level of education (1 = High school, 2 = Some college, 3 = College, 4 = Graduate work, 5 = Other). The majority had completed college or graduate education (67%).

Personality Traits. I examined participants’ Time 1 scores on the 60-item NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree; McCrae & Costa,

2004). I focused on the traits of neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness based on their significant associations with purpose in life in prior studies. Summed scores were standardized for each trait to facilitate interpretation in the final model. Higher scores indicated a higher tendency for neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness. Cronbach's alpha for each trait was satisfactory: 0.86 for neuroticism, 0.75 for extraversion, and 0.85 for conscientiousness.

Generativity. In this study, I examined participants' Time 1 generativity. Participants completed the 20-item Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) (0 = never to 3 = very often/nearly always), which has been shown to have strong psychometric properties (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Example items include "I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences" and "I do not volunteer to work for charity" (one of the six reverse-scored items). Higher scores indicate stronger generativity. Consistent with prior studies (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), the LGS showed satisfactory reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the LGS was 0.85. The complete LGS scale is included in Appendix 4.

Qualitative Measures

Life stories. The Time 1 and Time 5 life stories from each participant were of interest in this study. The participants were interviewed in person twice between Time 1 and Time 5 of the FLSA study. To accommodate each participant's availability, a total of 158 Time 1 interviews were conducted between May 2008 and May 2010, whereas the 135 Time 5 interviews were completed from October 2012 to November 2013. Most life-story interviews took about 1.5 to 2 hours to complete (McAdams, 1993, 2008). The Time 1 and Time 5 life-story interview protocols were similar with only a few changes. At Time 1, participants were asked to describe their lives as book chapters, and then to articulate key scenes in childhood and adult years with their feelings through those events. They were also asked about their life values and future

plans. At Time 5, the interview started with the same key scenes throughout the lifespan without first reviewing one's life as book chapters as in the Time 1 interviews. There was more focus on work and career, historical context, continuity and change, and values and life themes in Time 5 interviews compared with Time 1. All the Time 1 and Time 5 interviews were transcribed verbatim by early 2014, ranging from 20 to 50 pages each.

Analytical Plan

Quantitative Analysis

At the first step in this mixed methods study (Creswell, 2014; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006), I modeled changes of purpose in life over time and examined the extent to which the selected psychosocial predictors predicted the changes. In particular, I applied Growth Mixture Modeling (GMM; Jung & Wickrama, 2008), using normal and non-normal distributed analyses, to model the trajectories of purpose in life. To avoid the confusion of referring to purpose in life as a theoretical conceptualization versus purpose in life as an operational construct, in the following, I use *PIL* to represent the latter, the quantitative scores from the Purpose in Life (PIL) subscale.

Growth mixture modeling was applied to examine changes of PIL over time and to further analyze the extent to which certain psychosocial characteristics predicted such changes. Unlike conventional growth curve modeling, GMM allowed me to answer the research questions by empirically exploring latent subgroups of individuals who may display distinct developmental trajectories, rather than assuming that a single set of parameter estimates accurately describes observed data (e.g., an average intercept and slope, each allowed to vary randomly across individuals) (Ram & Grimm, 2009). In the context of GMM, "latent subgroups" are identified by latent class memberships. Due to the observed left-skewedness of PIL scores over time (See

Table 4.1), I explored both normal mixture modeling (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014a) and non-normal mixture modeling (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014b) using Mplus (Version 7.3, Muthén & Muthén, 2014). Latent classes of trajectories were estimated using normal distribution models and skewed-*t* distribution models, separately. Robust Maximum Likelihood (MLR) estimation was applied for mixture modeling, allowing missing cases on outcome variables to be included (Acock, 2005). Trajectories were regressed against time (i.e., five years) rather than age due to the homogeneity of age among the current sample. Time was centered at baseline, and the intercept and slope parameters were allowed to covary. I compared the results using the model fit criteria to determine the most likely solutions (e.g., normal versus non-normal mixtures, one versus two classes, and two versus three classes), including the Bayesian information criterion (BIC), Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test (LMR-LRT), and the bootstrap likelihood ratio test (BLRT; Jung & Wickrama, 2008). Lastly, the baseline sociodemographic characteristics and personality characteristics of traits and generativity were added to the GMM model as predictors for PIL trajectories. The final analytic model is presented in Figure 4.1.

Qualitative Analysis

For qualitative analysis, I purposively sampled a subsample of participants correspondent to the significant quantitative findings. With the aim to explore similarities and differences between participants with the PIL trajectories revealed in the quantitative analysis, I applied a thematic analytical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Luborsky, 1994). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used for identifying themes and analyzing how these themes coexist with each other within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The broad research question concerns how participants define and develop their themes related to purpose in life. Following suggestions by Braun and Clarke (2006), I further formed narrow questions to guide my analysis process to

answer this overarching question: 1) What are the themes and sources in which late-midlife females derive their purpose of life? ; 2) How do these themes and sources remain the same or change over the five years of study during their late 50s to early 60s? ; and 3) How do the themes and sources differ by the significant effects revealed in quantitative results?

I approached the data with my theoretical interest in purpose in life. Therefore, it was more appropriate to apply a “theoretical” thematic analysis, identifying themes in a theory-driven way (Braun & Clarke, 2006, *p.* 12). Prior studies have identified sources of meaning and purpose in life (Baumeister, 1999; O’Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker, 1991; Reker & Wong, 1988, 2012). In general, Reker and Wong (1988, 2012) have argued some sources were to provide a deeper sense of purpose in life than others. The four hierarchical categories of sources, from most to least comprehensive, are self-transcendence, collectivism, individualism, and self-preoccupation (Reker & Wong, 2012, *pp.* 437–438). Self-transcendence is theorized to provide higher sense of purpose in life, including such sources as personal relationships, religious beliefs and activities, service to others, enduring values and ideals, and relationship with nature. The second in providing purpose in life is collectivism, including such sources as social and political causes, traditions and culture, leaving a legacy, and humanistic concerns, followed by individualism from such sources as leisure activities, creative activities, personal achievement, and personal growth. Self-preoccupation is hypothesized to provide the least source of purpose in life, including such sources as maintenance of basic needs, financial security, hedonistic activities, and material possessions. Moreover, I also referred to a study conducted with 38 midlife New Zealanders (26 women and 14 men, aged between 40 and 50) due to their study focus on midlife adults (O’Connor & Chamberlain, 1996). They identified six sources salient for the midlife sample, including relationships with people, creativity, personal

development, relationship with nature, religious and spiritual, and social and political. The hierarchy of themes and sources provided a framework for me to explore a more detailed account of themes related to purpose in life within the data.

Because the nature of purpose in life is future-oriented as a result of reflecting on the past and the present experiences (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Hooker & McAdams, 2003; Reker & Wong, 2012; Ryff, 1989b), I exclusively focused on the life-story interview sections that were most likely to reveal one's purpose in life. The targeted sections were Future Script (Two questions: The next chapter; and Dreams, hopes, and plans for the future) and Values and Life Theme (Two questions: Single value; and Life theme). The same questions were asked during Time 1 and Time 5 though in different sections during the life-story interviews. In the Time 1 interview, these questions were included in Sections C, E, and F, whereas they were in Sections F and G at the Time 5 interview (see Appendix C and D). Moreover, I analyzed two other questions in the Time 1 Future Script section, where participants were asked about their life projects and overall philosophy of life. Because the data were not collected around the topic of purpose in life, besides coding for the explicit narratives of purpose in life, I examined the underlying ideas in what the participants said in regard to their future and identified whether the content consistently implied the participants' purpose of life across the interviews.

I followed the steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I first immersed myself in the overall life stories before I developed initial codes. In particular, Luborsky (1994) suggested procedures for discovering and documenting themes and provided examples to derive themes in life review studies. His focus on the frequent statements in data and/or the salient statements that anchor the participants' lived experiences are consistent with the nature of my

life-story interview data, emphasizing the meaning individuals construct for themselves (McAdams, 1993).

Life Story Overview. To facilitate the coding process and determine whether a particular theme implies the participants' purpose in life, I created life-story overviews as a way to provide the contexts of each participant's life. For example, they reflected on the geographic moves since childhood, current and past family status and living situations, current and past careers (if retired), the ebb and flow of relationships, life challenges, and future plans. These life-story overviews included a line across the top of the page labeled Age and Year and indicated the major life events at different points in time and their reflections about certain events. The idea to conceptualize one's life temporally was similar to the life drawing technique (Whitbourne & Dannefer, 1985–1986) and life graph (Birren & Cochran, 2001, *pp.* 155–156). However, their focuses were about individuals' perception of time and their subjective life peaks and valleys. In my analysis, the life-story overviews were mainly meant to contextualize the themes identified in the thematic analysis.

I then revised the codes by constantly comparing with the theoretical and empirical findings related to purpose in life and midlife development, and finally synthesized the codes for overarching themes and key concepts. It is particularly important to keep self-reflexivity during analysis (Creswell, 2014). I reflected on my subjective and theoretical perspectives when reading and listening to the life stories from the perspectives of the participants. Moreover, as a non-American and as someone younger than the participants, I was aware of the possibility that I would never fully understand their purpose in life the way they experienced it. However, I strived to be as close to their subjective perspectives as possible. A qualitative data management software program (ATLAS.ti Version 7.5.6) was used to facilitate organizing the iterative

analysis process.

Summary

To keep the quantitative and qualitative results discrete, yet connected to each other, I decided to present quantitative analysis results first in the following chapter, Chapter 4. Next, I described how I incorporated the quantitative findings to inform my qualitative analyses for a more comprehensive understanding of purpose in life development among late-midlife adults. I summarized the qualitative analyses and findings in Chapter 5. The final chapter provides a conceptual integration of quantitative and qualitative findings.

CHAPTER 4: PURPOSE IN LIFE TRAJECTORIES AND PREDICTORS IN LATE MIDLIFE

In this chapter, I present the quantitative results applying GMM, using normal and non-normal mixture modeling. In particular, I describe how the non-normal mixture model best estimates the PIL trajectory compared to the normal mixture model. The findings are discussed in transition to qualitative analyses in the following chapter.

Quantitative Results

Table 4.1 shows the descriptive statistics for PIL and baseline psychosocial variables. At the first glance, the means of PIL from Time 1 to Time 5 are similar across time, ranging from 3.84 to 3.94. Moreover, African Americans, on average, reported higher PIL than White Americans. As shown in Table 4.2, PIL were moderately yet significantly correlated across the five years (correlations ranged between 0.58 and 0.73). Generativity and the personality traits of conscientiousness and extraversion were positively associated with PIL over time and negatively associated with neuroticism, as expected. The associations between PIL and sociodemographic characteristics vary by waves but mostly were non-significant. However, the significant correlations between race and PIL over time were consistent with the observed mean differences between White and African American participants. Education was not significantly correlated with PIL across time. Gender was moderately significantly correlated to PIL at only two time points.

Reviewing individual plots of PIL across waves suggested that some participants had observable changes, ups and downs, in PIL over five years, whereas most maintained stable (163 longitudinal plots not shown). This supported the decision to use GMM analysis, which allows for examining underlying population heterogeneity in purpose in life. I conducted and compared

GMM results between normal and non-normal distributions. Assuming a normal distribution of PILs, the one- and two-class models were able to converge, but a three-class model failed to converge. Normal distribution mixture modeling indicated that the two-class linear model was significantly better than the one-class model (two-class normal BIC = 1473.48 versus one-class normal BIC = 1486.89) ($LMR = 26.92, p < 0.02$; $BLRT(3) = 28.68, p < 0.001$). Moreover, a two-class quadratic normal model (BIC = 1487.24) performed worse than the two-class linear model. Thus, assuming a mixture of normal distributions led us to select a two-class linear model as being the most appropriate form to describe the PIL data.

I then explored the non-normal mixture modeling. Rather than explaining the observed data using a mixture of normal distributions, this analysis assumed that the within-class data were skewed and had thicker tails than would be appropriate under a normal distribution. I specified one-class non-normal models with latent variances and covariances fixed and had model convergence without problems. For non-normal GMM, the models decompose each latent variable into two portions to explain the latent trajectory: one is normally distributed and the other follows a half non-normal distribution. The normal portion is defined by one level parameter (the mean) and one shape parameter (the variance) whereas the half non-normal portion is parametrically defined by two shape parameters (the skewness and degree of freedom), with the level parameter tied directly to that of the normally distributed parameter. Therefore, the overall mean of the latent trajectory is defined by the parameter estimated as the latent mean. The shape of the trajectory is defined by three components: the variance of the normally distributed portion and the skew and degree of freedom of the half non-normally distributed portion. Fixing the estimated variance to zero suggested the variance of the normal portion is zero. The trajectory still has variation as a direct function of the half-non-normally distributed

parameters, skewness and degree of freedom. The result indicated the one-class non-normal mixture modeling with a skewed- t distribution estimated linear trajectories of PIL significantly better than the one-class model with a skewed-normal distribution. A two-class skewed- t model produced a number of estimation errors and did not fit the data any better than the one-class skewed- t model (two-class skewed- t BIC = 1374.47 versus one-class skewed- t BIC = 1368.97). Moreover, a one-class quadratic skewed- t model fit worse than the linear model (BIC = 1373.44). Therefore, assuming a mixture of skewed- t distributions indicated a one-class skewed- t linear model as being the most appropriate form to describe the PIL data.

Table 4.3 summarized the results comparing two mixture models. The one-class skewed- t mixture model appeared to provide more parsimonious explanation of the data than the two-class normal mixture model (one-class skewed- t BIC = 1368.97 versus two-class normal BIC = 1473.48). I based the decision on the BIC values. BIC represents total model fit weighed by the number of estimated parameters. BIC is lower for a model with fewer parameter estimates than a model that fits the data equally well but requires more parameter estimates. As such, the model with the lowest BIC value indicated the most parsimonious model. For both mixture models, the linear models were better than the quadratic models. Only the intercept parameters were significant—not the slopes, suggesting individuals varied in their initial levels of PIL but did not change at all over the five years. The variance of the intercept was described by the significant skew parameters (the skew of -2.29 provides a variance of .718). Importantly, the skewness parameters for intercept and degree of freedom were significant in the one-class skewed- t mixture model, explaining the reasons of finding two classes when assuming normality versus a single skewed- t class. That is, the small class in the two-class results is considered as representing the tail of the skewed- t distribution, while the large class represents the bell area of

the skewed- t distribution.

To ensure the superiority of the skewed- t model, I further compared criterion analyses between the one-class skewed- t and two-class normal mixture models to examine whether the predictors behaved substantially differently in the tail versus the bell area of the distributions. Due to the only significance of intercept rather than slope in both models, for the one-class skewed- t mixture model, I regressed the random intercept on the predictors. For the two-class normal mixture model, I regressed class membership on the predictors (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014a). Three participants were excluded from the models due to their missingness for one or two of the predictors, race and/or generativity. Table 4.4 presents the estimated effects of the baseline predictors on the skewed- t and normally distributed PIL trajectories. The two regression results were similar in that race and conscientiousness significantly predicted higher levels of PIL among participants (effect size = 0.25, $p = 0.003$; effect size = 0.42, $p = 0.008$, respectively). Therefore, the current data did not support rejecting the more parsimonious one-class skewed- t mixture model in favor of a less parsimonious two-class normal mixture model (updated one-class skewed- t BIC = 1337.39 versus updated two-class normal BIC = 1436.15). The result suggested that PIL was stable over time and non-normally distributed in the sample (See Figure 4.2).

Discussion

This first goal of this study was to examine the trajectories of purpose in life during late midlife. The quantitative findings suggest that midlife adults show remarkable stability in purpose in life, with their PIL scores following a skewed- t distribution. A majority of the participants in this study displayed high, stable levels of PIL, whereas a smaller subset displayed stable, low levels of PIL. With the present data, I was not able to detect different patterns of

trajectories underlying the non-normality among midlife adults. Nevertheless, the findings illustrated how GMM with normal and non-normal distributions may capture unobserved population heterogeneity in longitudinal data (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014a, 2014b).

The average PIL among the participants in this study was comparable to the participants from the MIDUS II national study, which used the same seven-item Purpose in Life (PIL) subscale (Mean = 3.74; SD = 1.00; Ryff et al., 2012). However, without examining the longitudinal trajectories in another, larger sample, it is not my intent to generalize the current results to the general population. Moreover, purpose in life is highly correlated with other measures of well-being. Although one study using the five-wave Health and Retirement Survey (HRS; 1992–2000) found three longitudinal normal-distributed patterns of emotional psychological well-being in transition to retirement (Wang, 2007), the patterns might be better estimated by applying non-normal growth mixture models due to the observed skewed distributions of their outcomes (M. Wang, personal communication, February 26, 2015).

The second goal of this study was to explore the extent to which certain sociodemographic and personality characteristics predicted purpose in life longitudinally from midlife adults' late 50s to early 60s. Given the fact that the majority of the participants showed a higher-stable level of PIL, it is important to investigate potential factors differentiating them from a smaller proportion of the participants with lower PIL.

The regression result indicated a significant racial difference, such that African Americans were more likely to report higher purpose in life than White Americans. One explanation may be related to higher education among this sample of African Americans in comparison to education levels among most midlife African Americans. Previous findings from the MIDUS sample showed that the effect of race on purpose of life varied by one's level of

education (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003). They found that both White and African American participants with lower levels of education reported similar levels of PIL. However, for each unit increase in education, African Americans tended to report as twice an increase in PIL compared with White Americans. However, the effect of education was not significant in this study, which may be due to the fact that the current sample of African Americans were highly educated (66% with college education and beyond) compared with about 15% of the MIDUS Black sample. The correlations between education, race, and PIL over time were not significant. Future research could examine how higher educational status might have contributed to increased sense of purpose in life and goal-orientation for African Americans during middle adulthood in a larger sample.

Another explanation emphasizes the positive association between formal religious participation or spirituality and purpose in life (Emmons, 1999; Greenfield, Vaillant, & Marks, 2009; Krause, 2008). Religiosity and spirituality are critically significant in African American culture (Chatters, Nguyen, & Taylor, 2014). National surveys have indicated that African Americans have the highest levels of religious involvement across ages. Moreover, older African Americans tend to consider spirituality important in their lives and are more likely to identify themselves as being spiritual than older Whites. One study that focused exclusively on older African Americans found that religiosity significantly predicted purpose in life by showing that all forms of religious involvement consistently promote one's sense of purpose in life (Frazier, Mintz, & Mobley, 2005). In another study using the two-wave data from a national survey directed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Krause (2008) examined particularly the effect of emotional and spiritual support provided by church friends on older adults' religious meaning in life. He found that older African Americans tended to report a

deeper sense of religious meaning in life than older White Americans, and such racial difference was observed largely because older African Americans were more likely to receive spiritual and emotional support from those they interacted with in church. Moreover, spiritual support appeared to have a larger effect on their religious meaning in life than emotional support. Formal religious participation seemed to be a critical lens to understanding older African Americans' life experiences of meaning and purpose in life. Future studies are still needed, however, to examine whether these effects remain for younger and middle-aged African Americans due to the overall decreased religious practice in these cohorts. Unfortunately, in our study there was no baseline information available in regard to the participants' religiosity. It is important to further examine the role of religiosity and spirituality in promoting purpose in life for African Americans.

The findings indicate that late-midlife adults have remarkably stable trajectories of purpose in life despite the many changes associated with their development in late midlife, such as the death of one's parents, children moving away, retirement, becoming a grandparent, and health changes (Lachman, 2004). A few intriguing questions arise: When and how do people form purpose in life? With the majority displaying higher sense of purpose in life, how do they maintain such purpose in life as they transition into older adulthood? Most importantly, how can we promote purpose in life into late adulthood? Based on prior research, the formation of purpose in life aligns with identity formation in adolescence (Bronk, 2014; Damon, 2009; Erikson, 1963). As such, adolescents revise their identity in relation to their purpose in life over time. Inferring from research on midlife generativity development, which is considered the major developmental purpose during middle adulthood, the process of forming such generative purpose could be tied to processes similar to those in adolescence (McAdams & de St. Aubin,

1992). Moreover, the processes in which individuals form generativity depend on their cultures, personal beliefs, and concern for future generations. However, in contrast to the hypothesis that higher generativity in midlife may promote one's pursuit for meaning and purpose in life (Erikson, 1963; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987), the effect of generativity was not significant for our sample of middle-aged adults. It thus remains an empirical question whether and how the formation of generativity stabilizes individuals' sense of purpose in life in midlife in relation to their prior developmental experiences.

Guided by the integrative personality framework, it is also important to investigate what role being conscientious plays in this process, in addition to generativity. Consistent with prior studies, we found that higher and stable positive purpose in life may be a long-term benefit of having a responsible and healthy lifestyle as well as prosocial activities, such as going to church and volunteering for community (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams, 2012; McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993; Pinquart, 2002; Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). It is therefore important to explore the effects of lifestyle, social involvement, and civic engagement on those high versus low in conscientiousness, in relation to their sense of purpose in life. In contrast, extraversion and neuroticism did not significantly predict sense of purpose in life in this study. In earlier studies on meaning and personality, Maddi (1998) introduced the trait of hardiness for those who seemed to welcome life challenges, have control over them, and make long-term commitment in the midst of changes. Subsequent research suggested hardiness was not a unitary personality trait, but rather a combination of partly high conscientiousness, partly low neuroticism, and maybe partly high openness (McAdams, 2012). To illustrate the effects of personality traits on purpose in life, it may be worthwhile to explore the interplays between traits and the other levels of personality construct.

Study Strength and Limitations

Although the present study provides a deeper examination of purpose in life during the age period of 55 to 65, some limitations need to be addressed. One concern regarding this study is its use of non-normal GMM with a relatively small sample size. Although non-normal mixture modeling tends to require larger sample sizes than modeling with the normal distribution, it is still possible to conduct successful analyses with a smaller sample size (e.g., 100–200; Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014b). The high correspondence between the normal versus skewed- t mixture modeling results lends support to our results.

Sample selection biases also present possible limitations to this study. The sample was a convenience sample. The participants were all from one metropolitan area in the Midwest. Although the study focused on recruiting community participants through various venues, the selected participants might have been attracted to this study because of attributes different from those who did not participate. This difference may be reflected in the fact that almost half of the participants had pursued graduate education. Moreover, only White and African Americans were recruited in the study. With these limitations in mind, I do not aim to generalize the findings to the entire population. Instead, the result from this exploratory study suggests the importance of examining development of purpose in life, broadly psychological well-being, and associated psychosocial characteristics by incorporating non-normal mixture models. Future studies should also include a larger and more diverse sample to validate the current findings from middle-aged African Americans and White Americans. High purpose in life in late midlife can launch individuals into a satisfying old age. Understanding components leading to high meaning and purpose in life, when and how they stabilize, and what midlife adults can do to achieve and

maintain high purpose is important because purpose is the scaffold upon which older adults build their last phase of life.

Summary

This study expands our empirical understanding of purpose in life as a stable construct during late midlife. Importantly, the non-normally distributed PIL in this study sample suggests that most participants maintained higher purpose in life, whereas a relatively smaller proportion of midlife adults displayed lower purpose in life over time. Participants who were more conscientious and African American, compared with White Americans, tended to have higher-stable purpose in life. However, the effect of generativity on purpose in life needs further examination (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993). Besides the more positive effects of educational attainment for African Americans than for White Americans, as well as potential effects of religion and spirituality on purpose in life (Chatters, Nguyen, & Taylor, 2014; Krause, 2008; Ryff, 2014; Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003), further investigation is necessary to understand how African Americans and White Americans may differ in conceptualizing and fostering purpose in life. Moreover, it is unclear how life experiences associated with having different racial identities contributed to participants' development of purpose in life. Next, to explore the current quantitative findings in more depth, I have incorporated the life stories from a subsample of the participants to understand the development of purpose in life in the participants' own words.

Table 4.1. *Descriptive Statistics: By All Participants and by Race*

Variables	All Participants		White Americans		African Americans	
	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)
T1 PIL	163	3.94 (.79)	90	3.71 (.77)	70	4.24 (.71)
T2 PIL	158	3.87 (.82)	87	3.63 (.79)	68	4.18 (.76)
T3 PIL	154	3.90 (.84)	87	3.72 (.76)	64	4.15 (.90)
T4 PIL	152	3.84 (.85)	87	3.59 (.87)	62	4.19 (.68)
T5 PIL	147	3.92 (.80)	83	3.65 (.79)	61	4.30 (.66)
Conscientiousness	163	2.91 (.58)	90	2.87 (.58)	70	2.96 (.58)
Extraversion	163	2.50 (.52)	90	2.42 (.60)	70	2.59 (.44)
Neuroticism	163	1.33 (.69)	90	1.51 (.70)	70	1.12 (.60)
Generativity (LGS)	162	2.16 (.44)	90	2.06 (.44)	69	2.28 (.43)
Gender	163	64% (na)	90	59% (na)	70	73% (na)
Education	163		90		70	
College and over		68% (na)		72% (na)		61% (na)
Some college and less		33% (na)		28% (na)		39% (na)

Note: T1 PIL–T5 PIL= Purpose in Life Subscale scores from Time 1 to Time 5, ranging from 0–5; LGS= Loyola Generativity Scale. Gender: 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*.

Table 4.2. *Correlation Matrix: By Outcome and Predictor Variables (N = 163 Participants at First Assessment)*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. T1 PIL	1.00										
2. T2 PIL	.73 ^{***}	1.00									
3. T3 PIL	.61 ^{***}	.61 ^{***}	1.00								
4. T4 PIL	.66 ^{***}	.64 ^{***}	.63 ^{***}	1.00							
5. T5 PIL	.71 ^{***}	.63 ^{***}	.58 ^{***}	.70 ^{***}	1.00						
6. C	.48 ^{***}	.39 ^{***}	.30 ^{***}	.45 ^{***}	.32 ^{***}	1.00					
7. E	.40 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.19 [*]	.29 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}	.28 ^{***}	1.00				
8. N	-.48 ^{***}	-.50 ^{***}	-.44 ^{***}	-.43 ^{***}	-.36 ^{***}	-.42 ^{***}	-.46 ^{***}	1.00			
9. LGS	.49 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.25 ^{**}	.36 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.25 ^{**}	.48 ^{***}	-.39 ^{***}	1.00		
10. Gender	.14	.16 [*]	.17 [*]	.15	.12	.13	.08	.01	.06	1.00	
11. Education	.01	-.02	-.02	.00	.01	-.03	-.07	.06	.13	-.16 [*]	1.00
12. Race	.33 ^{***}	.33 ^{***}	.26 ^{**}	.35 ^{***}	.40 ^{***}	.07	.16 [*]	-.28 ^{***}	.24 ^{**}	.14	-.11

Note: C, E, N: Personality traits of conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism. LGS=

Loyola Generativity Scale. Gender: 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*. Education: 0 = *some college and less*,

1 = *college and over*. Race: 0 = *White American*, 1 = *African American*. *** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq$

.01; * = $p \leq .05$;

Table 4.3. *Unstandardized Parameter Estimates of the Non-Normal and Normal Mixture Models*

	One-class non-normal model		Two-class normal model			
	Class 1 (n = 163)		Class 1 (n = 38)		Class 2 (n = 125)	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Parameter Means						
Intercept	3.90***	.06	4.26***	.04	2.83***	.09
Slope	-.01	.02	-.02	.01	.001	.03
Parameter Variance and Covariance						
Skew (intercept)	-1.36***	.08				
Skew (slope)	-.15	.03				
Degree of Freedom	5.55***	1.50				
Cov (intercept, slope)	.003		-.004	.01	-.004	.01

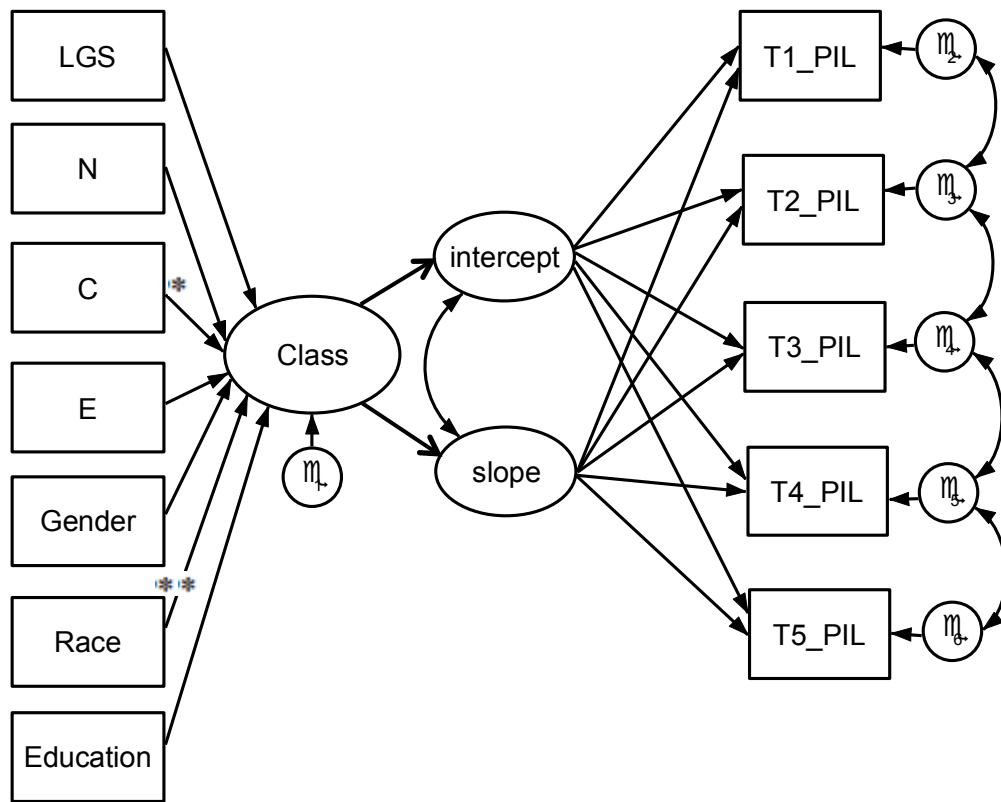
Note: Cov = covariance. *** = $p \leq .001$.

Table 4.4. *Coefficient Estimates for Predictors of the Non-Normal and Normal Mixture Models*

Predictors	One-class non-normal model		Two-class normal model			
	Class 1 (n = 159)		Class 1 (n = 37)	Class 2 (n = 122)		
	Coefficient	SE	Odds Ratio (Class 1 vs. Class 2)			
Conscientiousness	.25*	.07	2.33**	—	—	—
Extraversion	.06	.06	1.40	—	—	—
Neuroticism	-.16	.07	.55	—	—	—
Generativity	.12	.05	2.04**	—	—	—
Gender	.10	.10	2.17	—	—	—
Education	.003	.12	1.38	—	—	—
Race	.42**	.10	3.26*	—	—	—

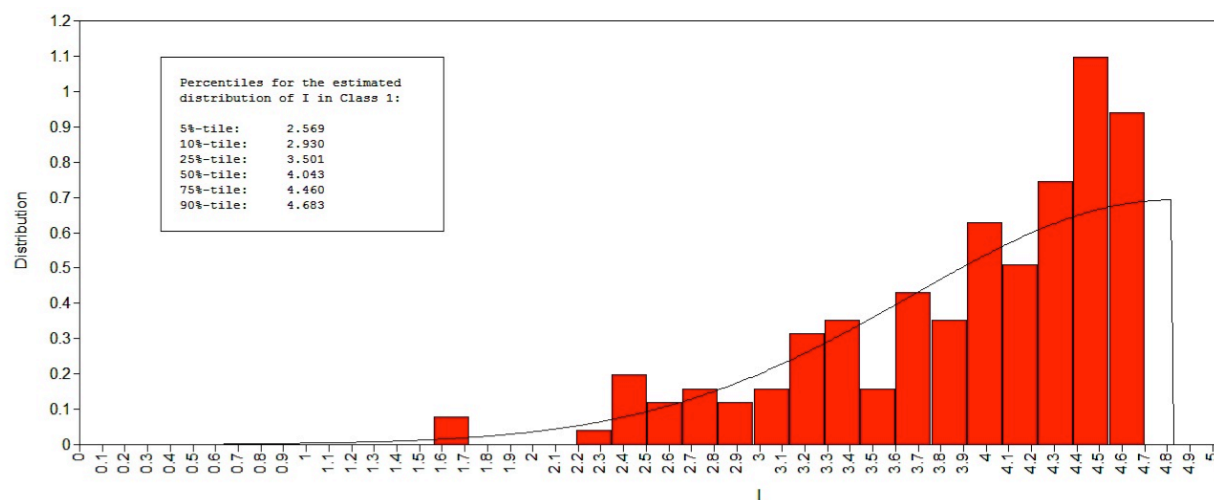
Note: The coefficients in the one-class non-normal model were standardized on the outcome variables, PIL scores. Gender: 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*. Education: 0 = *some college and less*, 1 = *college and over*. Race: 0 = *White American*, 1 = *African American*. *** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$.

Figure 4.1. Final Growth Mixture Model for Purpose in Life over Five Years



Note: N = 159. Latent class formation was estimated by using the five-year scores on Purpose in Life subscale (T1 PIL–T5 PIL), in which the intercept and slope were modeled to inform the class membership. The predictors were baseline measures, including generativity (LGS), neuroticism (N), conscientiousness (C), and extraversion (E), gender, race, and level of education. ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$.

Figure 4.2. Estimated Intercepts of Purpose in Life within One Non-Normal Class Adjusted for Baseline Predictors



CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE PURPOSE IN LIFE FOR LATE MIDLIFE FEMALES

To explore how people qualitatively define and develop their sense of purpose in life over time, I applied a thematic analytical approach to a subsample of 16 female participants' life-story interviews at Time 1 and Time 5 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involves a process of coding and identifying themes in relation to the participants' purpose in life. I first outline the overview of purpose in life identified from the subsample, followed by themes and sources related to their purpose in life. Moreover, I discuss similarities and differences in findings between and within individuals to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative results, especially by examining how qualitative themes and sources related to purpose in life differ between those with higher and lower PIL, between African American and White female participants, and by levels of conscientiousness.

Qualitative Analysis

Subsampling Procedure Based on Quantitative Results

Guided by the quantitative finding of the one-class, non-normal distributed quantitative PIL trajectory among participants, I purposively subsampled 16 participants for the qualitative analysis. Eight participants from the overall sample with higher PIL and eight participants with lower PIL, respectively, were sampled to capture the exemplary cases and better explain the quantitative results. Moreover, I sampled an equal number of African American and White American participants to further explore the significant racial effect on the PIL trajectory. Given that the research aim was to explore how people define and develop their sense of purpose in life over time, I focused on sampling participants with completed Time 1 and Time 5 surveys ($n = 148$). Because only the PIL intercept varied significantly between individuals, not the slope, I

subsampled based on participants' estimated PIL intercepts. Among the 148 participants, I randomly sampled participants within the upper 20% ($n = 30$) and the lower 20% ($n = 30$) of the estimated PIL intercepts.

After I reviewed the participants in the sampling frame, a challenge emerged due to an imbalanced representation by gender and race. There were some African American male participants ($n = 8$) but no male White participants in the higher 20% of PIL trajectory. In the lower 20% of PIL trajectory, there was an equal representation of men and women, although there were more White Americans ($n = 25$; 13 females and 12 males) in this category when compared with African Americans ($n = 5$; 2 females and 3 males). This may seem to contradict the GMM results indicating that the gender effect was not significant, but it is likely due to the sample size constraint of 53 males compared with 95 females in the overall study sample. Moreover, in the overall sample White males ($n = 35$) were twice as numerous as African American males ($n = 16$), whereas the numbers of White and African American females were more balanced ($n = 49$ and $n = 45$, respectively). (The missing number of three participants was due to unspecified racial identity.) The gender imbalance combined with the race imbalance would have resulted in very limited sampling of both races and both genders between those with higher and lower PIL trajectories.

This resulted in a difficult decision to include only female participants in the subsample frame ($n = 37$). Research has shown that men and women experience life differently (Cole, 2009). In particular, inequality is likely to be experienced in terms of the multiple social categories in which one belongs to, including gender, class, and race. For this study, the intersectionality of gender and race led to the justifiable decision to include only one gender in the qualitative portion of this study in order to more thoroughly explore racial differences and

purpose in life in the context of women's lives. Moreover, recent literature has highlighted that African American females tend to experience more social challenges, especially racism and sexism, over their life span compared with White females as well as White and African American males (Baker, Buchanan, Mingo, Roker, & Brown, 2015).

The final subsample consisted of 16 female participants. In particular, I randomly selected eight female participants from the top 20% ($n = 22$) and eight from the lower 20% ($n = 15$) PIL trajectories, proportionally by race. I utilized the RANDOM function in Excel to generate 16 random numbers. For the top 20%, six out of 16 African American females were randomly selected, while two out of six White American females were randomly selected. For the lower 20%, six out of 13 White American females were randomly selected. The only exception was that there were only two African American females in the lower 20%, and therefore they were selected purposively. Unexpectedly, one of them did not complete her Time 5 life-story interview, but she was still enrolled in the overall study and completed the online surveys for the five years. I explored whether there would be other African American females for this subsample by expanding the sampling frame to the lower 25% rather than 20% of PIL trajectory. However, these two cases were the only ones to remain with this new sampling frame. Because the purpose of this qualitative analysis was to explore whether there were distinct themes and patterns of purpose in life development in the quantitatively higher versus lower PIL trajectory, I decided not to sacrifice the power of the qualitative sampling by increasing the quartile brackets of PIL trajectory. The other justification was the relative adequacy of having only the Time 1 life story to understand one's life purposes compared to having only the Time 5 life story. As described in the study design, during the Time 1 life-story interview, participants were asked to review their whole life until the present as book chapters,

but not at the Time 5 interview. This provided sufficient information for a general plot of this participant's life and helped create understanding of how she defined and developed purpose in life. As a result, the final subsample was a total of 16 female participants, including eight African Americans and eight White Americans, for a total of 31 life stories.

For the purpose of this present study, I assigned pseudonyms for the 16 participants. Table 5.1 lists their pseudonyms and key demographic characteristics. In particular, pseudonyms beginning with the letter H (Hanna, Hailee, Heather, Haley, Helen, Holly, Hester, and Helena) refer to those higher in PIL, and pseudonyms beginning with the letter L (Laura, Lany, Leah, Lulu, Lucy, Lydia, Lisa, and Lili) represent those lower in PIL.

Thematic Analysis

For the analysis, I followed the six phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) and applied a theoretical thematic approach to code and identify themes in the data.

Phase 1: Becoming Familiar with the Data. My qualitative data included the 31 subsampled participants' life story transcripts, collected from Time 1 and Time 5 life-story interviews (McAdams, 1993, 2008). The transcripts ranged from 23 to 48 pages (Time 1) and 16 to 64 pages (Time 5) depending on how the participants narrated their lives in responding to the interview questions. Confirming with the FLSA researchers, most of the 31 interviews were conducted in the Northwestern University office, except one conducted over the phone for the convenience of the participant. During the interviews, the interviewer tended not to interrupt the participants' responses and reflections, but they rather asked for additional information afterward if the participants missed parts of the questions or needed to clarify their life experiences and reflections.

Because I did not collect the data, the transcripts were the major source of my analysis,

instead of field notes or other contextual information during the interviews. However, I was able to immerse myself in the data by reading and rereading the transcripts while also listening to the audio interview recordings. Unfortunately, only Time 5 audio recordings were available, and Time 1 audios were lost in the data collection and management process. Nevertheless, this process provided a better understanding regarding the interview interactions. For example, how the participants felt emotionally during the interview process often was reflected in their expressive tones. Moreover, longer pauses during the interview could reflect their hesitation, thinking process, or recovery of their emotions. Listening to the audio recordings also allowed me to check for accuracy in the transcripts. During this data immersion phase, I started taking notes, writing summaries, and jotting down any preliminary ideas for stimulating my coding in subsequent phases.

Importantly, due to the nature of the life-story data, I mapped out a life-story overview for each participant based on their Time 1 and Time 5 interview transcripts. These life-story overviews facilitated my understanding of how life experiences were embedded in the participants' lives over the lifespan. Similar to the notes I recorded during the process of reading, I also wrote memos on my thoughts for each individual's life story for the subsequent analyses. The life-story overviews for all 16 participants are included in Appendix E.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes. As intended, my coding focused on the sections related to future plans, values, and life themes. The full text of Time 1 responses ranged from 93 to 778 words ($M = 327$, $SD = 192$) for “the next chapter”, 50–822 words ($M = 303$, $SD = 218$) for “dreams, hopes, and plans for the future”, 114–1450 words ($M = 514$, $SD = 383$) for “life project”, 106–959 words ($M = 399$, $SD = 227$) for “single value in human living”, and 80–693 words ($M = 399$, $SD = 227$) for “major life theme”. For Time 5, the response texts ranged from

112 to 872 words ($M = 388$, $SD = 239$) for “the next chapter”; 30–830 words ($M = 280$, $SD = 219$) for “dreams, hopes, and plans for the future”; 95–551 words ($M = 199$, $SD = 114$) for “single value in human living”; and 91–729 words ($M = 266$, $SD = 172$) for “major life theme”. However, individuals varied in how much they responded to the same questions from Time 1 to Time 5.

To develop the initial codes, I used a constant comparison approach by doing incident-by-incident coding (Charmaz, 2006), in which I read and coded every open-ended question in the targeted sections across the 16 participants. The codes were refined and/or added through the process when new sources of purpose in life were identified. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), I coded as many as possible for potential themes and coded the quotes inclusively. That is, I kept contextual information relevant to the codes. Moreover, multiple codes were allowed to apply to each quote if they conveyed more than one source of purpose in life. I also paid attention to contradictory incidents that seemed to depart from the more frequent codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2006). As a result, there were 54 codes identified, varying by code frequency and by number of participants (See Table 5.2).

Phase 3: Searching for Overarching Codes. Once all the sections in the data were coded, I read through the codes and the attached quotes multiple times across individuals over time (Braun & Clarke, 2006, *pp.* 19–20). During the process, I was not blind to the scores participants gave to their sense of purpose in life over the five years. By reviewing their longitudinal quantitative changes in PIL and the overall life-story overviews I created in Appendix E, I was able to contextualize codes and derive potential themes across individuals. The codes formed the nine overarching codes: relationship (codes 1–11), self-needs (codes 12–24), work (codes 25–31), personal growth (codes 32–36), service to others (codes 37–41),

spirituality (codes 42–45), health (codes 46), housing/relocation (codes 47–50), and major life theme (codes 51–54) (See Table 5.2). These overarching codes were not mutually exclusive to each other, as some participants might find primary importance in meeting their needs in both personal and family contexts, while others might find personal growth through work and services to others.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes. Two steps were suggested in this phase to examine the *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity* of each overarching codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, *pp.* 20–21). I first reviewed the codes by checking whether they were consistent with the coded quotes. It was also helpful to review the codes in reference to the theoretical and empirical findings of meaning and purpose in life (O’Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker & Wong, 2012). Within the overarching codes, I sorted 26 codes to form 16 sub-overarching codes (See Table 5.3). Other codes were discarded for their irrelevance to individuals’ purpose in life; however, they were not deleted from the analysis until I finalized the overarching codes. When the overarching codes and sub-overarching codes sufficiently captured individuals’ purpose in life across the codes and quotations, I moved on to the second step: validating the overarching codes and sub-overarching codes in relation to the entire data set and examining whether they reflected the overall life stories of the participants. After reviewing the themes, I focused on addressing how each theme fit into the broader “picture” of purpose in life, and how each overarching code was related to each other as I mapped them together. The final overarching codes seemed to reflect Reker and Wong’s (2012) theoretical framework in that they could be grouped into sources of purpose in life from self-preoccupation to self-transcendence: *self-needs*, *work*, *personal growth*, *family relationships*, *caring for others*, and *spirituality* (see Table 5.3). Moreover, the last overarching code, *major life themes*, was derived from the last interview

question in which participants were explicitly asked about their central life themes after participants had reviewed their life stories. Unlike the other six overarching codes, which were derived from the participants' goals and plans for the future, major life theme provided information as to whether and how the participants had constructed a coherent idea throughout their life stories.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Overarching Codes. At this point, I aimed to define and refine the overarching codes and sub-overarching codes in detail to ensure that the scope for each code was clear and distinct from each other. I did so by going back to the coded quotes for each codes, including the discarded ones to see whether the overarching codes and sub-overarching codes were able to capture the themes of purpose in life that are different between individuals and changes over time within each person. Through the process, I refined a few overarching codes and sub-overarching codes (see Table 5.4).

For *self-needs*, I reviewed the quotes from the codes “Focusing on meeting own needs” and “Taking care of self and being healthy,” and combined them into one sub-overarching code, “Meeting basic needs and happiness.” It mainly tapped into maintenance of basic needs and hedonistic activities in the self-preoccupation category (Reker & Wong, 2012).

I combined the codes “Planning to travel more in the future” and “Pursuing personal hobbies” into the sub-overarching code, “Leisure activities.”

For *work*, the codes “Self-fulfilling” and “Feeling constrained by work” were combined into the sub-overarching code, “Work achievement.”

For *personal growth*, I renamed as *personal development* and renamed the first sub-overarching code “Finding self-strength and resilience.” In addition, I reviewed the quotes

related to “Having integrity as important value” and included it as a sub-overarching code to this theme because participants talked about how their values supported their own development.

The last code, “Challenging social norms,” was merged with “Mentoring others” in the overarching code *caring for others* because challenging social norms was discussed by participants as a reason they were mentoring others. For *caring for others*, I separated the two codes under the sub-overarching code “Expressing compassion” into two sub-overarching codes: “Acting with compassion” and “Planning to volunteer”. When the participants talked about volunteering in the future, they did not necessarily explain their motivation as compassion. In contrast, in the coded quotes about compassion, the participants spoke explicitly about caring for, sharing with, and helping others.

No revision was done for the overarching codes of *family relationships*, *spirituality*, and *major life themes*. The final overarching codes and sub-overarching codes are summarized in Table 5.4 and the correspondent selected quotes from the participants are presented in Table 5.5.

Phase 6: Summarizing the Analysis Results. The overarching codes represented the broad themes and sources through which late-midlife female participants formed their purpose in life. This last phase of analysis proceeded on two levels: within and between individuals. For the within-individual analysis, the guiding question was whether and how these themes and sources related to purpose in life remained the same or changed between Time 1 and Time 5. That is, were the participants’ purpose in life themes stable or had they changed over time from Time 1 to Time 5? For between-individual analysis, the guiding question was whether there was concordance between the qualitative findings and the quantitative GMM results discussed in Chapter 4. There were five themes that emerged from analyzing the overarching codes within and between participants. In particular, comparisons were made between those with higher and

lower PIL trajectories, and between White and African Americans, as well as between ways that the personality trait conscientiousness was displayed in the themes. In this way, I could evaluate the coherence within and across themes and contrast discrepant information against the themes across the subsample.

Findings

As I read through their life-story narratives, the women demonstrated a variety of ways they make meaning and derive purpose in life. Even though they were not asked directly about personal definitions of purpose in life during the interviews, they discussed future plans, goals, values, and central life themes by which they planned to direct their futures. As such, the themes identified in the qualitative analysis are likely to contribute to their overall purpose in life.

In the first theme, late midlife female adults appeared to derive their purpose in life from **multiple sources**, including *self-needs, work, family relationships, personal development, caring for others, and spirituality*. The second theme, identified as **centrality of family**, participants talked about family relationships as important in their lives. The third theme, **faith and spirituality**, appeared to guide purpose in life for only a few participants. In the fourth theme, participants typically responded to life challenges by **being proactive versus being reactive**. In the fifth theme, participant narratives indicated that they either focused on **serving others or serving self**. In the following, I discuss each theme in details.

Multiple Sources of Purpose in Life Over Time

The first finding suggests people are able to derive meaning and purpose in life from multiple sources. The 16 female participants discussed their lives across the six sources that were likely to provide them with purpose in life:

Self-needs. The first source of purpose in life identified among the participants was self-needs. Eleven participants discussed self-needs as their future focus. Among them, six participants discussed meeting their basic needs and hedonistic pleasure. Eight participants (some of them discussed basic needs and hedonistic pleasure as well) talked about pursuing leisure activities.

Meeting basic needs and happiness. Six participants expressed their desire to be more self-oriented. Three of them talked about meeting self-needs at both Time 1 and Time 5, whereas the other three mentioned meeting self-needs at either time point. Nevertheless, they all consistently expressed their desire to be able to take care of themselves, remain healthy, and be happy. For example, Lucy reflected on how she had contributed to her children and work, and thought of now as a time for meeting her own needs:

Stop taking everything on. You know, my problem is I want to fight my kids' battles. I want to fight my grand babies' battles. And I had to put aside some of that... I just got tired of being alone... these kids are grown... I'm focusing on... my happiness now and being a little selfish, and I'm glad I am. Cause I gave my whole life to my kids (Lucy, Time 1).

Five years later during the interview, Lucy consistently discussed her desire to separate from her adult children to fulfill her needs for self-independence.

I've been living here with my children. And I'm really at the point now, I'm ready to live off on my own again. And even if I don't make [it] with him [her boyfriend], I want to have my own place, because I feel like this. They're grown. I'm grown. And I've done my share. You know, I'm ready to go to the next level. I've been here for them and sometimes that helps, but then sometimes that don't. That hinders (Lucy, Time 5).

Leisure activities. Regardless of whether they were retired or not, eight participants valued leisure activities in the future. Among them, three participants showed consistency in their pursuit at Time 1 and Time 5. They planned on picking up the hobbies they had learned earlier in life, learning new skills, continuing their current lifestyles, or traveling more. For example, Lisa shared her enjoyment of knitting learned from childhood at Time 1 and expressed

her excitement at Time 5 when she rediscovered her passion for music at a music festival a few years earlier:

Well, I'm going to learn to play an instrument [the mountain dulcimer] that you know, gives me great pleasure. That's what I'm hoping for. Which is kind of like an entry into... I mean almost going back, right? Everybody played the guitar back in the day. I mean I never did, but I enjoyed listening. And so a little bit full circle in that direction. I really enjoy music and I think I want to fill my life with more things that I enjoy like that. You know, and let go some of the other stuff that keeps me stuck or you know, doesn't provide pleasant feelings (Lisa, Time 5).

One participant, Lili, who completed only the Time 1 interview, had pursued her dream as a writer for many years but could not finish her book project due to her busy work schedule. She hoped to complete her book when she retired:

I can't believe this has been like eight or nine years ago. I was influenced by a nephew and niece who were not raised by their mother... my sister who was involved in drugs and alcohol. She is now not for the last two years. But anyway... I've learned some things just watching him and stuff, and seen what, what little boys do and how they react to things... And I decided that I'd like to write a book about... my nephew and his sister primarily... And it's something involving taking parts of their life... if I continue more and more books, if I get it published, it's showing a young man growing of age, going through some of the life changes, making some of the decisions. He and I had an experience and it brought... this all came about with the fact that him really realizing that the grass is not always greener on the other side (Lili, Time 1).

Even though there was no way to know whether she had finished her book five years later, this was her life project that she discussed avidly at Time 1.

For the other four participants, their pursuit for leisure activities seemed to be a consequence of the unexpected life events they experienced during the five years. Hailee talked more about learning and traveling at Time 1 but less at Time 5, although she still hoped very much to travel around the world with her husband. By reviewing her life story, it was clear that her focus had shifted to fixing their house in New Zealand after the recent earthquake, so that they could move back to be with her husband's family in the years to come. Unlike Hailee, Hanna had divorced her husband at Time 4 and now felt freer to pursue what she would enjoy.

She looked forward to traveling with her brother to search for family roots in Ireland at Time 5. For others, pursuing leisure activities often hinged on financial situations. Helena discussed her wish to retire and travel only at Time 1. However, she had been looking for jobs since Time 1 and focused mainly on work and spirituality at Time 5. In contrast, Heather was having health problems and not working at Time 5. She enjoyed not having a busy life, and she pursued leisure activities that she had not been able to do when she was busy at work.

Work. The second source of purpose in life identified is work. Work has been one of the participants' central focuses in life, if not the only focus. At Time 1, 13 participants were still working. There were three participants who had retired before the Time 1 interview, and one retired the year after the Time 1 interview. Only one participant had been looking for jobs over the five years during the study period. Moreover, fourteen participants explicitly discussed the role of work in their lives. Some described their work in terms of work achievement whereas others shared concerns to establish financial security for the future through work.

Work achievement. Eight participants described their work as fulfilling. They tended to talk about finding meaning at work because their work involved helping or educating others. They worked in roles such as schoolteachers, counselors, health-care administrators, and nurses. For example, Lulu shared her late career entry into nursing and what fulfilled her at work:

So I've kind of made a decision to start looking and get back into patient care. And I've interviewed for a home health job where I'd be working with a lot of cancer patients. And when this first came up, 'cause that would be new to me, I was kind of worried about it. But now... I'm kind of excited. I kind of think... you have another 10 years of working and you're old but you're not too old to learn something new... I'd like to think of myself as learning more and not just stagnating and waiting until my retirement. I like to keep learning stuff because... I became a nurse when I was 44... There's still lots to learn. So I'm kind of excited about that. I want to keep doing that. I'm hoping to be—have enough, you know, financial security to retire then. I have a grandson who's two. And I just kind of see myself as working hard until I retire and then hopefully just enjoying my family, God willing (Lulu, Time 1).

Moreover, a closer examination of her life-story overview suggested that her life had mainly focused on work to fulfill herself and meet her financial need. At Time 5, she was not sure whether she would quit working for a long time because she liked what she did. She was imagining herself at least working part-time for as long as she could and maybe volunteering as a nurse if she couldn't work anymore.

However, the other two participants shared that they sometimes felt constrained by their jobs. Lisa was not recognized for her efforts at work, while Lili had some emotionally draining workdays. Lisa wished to retire to be able to spend more time with her grandchildren. When she saw other women her age spending time with their grandchildren at stores, they reminded her of her work-family conflict: "... because they can do it any day they want... it's more a matter of time and organizing time and being able to enjoy, you know. Now it's hard to do that" (Lisa, Time 1). Yet, they both were not planning to stop working, mostly for financial reasons.

Financial security. Nine participants explained that they had to keep working to establish their financial security. Among them, five participants planned to start private businesses before they could no longer work at their current jobs, as an alternative way to maintain their financial security. They talked about investing to become a landlord, owning a private real estate business, starting a business on the Internet, opening a bed and breakfast, and selling life insurance. For example, Haley discussed planning for her private insurance business to ensure that she could keep living comfortably during retirement:

To me I, I would say it's to try to hold onto my job more than anything, at least till I'm able to go into retirement. And... even when I did go to retirement and started collecting my Social Security I plan to still sell insurance. I'll always be working no matter what. I'm trying to hold on [working] as long as I possibly can. A lot of people like to hold onto that [Social Security] check because you're getting it twice a month as opposed to once a month... I want to get me established and start doing some insurance on the side, so I could... have a little clientele going. Yeah, and I'll just run it independently... by

myself... I would say the hope to live comfortably with no interruptions in employment would be a nice thing (Haley, Time 5).

Likewise, one participant discussed her investment in property with her husband years ago, although she did not think the investment was worthwhile.

For the other four participants, they hoped to return to or continue to work even though retirement was still in their future plans. For example, Helena had been looking for jobs over the years and continued to hope to establish her financial security as she aged. Lulu reflected on her work and retirement plan in Time 1 and Time 5. She hoped to be able to keep working for financial security and to be cared for by her daughter when needed:

Finances are a huge issue. It's been a horrible year. And so I'm really hoping... to accomplish in the future is some kind of financial security where I'm not living hand to mouth, paycheck to paycheck. You know, that's a huge goal for me to learn how to manage my money and, and get myself some sense of security there. As far as accomplishing things, you know, my job itself is just kind of a rewarding type job... I just want to keep doing what I do and have some kind of financial security. Be able to help my family a little bit more... I don't have anything huge (Lulu, Time 1).

Well, I figure financially I'll probably have to work until I drop, at least another 10 years. And then hopefully, I'll be able to retire [laughing] and with my grandson and my daughter... I just kind of hope that I can afford, I guess like everybody does now, to have some kind of life. It's so scary now, you know... people live forever. I take care of people that are all in their 90's. It costs them what, \$10,000 a month to stay there... to be honest with you, I don't know how people are going to do all of this. I mean, I look at the situation and I think how are people going to do this? How are we going to live to be 100 years old and take care of ourselves? 'Cause unless you're immensely wealthy, it's very difficult to do. So I'm just kind of taking it a day at a time. I'm hoping that if I'm smart and I'm very lucky and very healthy, very nice to my daughter [laughing] that, you know, things will work out but I don't know... it's really scary when you think about it (Lulu, Time 5).

Regardless of whether the female participants considered retirement to be their next transition, both the pleasure at work and pressure to continue working had given the participants some sense of purpose in life—at least to the extent that they aimed to support themselves living comfortably in the future. Pursuing retirement alone did not seem to provide a sense of purpose

in life for the participants. No matter whether they were working currently, they tended to consider retirement a time to pursue activities with their loved ones, such as traveling with their husbands or grandchildren, or as a time to learn new skills. However, these retirement dreams would be feasible only after they established a certain degree of financial security.

Family relationships. The third source of purpose in life identified is family relationships.

Fifteen out of the 16 participants talked about their focus on relationships with family members and/or romantic partners. Four aspects seemed to capture the variety of their family focus: (a) focusing on family in general, (b) valuing marriage or partnership, (c) supporting adult children and family members, and (d) being a grandmother.

Focusing on family in general. Though many participants talked about the role of family in the future, eight participants *explicitly* described family as their central focus in life. Five of them depicted their love for family as central to their lives and described how family relationships had enriched them as a person. For example, Hailee described the meaning of family to her, often in a sense of reciprocity in caring for each other and expanding to their general interpersonal relationships:

Well, I would say that it must have to do with significant relationships... that's what has made my life rich is family relationships, and relationships with my husband, and his significant family, and to have been a part of my family as long as I could, and to have taken care of my parents as they took care of me. That would certainly be a theme. Not just family relationships, but just relationships in general... I really value friends. I try to nurture them, and to take care of friendships... and I have some just significant, wonderful, long-time friends that it gives your life value... (Hailee, Time 1).

From a slightly different perspective, the other three participants discussed their roles as mothers and wives to their family members. Laura found intergenerational connections with her prior generations, especially in taking on the roles of her mother and grandmother:

I accept the fact that... my mother will soon be gone, and she's really the last of that generation. And in a way, it's kind of nice. I see my sister and myself at least as being

who my mom and my aunt and my grandma were, and that's kind of neat. I like the concept of seeing us moving to the next phase... not that I want my mother gone, but it's such a concrete picture that... this is where we go next (Laura, Time 1).

Moreover, among the four participants who had no biological children of their own, two had reframed their identity of being childless. Instead of taking the conventional view of the nuclear family, the two participants actively nurtured younger generations of their extended family and took the responsibility of caring for other family members:

Family project... I have like five or six young nieces. I'd just like to be able to enjoy more time and be able to be there with them. Go out with them more. 'Cause I came from a large family and we always had kids in the family (Haley, Time 1).

My husband and I are at a point where we just turned the page, a significant chapter... we have finished... taking care of the elderly and put them to rest, and we have no children, so we are foot loose and fancy free... I feel like we need to make that [my husband's family] a significant part of our future too because he's been quite a lot to me and my family... to be part of their lives, part of the kids, and offspring's of their life 'cause we don't have our own; nieces and nephews and things like that (Hailee, Time 1).

As negative cases to contrast with Haley's and Hailee's ability to reframe the meaning of family, the other two childless participants lower in PIL did not seem able to do so. Lili was considering getting married for the first time in her life at Time 1. She had cared for her mother for more than 20 years in her adulthood until her mother died when Lili was in her 40s. She talked about losing her biological father and stepfather in her 30s. She seemed to be on her own without a close network of family anymore. Although she had grown up in a large family with nine siblings, she never felt close to them and had to overcome the feeling that her mother did not love her as much as her siblings. The themes that had provided her a sense of purpose in life were less from family relationships and more about fulfilling her self-needs, working, and gaining strength and growth from her life challenges. Similarly, Leah had been concerned about being alone throughout her Time 1 and Time 5 life stories. Although she was very close to her mother, her mother died in her late 80s. Leah had a limited social network and did not have a

romantic partner, even though she would have liked to be married. She had many regrets about not expanding her social circle earlier in life, but she also talked about her preference for doing things alone. To her, it was just luck, good and bad, the way her life had turned out. She believed her life was more boring than most people's because she did not have her own family.

But somebody else would have had a completely different book because their most outstanding part of their life would have been their husband, and their children, and their mother and father, and taking care of their elderly mother and father, and I don't have any of that, so it's been really about my career and luckily I do have something to speak about because I went back to work, so otherwise, I would really be a zero (Leah, Time 5).

She showed a strong tendency to believe that she did not have a meaningful life story to share with others. Consistent with the trend observed in this sample, close family relationships, following the social norms of having a spouse and children, would have made her life meaningful to others.

Valuing marriage or partnership. Eleven participants discussed how they valued their relationships with their husbands or romantic partners. For the five White participants who were married, they discussed their lives as closely interconnected with their husbands' life plans, especially with affection and closeness: "I feel very close to my husband. We are very lucky we have a very nice marriage, so we will be married 29 years in August. I just like being with him" (Lany, Time 1). Similarly, through Time 1 and Time 5 Hailee consistently discussed her future plans with her husband:

Well, can't think of an actual, like, this is my life purpose project, but I would say it would have to do with creating ongoing enrichment activities with my husband that... because we met late in life he certainly is a part of my project. You know I have had 15 years with him, and hope to have you know 30 more, but we both have a real desire to continue to learn, and experience new cultures. So, I guess that the project would be to continually put out for us whether it is in the way of a visit, or a trip, or a travel... to continue to enrich our lives by learning, and participating in activities that have to do with travel, and broadening our knowledge of cultures would be a project I think that would be significant (Hailee, Time 1).

However, for Lisa, who was not on the same path to retirement as her husband was, some anxiety and uncertainty arose when she contemplated their future together: “He’s [my husband] talking about retiring next year... So I’m nervous about that and I’m not going to be able to look forward to retiring, I’m guessing until I’m 66, which is at least 11 years... that makes me nervous because it’s every year that goes by harder and harder to... work the same full time job that I did the year before, the year before that” (Lisa, Time 1). Nevertheless, all of these five married White participants valued their relationships with their husbands and planned to enjoy their lives together.

Regarding the six African American participants who were currently not married, they hoped to get married in the future. Only three of them had remained single over their lives, and one of them had lost her fiancé unexpectedly. Four of the current single participants had experienced abusive marriages. For example, after feeling that she had recovered from her prior relationship, Helen expressed her hope for a new romantic relationship: “Well, hopefully a partner. I’m looking forward to that. I feel like I’m finally at a point where I’ve exorcised enough of the demons of my past relationships to venture into a new relationship” (Helen, Time 1). Holly described vividly her hope for future marriage life as a continuing process of establishing her interdependence with family.

What’s going on now for me is that my life is going to be how it was kind of told to me years ago. Even though I’ve always wanted to be married with children with a decent husband, that wasn’t for me. But in my future, I am going to be married with a husband, and I will be able to enjoy my life with this man but be able to help my, my grandchildren and reach out to them. Not to take care of them but to be their grandmother. Take them places. Help them. If I need to help them with their school as far as money’s concerned, help them with college ’cause I’m always trying to get them to think college is what you need to do, encourage them, take them on trips... (Holly, Time 1).

Both married and single participants seemed to emphasize marriage and partnership equally as much. Moreover, their plans and dreams for marriage and future partnership reflected

their developmental experiences in that they were not only looking for intimacy within their partnerships but also working to balance their romantic relationships with their established family relationships with adult children and even grandchildren.

Supporting adult children and family members. Eleven participants discussed their involvement in the lives of their adult children and family members, mostly in a supportive role. For the five participants who passed the process of launching their children into young adulthood, they found enjoyment in supporting their aging parents, siblings, adult children and their families, and other relatives.

Three participants expressed that their most important goal in the future was to support their children's transition to young adulthood. At the same time, they might also share the responsibility of caring for their aging parents. For example, Lydia expressed her longtime role of being a mother and a caregiver for her own mother:

This next chapter I'm actually in now... my kids becoming independent... right now, life revolves around Thanksgiving vacation, when are you coming home, Christmas vacation, when you coming home. Gee, mom, I need money. I'm paying my tuition... so, you know, the involvement as a parent when I was uber involved when they were in elementary and grammar and high school, there was this sense... each elementary, middle, high school, each level, each way along the way, you're removed, the education system removes you a little bit. You know, you still need to be involved but the involvement changes... And when you go to college, you know, your involvement is totally different... Hopefully, that'll be the next chapter and there won't be any other, you know, major life event. And my mom... wants to die. She's ready to die... so we're kind of dealing with that, but the doctor tells her she's not going to die yet so... (Lydia, Time 1).

In contrast, the other three participant lower in PIL had taken on the roles as grandmothers while focusing more on self-independence, such as establishing financial stability through work, finding self-worth and pleasure through learning hobbies such as music, and pursuing future marriage. For one participant, however, too much involvement with adult children's families

might not have been optimal in that it brought some internal conflicts in herself. Lucy described how she was adjusting her parental role to be less hands-on with her grown children:

They're grown. I'm grown. And I've done my share. You know, I'm ready to go to the next level. I've been here for them and sometimes that helps, but then sometimes that don't. That hinders. Sometimes when they know that they've got somebody to fall back on, they're not striving harder to get what they need to do in life, because, you know. Stuff is right there all the time... and if it doesn't happen it'll be okay. So, you know, life is good (Lucy, Time 1).

Being a grandmother. Six participants continued to be involved with their adult children's family lives. They enjoyed or looked forward to taking on the role of grandmothers. Being a grandmother was rewarding in that they felt they had fulfilled the responsibility of being a parent to their adult children and had adjusted their parental roles successfully. To them, grandparenthood transformed the idea of parenting in that they did not have to assume the responsibility of educating and raising grandchildren but only of making each other happy and having fun together. For example, Holly contributed to raising grandchildren in the ways she could:

I used to count the years that it would take for them [her children] to grow up. I used to really do that 'cause my whole life was like their life. I couldn't do anything because of taking care of them. If I had wanted to buy a pair of earrings, I, I couldn't do it, okay, cause I had to take care of them. And I remember counting when they would be 19, how old would I be. When this, this, and how old would they be? You know, and, and I kept doing that, and I just knew, okay, it won't be too long they'll be—and then in the same time, I would tell them you guys got to be able to take care of yourself and take care of your family so when I, you know, get a certain age, I'll be able to finally enjoy my life, you know... To this day, even my daughter, she got four kids, she's taking very good care of them. And every now and then she may come to me for money, but I don't have to be the mother and the grandmother. I could be just the grandmother (Holly, Time 1).

In contrast, only one participant, Lany, was not looking forward to being a grandmother. At both Time 1 and Time 5, Lany expressed her worries about her future grandchildren:

One thing I'm—and I don't know if this should bother me or not, but I've talked to a couple other women about this, too. I'm really not looking forward to being a grandmother... the United States is changing so much, I wish the best for my kids, and I

want to see them happy. If they want to have grandkids, fine, and I love grandkids, but it's—doesn't have the same appeal for me because I'm scared of the world that these kids would be growing up in (Lany, Time 5).

For the majority of the participants, family seemed to be a critical source of purpose in life. The only exception was Leah, a single White female with lower PIL, who did not talk about family at all.

Personal development. The fourth source of purpose in life identified was personal development. Fifteen participants discussed recognizing the strength within self and insisting on important values to guide one's life. They talked about finding inner strength and being resilient, and having enduring values related to integrity for human living. Again, the exceptional participant not emphasizing this source was Leah, who had not discussed family relationships, either.

Finding self-strength and resilience. Twelve participants discussed the importance of the strength they found within themselves through life challenges. Every one of them, regardless of having higher or lower PIL, talked about how she had survived some kind of adversity in life. They realized that they were stronger than they had thought, after all.

Some participants talked further about taking a positive approach to life and looking on the bright side rather than toward the darkness in life. For example, Lulu discussed her coping with alcoholism in her family of origin and how she learned to be appreciative in life:

We're very lucky that we get life. Life is a great thing, and the world's a great place... And that's really pretty much the way I look at it. I mean I have my bad days where I probably wouldn't say that, but usually, you know, the world is really a great place... I am very grateful. At least I work on trying to be very grateful. Makes for a better day... You know, when I was younger I never had enough. More money, more clothes, more, you know. But I think you learn as you get older and see more that, you know, you really are pretty lucky... I went through a lot of Al-Anon because of my mom and all the alcoholism in our family. And, you know, that's what they teach you. And, and I'm really glad for that. I mean that's why, you know, sometimes I think people say, oh, what a horrible way to grow up. And I think it really was a blessing because, you know, really,

Al-Anon or those programs—they teach you things that I don't think a lot of times normal, everyday people get to learn or think about so. Like to be grateful (Lulu, Time 1).

In addition, two participants reflected on where their inner strength might have come from, in the context of their families of origin:

Haley: I always look at the bright side of life. The cup is not always half full, you know. I always try to... look at life that there's a good side and there's a bad side. I always try to get the bright, the better... side out of everything in life. No matter how dark it may look... there's a good side to everything, so.

Interviewer: Now, what, what do you think in your life made you feel that way?

Haley: 'Cause my father always was a happy person and, and my mother was, too. No matter what would happen to him and my mom, she was always happy... she was the type of person that she could have but two pennies in her pocket and if you asked her for a penny, she would share it with you. And my brother, Gold was the same way... (Haley, Time 1).

I'm stronger than I thought I was, and I have inner strength that I never did think, and I think I got that from my mom... and my aunts... I was the only child, but... I had lived with all of my aunts. My mother had five sisters. Okay? She had one brother. And I think each one of them had a hand in raising me, and I picked up a little bit from all... and once I found out that I could just -- I was patting myself on the back when I threw that crack out and the stuff. I said look at me. You could do anything... And when I did that that gave me a confidence I never thought I had. Really. And it was all, like I said, all inside me... My mother raised me up to be a strong woman who can do whatever she wants to do if she just puts her mind and her heart to it (Lucy, Time 1).

Three participants discussed perceiving strength through family and work experiences.

For example, Hanna talked about her experience of becoming resilient through her marriage crisis and now sharing her experiences with others at work:

Having been through a lot of these experiences myself, I think that having seen the benefit of it, I mean and the behavior health, something I wouldn't have gone into before my first husband died. It, it, it would have been, you know, I was interested in it but why would I want to go into that when I wanted to stay in accounting and financial stuff and everything like that. And then after I processed some of the experiences it was like, God, there's got to be something deeper than this. I've got to find something that reaches me inside, you know what I mean? So having been through this and actually, I think it's a, it's a real common thread in people in that work that they have—somehow it has touched them in some way and they want to give that back to—as long as you can maintain that

professional distance you have to try and give that back to others because you can be a source of hope for them as well so (Hanna, Time 1).

Being able to hold on to self-strength seemed to be crucial to sense of purpose in life.

Five participants consistently discussed their self-strength at both Time 1 and Time 5. Six participants discussed self-strength at Time 1 whereas one participant discussed this topic at Time 5.

Having integrity as an important value. Nine participants emphasized integrity as one of the most important values for human living. Even though integrity encompasses many facets, they strived to be honest, stay true to themselves, as well as respect and be kind to others.

Lydia's comment summarized the essence of integrity to the participants:

Because I think having integrity pulls up all those other words that I wanted to use as far as values or what have you. I mean it's being ethical. It's being moral. I mean to me being, you—it's being truthful. It's being honest. It's being fair. Valuing, you know, living and doing, doing what you say. Say what you do. Believe in what you do and believe in what you say. It's sort of the whole picture (Lydia, Time 1).

It seems that believing in and recognizing strength in self and being true to oneself and to others were equally important for the participants higher and lower in PIL. Even though many of them had experienced life crises, they remained hopeful for the future.

Caring for others. The fifth source of purpose in life identified is caring for others. Eleven participants discussed caring for others through acting compassion, volunteering, and/or mentoring others.

Acting with compassion. Nine participants discussed about acting with compassion. Five of them expressed their compassion to others through daily interactions. Moreover, one participant expressed her compassion through civic volunteering. One participant expressed her compassion through work. Two participants compassionately cared for others through religious practice.

Acting with compassion in daily life was a deliberate decision for five participants. For example, Laura talked about how she tried to be kind and respect others at Time 1 and Time 5.

In particular, she aimed to create an environment in which everyone could thrive:

I think that if you deliberately create an environment, people will do the right thing. I really believe that. But I also believe it has to be deliberate, and to me, first of all, it feels better to be nice. I mean, it feels really icky to be short-tempered, it feels unpleasant when a waitress in a restaurant isn't really nice. I mean, I think interrupting the situation and creating a better atmosphere is going to yield a better outcome for her and for me, and I want to feel good. I don't want to feel unhappy with whatever it was... Respect—I think [being] polite, avoiding provocative words, I think being really deliberate is so instrumental in creating a situation where people react thoughtfully rather than emotionally (Laura, Time 1).

Like Laura, others showed compassion in daily encounters and emphasized respecting others, being kind, and giving and sharing with others. Acting with compassion could help spread joy to others and create a better place for all people.

Hanna expressed her compassion through volunteering, while Hailee expressed her compassion through work. Hailee, a White female working as a counselor, emphasized the importance of having compassion for humankind:

I guess because of the field I've been in and you know, that I would say compassion... That people need to be able to understand where other people are and to understand other people's struggles, or to try to understand those around them in the world, different cultures and different religions and different family members. And have a sense of caring. When I think of compassion I think of caring for one another more than just getting along. That it's kind of a responsibility thing, to not just tolerate people whether they're family members or people at work or governments of one country to another, but to actually care about what happens to people. You know, us caring about world hunger, you know, and that kind of compassion on a global basis (Hailee, Time 5).

Similarly, recognizing the connectedness of humankind, two African American participants expressed compassion through religious practice. Helen expressed compassion in participating in Buddhist activities and in teaching her high school students:

Just being able to be a voice for peace in the world, whatever level that is. I see myself a force still participating in Buddhist activities and doing discussion meetings, and I see

myself even if I'm retired from work, I can see myself involved with the schools and making the schools better, because that's my biggest political agenda... the schools are not equitable. It all depends on who you know and where you live—depends on the school your children go to. And that I think is sad. It's a sad testament to our country: that we can't equitably provide equal opportunities for all the students, or more of the students certainly than we're doing right now (Helen, Time 5).

Holly, whose life had centered on faith, discussed how she cared for others in religious ways:

I've been teaching now for maybe five years. I've never imagined myself being a Sunday school teacher, but I think that goes right back into my need (inaudible; 60:14) my, my ability to want to help people in a sense, in the spiritual sense. I have a connection with God in a sense to understand his word... I want to be able to help other people to understand the word of God. And the word of God comes out of more than just reading the Bible. It comes out of people caring (Holly, Time 1).

Planning to volunteer. Four participants talked about their future plans to volunteer.

They seemed to be more constrained currently by their responsibilities but hoped to volunteer more as they were relieved from them. For example, Lydia reflected on her current struggle in caring for her dying mother and her emergent adult children:

I'm thinking again about doing some volunteer reading, like the Vita, reading teacher for English as a second language. Like I said, it's very, very difficult right now for me to make, you know, serious commitments beyond a day or two. You know, and I have your phone number plugged into my cell phone, so in case I got the call—that's why I have me—I mean I live with my cell phone. I sleep with my cell phone, so if something happens, you know, I'm there. They always know they can get a hold of me... I wouldn't mind doing some volunteering. I wouldn't mind volunteering reading. I wouldn't mind doing some volunteer you know, foster dog something (Lydia, Time 5).

Mentoring others. Four of the participants higher in PIL were especially dedicated to mentoring others and younger generations. They shared a desire to make a difference in others' lives because they had gone through hardship in their own lives. Consistent with their discussions about compassion, Helen continued to work toward reforming the educational system, while Holly found a way to help people through religious teaching. Helen reflected on her poor childhood experiences and was determined to advocate for educational justice for disadvantaged students:

I would like to work in a setting of—with, you know, a new— not new is the word, but reformed educational system. I think there are a lot of problems in the current system and that it would be nice if we can start to work toward reforming some of the things that happen, especially in terms of funding our schools. So I wanted to get more into that area... because of the experiences that I've had teaching different variety of students, I think that I could be an advocate for those that don't have... I have experiences from that that gave me a sensitivity for the poor and what it means to really be poor. Because if you've never been poor you don't understand what it's like to be poor. And I know I didn't understand what it was, and I remember once having to get a book and somebody—I put the book in the locker and somebody stole it. And then I ended up having to drop the class because I didn't have the money to replace that book... That's not your life anymore. You're living day to day, minute to minute, penny to penny... I think that having had that experience ... I can advocate better for those that don't have, and understand what their situation is and why they make some of the choices that they make (Helen, Time 1).

Originally, Holly hoped to help women find ways to cope with abusive marriages, like she did.

She cared for disadvantaged women beyond racial boundaries: “A lot of people only think it's black. No... that physical abuse does not just happen in racial people. It happens in all people.”

Even though she did not change her career to social work as she had hoped she eventually would, she had found a sense of purpose in practicing the guidance of God by teaching Sunday school.

Similarly, after getting through her first husband's suicide with the help of therapists and later being a stepmother, Hanna started working in health-care services and strived to be an inspiration to others through mentorship:

I've always been involved with... facilitating people with sharing my life experiences. I did the Families Anonymous group. I started the Stepfamily Support group at my church at one point. After I got remarried, I decided that was a calling I wanted, and... those groups are usually a disaster 'cause there's a lot of tensions that develop... But I've always been intrigued by sharing my life experience with others just as a reference point. Not to say here's the way you should do it so much as whatever. And I know in my present line of work there's a possibility of doing some parent education... getting involved with youth... that is a project I've probably carried along for a long time. People have been there going help me. I'd love to be able to at least share some of that with other people (Hanna, Time 5).

Hester had pursued her profession as a playwright and artist and aimed to share her stories of racial discrimination to encourage young black girls to step outside their comfort zones. She had

founded a nonprofit organization to help young minority girls establish their self-identity through performing arts:

Can you imagine the power black women would have if we just stepped outside our comfort zones and just started living? Stop being so uptight about I got to get a man, I got to get a man. And there's so many men. I'm like, girl, please. Get a man. But the thing that attracts men is women who are comfortable with themselves. You know, you like being around them. You want to smile with them. Come on. So if I can get black women to do that, gosh, I'd be a miracle worker. But my projects are working with black women to get out of their comfort zones, working with my girls, and my writing and performing (Hester, Time 1).

The commonality for these four participants, three of whom were African Americans and one was White, was their strong motivation of generativity. They had experienced some form of hardship in life and were given a hand when they were in their darkest time. Therefore, they worked toward reaching out to others in the same boat they were in before.

Spirituality. The last source of purpose in life identified is spirituality. Spirituality seemed to be a source of purpose in life for fewer midlife female participants in this study. Seven participants were concerned with having spiritual support in their lives. In particular, six participants discussed how having faith in God was important to them. Two of them also talked about being in the process of searching for spirituality in a different religion whereas one of them was searching for spirituality in nature. Two participants not only had a deep faith in their religion but also actively practiced spirituality on a daily basis.

Having faith. Six participants believed their deep faith in God had helped solve their life problems. It seemed that they discussed their spirituality more as external control, as in the following: "Having faith in God more so than human beings cause... I just feel that God would never fail you, whereas a human being will. (Helena, Time 1)." For most of them, their faith had carried them through in life. Heather had lost her adult daughter to cancer in 2002 and still mourned her loss. Throughout the interview, she described her deep faith in God. It was clear

that her prayer and connection to God on a daily basis had helped her remain higher in purpose in life. Participants believed God gave reasons to everything happened in their lives, whether positive or negative.

Searching for spirituality. Three White participants were searching for a more concrete framework from spirituality. Two participants, although they might have been exposed to some forms of religion before, discussed looking for spirituality in Buddhism in the future. In contrast, Lisa was the only participant searching for spirituality in nature, as she had a few experiences of discovering the oneness in nature:

So I'm hoping that it [the trip] will happen because you know some of these trips, you know like I haven't been on very many trips, but they really help me. They really give better insight into you know what life's all about anyhow (Lisa, Time 5).

Practicing guidance by Christianity/Buddhism. Two African American participants higher in PIL were unique from others. Instead of believing in God passively, they actively practiced their religions, one being Christian and one being Buddhist. They had found important lessons in their religious practice and tried to teach others their spirituality:

That's one of the things that I like about Buddhism. It helps me to find humanity when I can't find it myself, when I naturally would turn against it or even be, you know, hurting other humanity... now, I'm focused on trying to see that humanity and have empathy for whatever they're going through and to... lend my hand, to become more... capable. I remember when I was at home raising kids and I was so overwhelmed... so now I'm like, well, if I could do that, what else can I do? How else can I impact humanity to help this be a better planet for everybody to live in? (Helen, Time 1)

To them, the most important objective in life was to make the world a better place for all.

Indeed, they spoke more than other participants about spirituality and caring for others guiding their purpose in life throughout their life stories.

The various sources from which the participants were able to derive purpose in life suggest purpose in life is embedded in their lives. It is a complex construct that people do not

quickly identify their purpose in life in reflecting on their own life stories. Indeed, only two out of the sixteen participants explicitly talked about their purpose in life when they talked about their major life themes. Both of them showed higher PIL over time. Holly identified her purpose in life as having faith in God and sharing God's guidance with others whereas Hailee explicitly expressed that her close relationships with family, friends, and those she worked with as a counselor gave meaning to her life. Nevertheless, the other participants discussed purpose in life in various aspects, though in a more implicit tone.

The female participants with higher and lower PIL derive purpose in life from similar numbers of sources. The former focus on three to five sources at Time 1 and three to four sources at Time 5, while the latter talk about two to six sources at Time 1 and one to five sources at Time 5, with one participant missing the Time 5 interview. A further inspection on subthemes of the sources shows that those with higher PIL discuss between four and 11 subthemes, while their counterparts talk about four to 12 subthemes. It has been shown that having a variety of sources is positively associated with overall sense of meaning and purpose in life (Reker, 1991; Reker & Wong, 2012). Based on the current findings, it is not clear to what extent having more or fewer sources contributes to sense of purpose in life.

Moreover, the female participants' sources of purpose in life are shaped by individual sociohistorical contexts, varying by age, gender, and cultural backgrounds. Individuals derive deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life when they pursue sources more confirmative to social and cultural norms (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2012). For midlife adults, work and family have been two prominent domains, where they invest the most in their lives (Lachman, 2004; Staudinger & Bluck, 2001). Midlife is also a time for increasing interiority that people are concerned more with personal values and lifestyles than with social roles (Neugarten & Datan,

1996). These may reflect on the four sources equally and consistently emphasized by these late-midlife female participants with higher and lower PIL, including work, family relationships, personal development, and spirituality. It is therefore possible that these common sources help the participants *maintain* their overall sense of purpose in life overtime as shown from the quantitative analysis.

Participants higher and lower in PIL show differences in the two sources: self-needs and caring for others. Overall, the participants lower in PIL were more likely to pursue basic needs and hedonistic pleasure. For those higher in PIL, it was salient that none of them focused on meeting basic needs and happiness. Equal numbers of participants, four with higher PIL and four with lower PIL, discussed pursuing leisure activities. However, those lower in PIL tended to look for personal pleasure in the leisure activities whereas those higher in PIL adjusted their leisure activities to their life changes.

In terms of caring for others, it seemed that participants higher in PIL were more likely to see compassion as an important value in their lives than those lower in PIL. While only two of the participants lower in PIL talked about how they shared their compassion for others in life, all the seven participants higher in PIL discussed showing compassion through daily encounters with people or through work. Four of those higher in PIL even focused their lives on mentoring others, especially younger generations. In contrast, all of those lower in PIL talked about their intention to volunteer in the future. Moreover, by comparing how these nine participants expressed and valued compassion in their lives, both White and African American participants were able to integrate compassion in daily lives.

Although equal numbers of higher- and lower-PIL participants had emphasized the importance of spirituality in their lives, some racial differences emerged in their spiritual actions.

Three white participants lower in PIL were currently in the process of searching for spirituality in alternatives to organized religion or nature, whereas two African American participants higher in PIL showed higher commitment to practicing spirituality and helping others.

Even though single African American females were more likely to discuss their hope to get married in the future, they valued intimacy as much as the married White females did. However, there seemed to be some variation by PIL and race in family relationships. Two participants higher in PIL, one White and one Black, without biological children themselves, had reframed their definition of family beyond the nuclear family. Regardless of their marital status, they emphasized romantic relationships. The five married White participants, one higher in PIL and four lower in PIL, emphasized investing in their relationships with their husbands. The six single African American participants, four higher in PIL and two lower in PIL, longed for a partner in their future.

Family Roles Connected to Purpose in Life

The second theme is how family roles are connected to purpose in life. The female participants mostly focused their future on relationships within the family context. All of them spoke about their family relationships with anticipation for investing on marital relationships with husbands as both of them enter older adulthood, helping their children's families to grow, supporting other family members such as aging parents, and/or nourishing grandchildren as becoming grandmothers. Although female participants may have more or less emphasis in any of the family relationship aspects, how they have constructed their correspondent purpose in life seems to be tied with their family roles as women: wives, mothers, adult daughters, and grandmothers. For example, Hailee discussed that her close interpersonal relationships, especially with family, had given meaning to her life. By reviewing her life story, it was clear

that her life centered on family relationships in balance with her profession as a counselor.

Likewise, Helena talked about family being her top priorities by recognizing the ups and downs in family relationships.

My family. It's God first, family second, career last. And those things are being what -- is family, the closeness. We have our disappointment, hope we stay close and... we're healthy and then we all be safe at all times. At all times (Helena, Time 5).

In contrast, Lany believed that there is a purpose in life for everyone even though she had personally not yet figured out hers. However, consistently at Time 1 and Time 5, she seemed to be mostly concerned about her roles as a mother to her emerging adult children, a wife to her beloved husband, and a caring daughter for her mother in her 80s.

I hope I realize by the end of my life, I hope I figure out why I was here. Because I do feel that you live your life in learning something, and again, it is a reincarnation type of thing... I do feel I'm awfully lucky to be living this life where I am in the United States and having grown up in a family that had -- they were not rich, but they always had enough money to put food on the table and made sure we were able to go to college and so forth... Maybe one of my kids will do something great, and I was just put on this earth to be a mother for the two kids. I do not know. Maybe I was put on this earth because the man I married -- it was his one shot to marry somebody (Lany, Time 1).

I guess I really haven't figured out what my purpose here has been unless it's just been to be a, a, a mother and a wife and to maybe be an extra person thrown into having this handicapped sister thing... I think that... I wasn't really born to be the star of the show, that I was probably just a supporting player somewhere along the way. Maybe the most important reason why I'm here hasn't happened yet (Lany, Time 5).

Participants from diverse backgrounds cared for family regardless of their self-ratings on higher or lower PIL, marital status, or race. Family seemed to be their critical source of purpose in life in that they focused on family ties.

Faith as Fundamental to Purpose in Life

The third theme is how faith is fundamental to the participants' purpose in life. Even though only a total of seven female participants talked about their faith in relation to their purpose in life, four participants higher in PIL and three participants lower in PIL firmly

emphasized faith as the linchpin to face their life challenges. Most of them elaborated their faith within the scope of believing and praying in daily lives. For example, Lulu felt fortunate with her belief in God and her personal efforts for her life.

I don't know if it's a theme. I just think I've been very lucky, a very lucky person. I, you know, and just look where I started and where I am now, and the things that I've survived, I just think I'm very lucky, very fortunate... it's probably a combination of my God, whoever he is, and myself (Lulu, Time 1).

Two participants higher in PIL were unique in that they practiced their faith in actions.

Holly identified her purpose in life as having faith in God and sharing God's guidance with others. In fact, having faith in God had been emphasized throughout her life story. When describing her purpose in life, she seemed to touch more on an existential meaning of life (Reker, Peacock, Wong, 1987) consistently across Time 1 and Time 5:

Faith would be the major theme... I can take care of my own children. And that statement was that faith that I, I had, and I don't know where it came from. You know, I believe it probably came from God, but I wasn't going to church then. But my faith in my ability to raise my children was from the time when I left my husband till maybe the time they all grew up and taking care of their own cause all of them are taking care of their own children. They all are doing very well. And I just believed in that. That's all. And, and that -- it was just faith, and it was there. It was there. It's kind of hard to describe where, how, whatever, but that's the faith that God always tried to tell you. Believe it and it will be. That's what I believed when I was raising them (Holly, Time 1).

So I'm happiest when I am worshiping God. I'm happiest when I pray. And I found that out maybe in the last couple of years—I'm at peace more when I'm praying. Then I got to come back and live in the world, but I have a peaceful [time] when I can talk to God and kind of try to understand what he's trying to tell me. I'm not perfect at it. I have a long way to go, but this is what I think my whole purpose is: My whole purpose is not here on earth to make money. My whole purpose is not here on earth to live a life of luxury, even though I want to. But my whole purpose to me is to give glory to God (Holly, Time 5).

Moreover, Helen combined the life theme of faith in Buddhism into her worldview of relationships. In her Buddhist worldview, life was about connection with family, community, and human beings. Her life theme had been love—loving self and others. She saw herself with a

mission to contribute to world peace through teaching her high school students as well as teaching Buddhism throughout her life story.

Faith and spirituality has theoretically been seen as a common basis for guiding one's beliefs and motivational system (Park, 2013). Faith and spirituality contribute to one's meaning and purpose in life by affecting how individuals appraise, understand, and interpret life experiences. However, being spiritual or religious may not guarantee higher sense of meaning and purpose in life as both participants higher and low PIL emphasize faith in their lives in this study. The significance of the two participants higher in PIL seems consistent with the religious meaning-making model (Park, 2013). The extent to which people act to maintain or restore meaning and purpose in life depends on the perceived discrepancy between their spiritual or religious system and their evaluations. Holly and Helen seemed to utilize their spiritual system to evaluate their challenging life events and act on the basis of their faith as they move on in life.

Proactive versus Reactive Approach to Purpose in Life

The fourth theme emerged from how the participants described their major life themes. There were nine participants expressing their major life themes as being more *reactive* to life challenges and plans. They did not actively plan their lives. Rather, they discovered their life theme by reacting to unexpected life challenges. In contrast, five participants discussed their major life themes in a more *proactive* approach. They showed determination to confront challenges in their lives and pursue their ideal lifestyles.

Those who talked about their lives as being reactive were more likely to report lower PIL. They discussed how much they had gathered their personal resources. They had relied on themselves, discovered inner strength, learned from their life mistakes, and looked forward to reacting to the unexpected events in the future. In fact, five of the eight participants with lower PIL had narrated a reactive life theme consistently across Time 1 and Time 5. For example,

Lucy expressed that when she finally quit abusing drugs, she realized her inner strength in a way that she did not at Time 1. At Time 5, she discussed how she planned to react to her future:

As a friend of mine says when I tell her... I always have hope that things will change, she'd say, yeah, you always do believe that. You don't know how to move forward, let it go. I would say that the theme in my life would be to—it's OK—OK to have hope and look forward to things, learning about yourself or being strong... I would say the theme of my life would be to keep learning. Try to keep a positive attitude. Don't walk around with a lot of grudges and extra baggage. It doesn't do anything but... either slow you down or stop you. And look forward to whatever experiences there are to have in life. Some of them are bad, bad, bad. I'm not going to lie to anybody. But some of them are so wonderful. And even the bad things, if you can see beyond it just being so bad and realize that you learn—what did you learn from that? And I think if you could look at those bad things like that, which I have done I think in my life, even through my very serious cases of depression throughout my story, as I said, I felt that I had to keep looking forward to what was the next step, that I was stronger than I realized I was, that there was some way of making a difference (Lucy, Time 5).

Without major life challenges like Lucy had gone through, Lany discussed how she had always taken the safest road and never tried to branch out to do anything in her life. She knew there was a purpose in life but she could not figure out hers throughout the five years:

I hope I realize by the end of my life, I hope I figure out why I was here. Because I do feel that you live your life in learning something, and again, it is a reincarnation type of thing. I have a feeling that I'm going to be living a life again. What am I going to take from this life that I have led to help me in my next life? Why am I the way I am now? Is there something that happened in the previous life that made me the way I am now? I do feel I'm awfully lucky to be living this life where I am in the United States and having grown up in a family... they were not rich, but they always had enough money to put food on the table and made sure we were able to go to college and so forth. There is a reason why I have been put into this life. I cannot figure out what it is, though, and I do not even feel that if I accomplished some huge goal that I set for myself in the next 20 years... Maybe... I was just put on this earth to be a mother for the two kids. I do not know. Maybe I was put on this earth because the man I married—it was his one shot to marry somebody. I do not know... I have always been a sit-back-and-see-what-happens type instead of trying-to-make-something-happen type of person, not real proactive (Lany, Time 1).

At Time 5, she continued to express her unsettledness about finding her purpose on the earth but seemed to be satisfied with being a mother and a wife and supporting her other family members:

“I wasn't really born to be the star of the show ... I was probably just a supporting player somewhere along the way (Lany, Time 5).”

One exception was Laura, who seemed to have regressed from being more proactive at Time 1 to being reactive at Time 5. She commented on her reactive nature in her childhood and adolescence due to illness and said that she became proactive after her recovery during adulthood. However, with her disease relapse, she seemed to struggle with reacting to her illness and facing disruption in family and work life at Time 5.

Three lower-PIL participants mentioned reactive approaches at either Time 1 or Time 5. Lisa and Lili mentioned reactive approaches to life only at Time 1. The interviewer omitted the last question about life theme for Lisa's Time 5 interview, while Lili completed only the Time 1 interview. In contrast, Lydia did not figure out her life theme at Time 1 but thought it might be her importance to others, especially her family. At Time 5, she described her life theme as reacting to the unpleasant experience of a lawsuit with her sister over their mother's health care.

I'm my own best friend. You know, people come, people go. Some people stick around longer than others. I think, you know, and I don't know if this is a theme, but it's thematic. You know, we always used to say, you can't expect others to be happy with you or like you unless you like yourself. That was something, you know, my parents told me early on... And that has been thematic throughout my whole life, and that also, it really hit home with... my current crisis, my offshoot book series is my sister, the alcoholic, who really isn't happy with herself... I mean, you don't always have to have more; you just need to enjoy what you have. And just being comfortable with what you are and who you are and what's there in front of you (Lydia, Time 5).

In contrast, none of the participants higher in PIL described their life theme as being reactive, except for Helena. However, she also described how having faith had provided her direction to move on in life even though she was not proactively planning her life. She expressed that relying on herself and believing in God were her life theme during both Time 1 and Time 5 interviews:

Trusting in myself, depending on myself and not no one else, and having faith. That's it... I believe that because I never went through any changes. I always depended on what's here. I always have, no matter. I may say could you give me this tomorrow? You say, yeah, but something comes up. I always depend on here, here in my hand. And I was never a kind of person that, a borrower... never will borrow from people. So I just depend on myself and watch what I spend so I would never be in that position (Helena, Time 5).

Among the other seven participants higher in PIL, five of them described their major life themes as being *proactive* to life challenges and plans. They talked about not being afraid of challenges in life. Because life would not always happen the way they expected, they decided to take on challenges and be resilient. For example, Haley talked about being positive and persistent in trying even if she failed during Time 1 and Time 5 interviews. Likewise, Hanna talked about taking the road not taken and trying to make the best of life:

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade. And I think I'm very good about being flexible, and I think the other part of this, because I can be an anxious person at times, I'm very good at looking for options... And even not making a decision is a decision if that's your comfort level in saying... People don't get that. They think it's passivity, but really if you're, like, overwhelmed with something, that's fine. Just be and let it pass, and it will become clear to you over time what you need to do next. But I think that's something... that's run through my life (Hanna, Time 1).

Hester talked about how she did “dream great dreams and make them come true (Hester, Time 5).” For these five participants higher in PIL, they expressed a higher sense of control while acknowledging the uncertainty in life.

Serving Others versus Serving Self to Purpose in Life

The fifth theme is how serving others versus serving self contributes to purpose in life. By reviewing the two sources of purpose in life, *self-needs* and *caring for others*, a stark distinction between the female participants higher and lower in PIL indicates the focus to serve others versus self. In particular, the participants higher in PIL were more likely to discuss acting with compassion and mentoring others, whereas the participants lower in PIL tended to talk

about meeting basic needs and happiness. All but one of the participants with higher PIL showed compassion to care for others compared to only two participants lower in PIL. Moreover, four of the participants higher in PIL discussed how they have challenged social norms to pursue what was best for them instead of what was expected of them. They further carried their strength they grew from the challenges to actively mentor others. While their motivation to mentor others may differ, generativity and spirituality are salient in their narratives. Hanna's comment summed up their goal to serve others: "Mentoring. It's very simple. People have mentored me. I like doing that, too (Hanna, Time 1)." In contrast, six out of the eight participants with lower PIL emphasized meeting self-needs for basic living and personal pleasure. For example, Leah expressed taking care of herself as the first priority.

But again, my number one priority is me and my health and a lot -- and some more of me. And I treat myself well, but I'm very hard on myself and I'm going to continue to be. And I like things to be just so it's maintenance every day. But other than that, I do live my life, you know, kind of with no big cares or woes. It's just the general sense of feeling like maybe there's something else out there. So I took... the spiritual path as you mentioned, but that didn't really do anything for me [Leah, Time 1].

Indiscernible Differences in Terms of Race and Conscientiousness

When I compared the themes across White and African American females, both groups seemed to have similar focuses. However, there are some racial differences in their romantic relationships and spiritual practice. White participants tended to remain in marriages, while African American participants currently were single. As a result, the former were planning their futures in accordance with their husbands' future plans. The latter discussed wanting to get married in the future. Regardless of marital status, both groups seemed to place equal value on romantic relationships.

The other difference concerned spirituality. There were two African Americans actively practicing spirituality by teaching others, whereas others mostly talked about their faith, and

three White Americans searched for a more concrete sense of spirituality. Although there are some racial differences in themes in this study, future research is required to replicate the findings in a larger sample.

I was not able to examine the effect of conscientiousness on purpose in life between those higher and lower in PIL or between White and African American participants. Only seven participants had reported significantly higher or lower levels of conscientiousness at Time 1 (above or below one standard deviation across the overall sample). There were three participants who reported a higher level of conscientiousness at baseline. Two were higher in PIL and one was lower in PIL. The two participants higher in PIL had shared strong determination to achieve their goals. Hanna had survived her life challenges and was determined to help and inspire others. She talked about what she had accomplished at work. Helena had been single her whole life and had to conscientiously rely on herself. The one participant lower in PIL, Leah, was the exception in this subsample. She focused only on herself with faith in God. Her higher conscientiousness seemed to be a result of the reality that she was the only one responsible for taking care of herself. In contrast, there were four other participants lower in PIL reporting lower levels of conscientiousness at Time 1. It seemed that they had not been able to achieve their goals between the two interviews. Laura had health issues that kept her from returning to her ideal life track, family, and work. Lisa was in the process of finding and pursuing hobbies for self-pleasure. Lucy and Lili had been dating and talked about getting married at Time 1, even with clear visions and plans, but Lucy was still single when she was interviewed again at Time 5, while Lili did not complete the Time 5 interview. Without sufficient empirical findings concerning how conscientiousness may link to purpose in life, it is difficult to interpret the quantitative effect.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored how midlife female participants defined and developed their sense of purpose in life through their life stories collected by two interviews five years apart. Between ages of late 50s to early 60s, they were in transition to older adulthood as defined by social norms. Subjectively, they still viewed themselves as being productive and essential to their significant others. In this developmental context, the qualitative analysis identified the five themes related to the female participants' purpose in life. The first three themes were shared by all the participants. First of all, the participants were able to derive purpose in life from multiple sources, including self-needs, family relationships, work, personal development, caring for others, and spirituality. Second, family ties were critical to purpose in life. The majority of them discussed their role transitions within the family context: as being wives to their midlife husbands, mothers to their adult children, and daughters to aging parents in addition to changing selves. Third, faith set the foundation for deriving purpose in life even though relatively fewer participants emphasized it. The last two themes indicated differences by the participants' PIL examined in the quantitative findings. It is clear that participants higher in PIL tended to take a more proactive approach to life challenges and plans whereas those lower in PIL seemed to be more reactive. Lastly, there was a distinction between serving others and serving self as purpose in life among participants. Those higher in PIL discussed their lives in serving others while the participants lower in PIL mostly focused on meeting self-needs to be healthy and happy.

In the following, final, chapter, I integrate the results from the quantitative and qualitative methods to discuss how the mixed methods findings helped increase our understanding of purpose in life during late-middle adulthood.

Table 5.1. *Characteristics of the Subsample Participants*

Name (pseudonym)	Age (Time 1)	Race	Marital status (T1–T5)	Adult children	Employment status	Religious affiliation
Laura	55	WA	married	1	Healthcare	Jewish
Lany	55	WA	married	2	Retired as a sensory panelist on 05/31/2007; part-time library shelver at T2	None
Leah	56	WA	divorced	0	Education, retired on 06/30/2007; substitute teacher one year later	Jewish
Lulu ^a	N/A	WA	divorced	1	Registered nurse	Catholic
Lucy	55	AA	never married	2	Legal	Lutheran (converted to Baptist at T5)
Lydia	55	WA	married	2	Management, retired at T2	Christian
Lisa	55	WA	married	2	Office	Catholic
Lili	58	AA	never married	0	Healthcare	Christian
Hanna	56	WA	married (divorced at T4)	2	Healthcare	Unitarian
Hailee	56	WA	married	0	Education, retired on 10/04/2007	Methodist
Heather	57	AA	divorced	1 ^b	Management	Pentacostal
Haley	55	AA	never married	0	Sales	Baptist
Helen	58	AA	divorced	6 ^c	Education	Buddhist
Holly	57	AA	divorced	3	Business	Baptist
Hester	57	AA	married (divorced at T4)	1	Arts	none
Helena	58	AA	never married	1	Unemployed	Baptist

Notes: ^a Lulu's actual age at Time 1 was missing in survey data and she did not mention her age during interviews. However, due to the study design, her age was supposed to be between 55 and 58 at Time 1. ^b Heather's adult and only daughter died from cancer in 2002. ^c Helen had one stepdaughter from her ex-husband's prior marriage. They had three children together, and she adopted two more children from her close girlfriend when she died.

Table 5.2. *Code Summary in Phase 2*

	Code	Code Frequency	Numbers of Participants
1	Concerns for family members and adult children	9	6
2	Connections with friends	3	3
3	Continuing family history project	4	3
4	Enjoy and/or look forward to being grandmother	12	6
5	Enjoy taking care of older family members	3	2
6	Family (mostly) as the central focus	10	5
7	Hoping to pursue marriage or partnership	14	6
8	Not looking forward to being grandmother	2	1
9	Planning future with husband	14	5
10	Reframing family as being childless	5	3
11	Supporting own children to become independent	8	3
12	Awareness of aging	6	5
13	Being reactive to life challenges	3	3
14	Criticizing people not being responsible for others	4	4
15	Focusing on meeting own needs	19	10
16	Having integrity as the most important	13	9
17	Planning to travel more in the future	11	4
18	Pursuing personal hobbies	10	5
19	Lacking self-efficacy	11	1
20	Feeling being alone and lonely	4	1
21	Getting a car to increase her sense of mobility	2	1
22	Loving self as the foundation to love others	3	2
23	Showing creativity	2	1
24	Being proud as an American citizen	1	1
25	Feeling constrained by work	3	2
26	Hoping to establish financial security for retirement	21	9
27	Hoping to get further education for career change	5	2
28	Hoping to return to work	5	2
29	No plan to retire	3	2
30	Planning to work part-time	4	3
31	Self-fulfilling	16	8
32	Actively changing self for positive attitude toward life	5	5
33	Being resilient to overcome crises and find opportunities	17	10
34	Challenging social norms for better (for self and others)	8	4
35	Finding inner strength	10	7
36	Goal and action oriented	8	4
37	Against capitalism: wealth should be shared with the poor	1	1
38	Acting compassion- caring for others	18	7
39	Earlier life experience: Sharing with and helping others	3	3
40	Mentoring younger generations	21	4
41	Planning to volunteer in the future	5	4

42	Practicing guidance by God	10	1
43	Searching new perspective in nature	1	1
44	Having faith in God	12	6
45	Searching for spirituality	3	3
46	Taking care of self and being healthy	13	8
47	Relocating to be safer	2	1
48	Fixing the house damaged by the earthquake	2	1
49	Changing the living environment/homeownership	2	2
50	Relocating to be closer to family	8	3
51	Knowing one's purpose in life	7	4
52	Relying on self	3	3
53	Everyone has a purpose in life, not figure out yet	3	2
54	Searching for life themes	5	3

Table 5.3. *Defined Overarching Codes, Subcodes, and Codes in Phase 3 and Phase 4*

Overarching Codes	Subcodes	Codes	Code Frequency	Numbers of Participants
Self-needs	Focusing on meeting own needs	Focusing on meeting own needs	15	8
		Taking care of self and being healthy	13	8
	Pursuing personal hobbies/travel	Planning to travel more in the future	11	4
		Pursuing personal hobbies	11	6
Work	Feeling self-fulfilled or constrained	Feeling constrained by work	3	2
		Self-fulfilling	16	8
	Financial security	Hoping to establish financial security	20	9
Family Relationships	Focusing on family in general	Family being the most important	8	7
		Reframing family as being childless	4	2
	Valuing marriage or partnership	Planning future with husband	14	5
		Hoping to pursue marriage or partnership	14	6
	Supporting adult children and family members	Supporting own children to become independent	8	3
		Enjoy taking care of older family members	3	2
		Concerns for family members and adult children	10	7
	Being grandmother	Enjoy and/or look forward to being grandmother	12	6
		Not looking forward to being grandmother	2	1
Personal Growth	Finding inner strength and/or being resilient	Finding self strength	10	7
		Being resilient to overcome crises and find opportunities	17	10
	Challenging social norms	Challenging social norms for positive development	7	4
Caring for others	Expressing Compassion	Acting compassion– caring for others	22	10
		Planning to volunteer in the future	7	5
	Mentoring others	Mentoring others	20	4
Spirituality		Having faith in God	12	6

		Practicing guidance by Christianity/Buddhism	11	2
Major life themes		Proactive to life challenges and plans	8	5
		Reactive to life challenges and plans	15	9
		Relationships and love	4	3
		Faith	7	5

Table 5.4. *Refined Overarching Codes and Subcodes in Phase 5*

Overarching Codes	Subcodes	Code Frequency	Numbers of Participants
Self-needs	Meeting basic needs and happiness	14	6
	Leisure activities	23	8
Work	Work achievement	19	9 (2 negative cases)
	Financial security	20	9
Family Relationships	Focusing on family in general	13	8
	Valuing marriage or partnership	28	11
	Supporting adult children and family members	23	11
	Being a grandmother	14	7 (1 negative case)
Personal development	Finding self strength and resilience	29	12
	Having integrity as important value	13	9
Caring for others	Acting with compassion	21	9
	Planning to volunteer	7	4
	Mentoring others	20	4
Spirituality	Having faith in God	12	6
	Practicing guidance by Christianity/Buddhism	11	2
	Searching for spirituality	3	3
Major life themes	Proactive to life challenges and plans	8	5
	Reactive to life challenges and plans	15	9
	Relationships and love	4	3
	Faith	7	5

Table 5.5. *Overarching Codes and Subcodes of Purpose in Life with Quotes*

Overarching Codes	Subcodes	Exemplar quotes
Self-needs (<i>n</i> = 37 coded passages)	Meeting basic needs and happiness	But again, my number one priority is me and my health and a lot -- and some more of me. And I treat myself well, but I'm very hard on myself and I'm going to continue to be. And I like things to be just so it's maintenance every day. But other than that, I do live my life, you know, kind of with no big cares or woes. It's just the general sense of feeling like maybe there's something else out there. So I took... the spiritual path as you mentioned, but that didn't really do anything for me. [Leah, Time 1]
	Leisure activities	I liked knitting a lot and I did it in high school and I kind of put it aside... then when my daughter came along I kind of picked it up again and I knit for a few years. And then when my son came along it was just too much, you know. And then things got really crazy. Mostly I didn't and then when my granddaughter was on the way, I picked up again and was going great. And my license plate is N Knits 2. [Lisa, Time 1]
Work (<i>n</i> = 37 coded passages)	Work achievement	I am going to win a Tony. I am such a good play writer. [Hester, Time 5]
	Financial security	To make a lot more money than what I'm making now, to find something a lot better than what I'm doing, and to be able to retire within at least eight years from now and not have to worry about making ends meet and be able to live comfortable. [Haley, Time 1]
Family relationships (<i>n</i> = 77 coded passages)	Focusing on family in general	My family. It's God first, family second, career last. And those things are being what -- is family, the closeness. We have our disappointment, hope we stay close and... we're healthy and then we all be safe at all times. At all times. [Helena, Time 5]
	Valuing marriage and/or romantic partnership	And I'm dating now. I do need a social life. So, I'm dating a little bit more now than I did before. I joined an Internet

		dating group, so sometime I'm getting a date on that. [Holly, Time 5]
	Supporting adult children and family members	I would love to see my daughter happy, especially professionally, as well as in her own skin. And actively living her own life. [Laura, Time 1]
	Being a grandmother	I like spending time with my grandson. [Lulu, Time 1]
Personal development (<i>n</i> = 42 coded passages)	Finding self-strength and resilience	So I think resilience is a real key to how you choose to live your life... that would be my theme: that things don't go a certain way as planned. And if you can't cope with the changes that life throws on you, you know, you can get stuck in a lot of places. You can get stuck in a lot of rivers when the branches and things are in your way, and you need to be able to navigate around obstacles and to look through crises and find opportunities. [Hailee, Time 5]
	Having integrity as an important value	Being honest and true to yourself and to others, and believing in yourself, and try to do the right things towards other people as you want them... That's what I believe in. [Helena, Time 1]
Caring for others (<i>n</i> = 47 coded passages)	Acting with compassion	Cause I pray to love people whether they love me or not. I used to have a problem with loving people, but I pray that I love people and try to -- and not only treat people the way they treat me because everybody's not going to treat you right, but treat people the way Christ would treat people, and he was, he was going to love people whether they hate you or not. So my belief is fundamental, just believe in God, and believe that... there's good in everybody. [Holly, Time 1]
	Planning to volunteer	I would like to either return to work or develop I guess volunteer skills that will satisfy me as much as work did. [Laura, Time 5]
	Mentoring others	Mentoring. It's very simple. People have mentored me. I like doing that, too. [Hanna, T1]
Spirituality	Having faith	Heather: That I could survive,

(n = 26 coded passages)		<p>regardless, survive. Whatever challenge there is, you have to, you have to do it. I mean whatever, you know, you got to always got to keep going. You got to keep pushing. Just keep going. That's it. Keep it day by day and keep going.</p> <p>Interviewer: Where do you think you get all your strength?</p> <p>Heather: From God. Faith in God.</p> <p>[Heather, Time 1]</p>
	Searching for spirituality	<p>So I took the, you know, the spiritual path as you mentioned, but that didn't really do anything for me. So maybe next time I come here I'll be a Buddhist. Who knows? I doubt it. [Leah, Time 1]</p>
	Practicing guidance by Christianity /Buddhism	<p>Currently, I'm enjoying my job now and this is what I do: I go to work and I go to church. I teach Sunday school. So when I'm not at work my mind is constantly reading the Bible, learning, teaching. [Holly, Time 5]</p>
Major life themes (n = 30 coded passages)	Proactive to life challenges and plans	<p>Life is evolution, but it's not random evolution, that you are the creator, the designer, the choreographer of every second of your life. It's not an accident that I'm here right now telling this story. I designed this, you know. I didn't have to, to do this, but it was a part of a plan that I had some time ago, and this is just another part of my evolution, and that we have to think about life that way... you also have to know that there's a flow, but you can control that flow by the actions that you take today. So thinking long term but living in the now.</p> <p>[Hester, Time 1]</p>
	Reactive to life challenges and plans	<p>Oh, jeez. Theme? My life is pretty boring. I guess... the theme would be just take it a day at a time and keep putting one foot in front of the other... It's got, it, I mean I enjoy, I'm happy... and you have to appreciate what you have instead of what you don't have.</p> <p>[Lulu, Time 5]</p>
	Relationships and love	<p>Love. Look for the love... that exists for yourself, first of all. Love yourself,</p>

		<p>accept yourself, and, and act in the moment. Move forward from that out of love... you know, love has carried me through. Even through the darkest times that I've had it's always been the outreach of a hand... the concern that, that surrounded me from my family and friends... the support when I needed it that's helped me to move forward and advance. So I think that if I can hold onto that and more often than I'm not... that would, that would be a shining mirror for me to see for my life... for that to be the central theme. Love of family, love of my country, love of my fellow human beings. [Helen, Time 1]</p>
	Faith	<p>My major theme in my life story is to learn how to be obedient for one. To be obedient to god, I know it's gory to go back to god] because that's what I failed. My whole first part of my life has been running away from my spirituality. Up until maybe I was 50... I was running away from my spirituality, trying to be somebody or be something that I was not. So now after 50, I have learned to embrace my spirituality. So my whole theme is still, my purpose is to worship god. My whole purpose here on this earth is to give glory to god. [Holly, Time 5]</p>

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation study is to quantitatively examine and qualitatively explore consistency and changes of purpose in life across five years of late middle adulthood. The mixed methods design consists of two parts. In the first part, I estimated the trajectories of purpose in life (PIL subscale scores) over five years in late midlife among the final sample of 159 participants. I further examined the extent to which the participants' psychosocial characteristics, including gender, race, education, personality traits, and generativity, predicted the trajectories. The quantitative analysis using Growth Mixture Modeling suggested a non-normal skewed-*t* distribution, in which participants retained a stable trajectory of PIL. Individuals only differed significantly on the initial level of purpose in life in that the majority had higher PIL while few reported lower PIL. African American participants were more likely to show higher PIL than White Americans. Moreover, participants with stronger trait conscientiousness tended to show higher PIL.

Because the statistical modeling did not explain the reasons for the differences in PIL, in the second part of this study I further explored how the participants defined and developed purpose in life, with particular focus on the similarity and difference between those higher in PIL and those lower in PIL. I conducted a qualitative analysis with a purposefully selected subsample of 16 female participants from the top 20% and lower 20% of the estimated purpose in life trajectory. As no White male participants were represented in the top 20% of purpose in life trajectory and only three African American male participants were in the lower 20%, consideration of the intersectionality of gender and race (Cole, 2009) led to a deliberate decision focusing on female participants only in the qualitative inquiry. Because the use of the secondary dataset of life stories was not originally designed for examination of purpose in life, I focused on

analyzing the interview transcripts in two sections, future script and major life theme. This is consistent with the theoretical assumption that purpose in life provides a sense of direction to one's future (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Hooker & McAdams, 2003; Reker & Wong, 2012; Ryff, 1989b). I applied a theoretical thematic analysis for the purpose of this study. Prior research on meaning and purpose in life (Baumeister, 1999; Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2012; O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker & Wong, 1988, 2012) partly guided the analysis inquiry. The analysis indicated five themes related to purpose in life. The first theme suggests participants are able to derive purpose in life from multiple sources, including self-needs, work, family relationships, personal development, caring for others, and spirituality. These sources have consistently been found in adult samples (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker, 1991). Moreover, family tie is a critical base for their purpose in life in that participants discuss their important family roles as wives, mothers, adult daughters, and even grandmothers. Faith is another important theme for establishing purpose in life. Those higher in PIL are more likely to express a more proactive approach to confront life challenges and plans versus being reactive and tend to serve others more versus to focus on meeting self-needs compared to those lower in PIL. Although the qualitative results should be interpreted with caution that the analysis is only based on female participants, the findings suggest some underlying pathways to higher versus lower purpose in life.

Continuity or Change in Purpose in Life during Late Midlife

The quantitative data indicated a generally stable trajectory of purpose in life during one's late 50s to early 60s; the qualitative data suggested a more complex story for female participants. Except for one participant who only completed the Time 1 interview despite having completed all the 5-year surveys, each participant displayed consistency in certain themes over

time. Among the 16 participants, 11 discussed consistent major life themes from Time 1 to Time 5, while three discussed different major life themes at two times. Unfortunately, two other participants are missing on answering their major life themes at Time 5.

After comparing and contrasting the six sources of purpose in life from the first theme between Time 1 and Time 5 for each individual, it is clear that most of them focused on at least two same sources over time although they may have talked about one or two different sources from Time 1 to Time 5. There are, however, varying patterns of consistency in the sources mentioned between participants with higher PIL and those with lower PIL in the quantitative surveys. Of those with higher PIL, six consistently focused on family relationships; six on personal development; four on caring for others; four on work; and two on spirituality. Only one participant higher in PIL focused on self-needs, pursuing leisure activities rather than meeting basic needs. However, It was not clear to what extent participants considered one source more important than the others without explicitly asking them to rank the sources. In fact, fulfilling one source could counterbalance a void in another. For example, a participant higher in PIL, who explicitly stated “God first, family second, and career last,” had not been successfully employed since being laid off in the 1990s. It seems her faith in God and close ties with family members has carried her through these challenges, which is consistent with her statement of major life theme as having faith.

For those who reported lower PIL, five consistently focused on family relationships; four on self-needs; four on personal development; and two on caring for others. Two women consistently focused on work, but one reported feeling a sense of self-fulfillment at work while the other felt constrained. Only one consistently focused on spirituality. When the women described these sources, they tended to focus on personal and cultural norms that they perceived

to be expected of them. That is, what they strive for is mostly rooted in their roles as wives and mothers. Even though White females were more likely to be married than were African American females, the latter women consistently mentioned pursuing marriage in their future with their endorsement of the ideal family being a husband and a wife with children. In fact, one participant talked about having a family with a man she loves as her longtime family dream even though she is now doing it *backwards*: having children before marriage. A few discrepancies between their life sources at Time 1 and Time 5 were manifested. This seems to be a result of current life crises that demand present focus. For example, one participant's self-needs and pursuit to regain health at Time 5 had hindered her focus to facilitate family relationships, especially supporting her 23-year-old daughter; to return to work; to strive for personal development; and to help others as she had discussed at Time 1. One participant was struggling with a lawsuit by her sister over their mother's healthcare surrogate and beneficiary at Time 5. Another had increasing concerns about financial security with aging.

The variation in sources of purpose in life between the female participants higher and lower in PIL does not necessarily support the hierarchy of sources related to self-transcendence, collectivism, individualism, and self-preoccupation (Reker & Wong, 2012). Although there were more participants with lower PIL reporting the self-preoccupation sources, there were almost equal numbers of participants with higher and lower PIL focusing on the other sources. The indiscernible hierarchy of source categories in this current study with late-midlife females seemed consistent with other study of meaning in life in midlife adults (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996). It could be that the hierarchy of source categories represents a generalization across age groups. Moreover, in this study the codes were not mutually exclusive from each other. For example, the participants might express both individualism and

collectivism in one code. The finding that one tends to have more than one source of purpose in life suggests multidirectionality in development (Lerner, 2006). Moreover, people derive purpose in life from specific sources depending on age as well as sociodemographic and cultural backgrounds (Reker, 1991; Reker & Wong, 2012).

Overall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings mostly suggests continuity of purpose in life yet with some changes in the sources providing sense of purpose in life. These sources of purpose in life reflect developmental contexts for women in their late 50s to early 60s. The themes are consistent with lifespan developmental theories in that for midlife adults work and family have been two prominent domains, where they invest the most in their lives (Lachman, 2004; Staudinger & Bluck, 2001). In a qualitative study with 38 midlife adults between the ages of 40 and 50 (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996), every midlife adult, both male and female, discussed their relationships with people as one of their sources of meaning in life. Consistent with their findings, family relationships in this subsample of women are a source of interest for all but one of the participants. Moreover, the gradual shift from relationships with children to an emphasis on planning the future with husband or romantic partner among these study participants suggests that midlife adults tend to experience intimacy in a more meaningful way than before (Lachman, 2004; O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996). In addition, midlife adults tend to show increasing interiority as they age, concerned more with personal values and lifestyles in addition to social roles (Neugarten & Datan, 1996). Among the participants, ten discussed meeting their personal development needs for self-independence. There are some variations in pursuing interiority, however, depending on individuals' lifelong developmental contexts (Elder & Johnson, 2003). The participants lower in PIL are more likely to derive their purpose in life as a result of following social norms related to their family roles, while those

higher in PIL tend to discuss how they establish purpose in life as a result of overcoming life challenges.

Pathways to Purpose in Life

The quantitative analysis indicates the majority of late-midlife participants maintain a higher level of purpose in life over the five years whereas only a small subset of participants remains lower. The qualitative analysis findings elucidate the quantitative result by suggesting why and how such purpose in life trajectory may occur. The themes equally and consistently emphasized by these late-midlife female participants are likely to help the participants *maintain* their overall sense of purpose in life overtime as shown from the quantitative analysis, especially family ties and faith. Moreover, it is suggested that the extent to which midlife female adults construct a *proactive* versus *reactive* major life theme and focus more on the needs of *others* over *self* may be pathways through which the female participants have maintained a higher-stable trajectory of purpose in life.

Pathways to Maintaining Purpose in Life

By comparing the sources of purpose in life identified in the first theme, the female participants with higher and lower PIL derive meaning from similar numbers of sources. The former focus on three to five sources at Time 1 and three to four sources at Time 5, while the latter talk about two to six sources at Time 1 and one to five sources at Time 5, with one participant missing the Time 5 interview. A further inspection on sub-codes of the sources shows that those with higher PIL discuss between four and 11 sub-codes, while their counterparts talk about four to 12 sub-codes. It has been shown that having a variety of sources is positively associated with overall sense of purpose in life (Reker, 1991; Reker & Wong, 2012).

The saliency of family ties for purpose in life among the female participants suggests the importance of contextual factors on development of purpose in life (Elder & Johnson, 2003). When individuals pursue sources more confirmative to social and cultural norms, they tend to derive deeper sense of purpose in life (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2012). The current FLSA participants were born in the 1950s and are part of the Baby Boomer generation and have experienced radical social changes, especially in the realms of family and work (Stewart & Torges, 2006). They lived through their childhood where gender roles were very traditional, in which men took more responsibility outside of the household while women tended to take care of husbands and children at home (Jones & McAdams, 2013). They experienced their adolescence with the insurgence of various social movements during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Regardless of whether they participated in the social movements in person or not, their lives have been affected by them, including Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, and the Women's Movement (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Stewart & Torges, 2006). In particular, Baby Boomer women were the first generation liberated to explore beyond traditional domestic gender roles of wives and mothers. They were encouraged to pursue work and career outside of home. Through their young and middle adulthood, many of these female midlife adults have taken both family and work responsibilities (Jones & McAdams, 2013; Stewart & Torges, 2006). It is possible that they have to work hard to strive for the balance between agency and communion as Baby Boomer women (Brown, Matthews, & Bromberger, 2005). As a result, this study indicates the female participants' lifelong involvement with family has served as important sources of their purpose in life. Based on the identified importance of family ties to midlife females' purpose in life, future studies should explore whether there are gender differences given the distinct social role expectations between men and women. They may be more blurred, as

men are expected to be actively parenting children and women are expected to work outside the home.

It is also important to explore the process of how midlife adults make meaning through family relationships and ties and whether such process changes as they transition into older adulthood. Studies have consistently indicated relationships with others as the most-mentioned source of meaning and purpose in life across different age groups (Debats, 1999; Krause, 2007, 2012; O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996). Moreover, relationships with family are frequently discussed as central to oneself. With age, maintaining close relationships with significant others becomes increasingly important (Carstensen, 1992). Researchers have begun to examine the effect of social relationships on older adults' meaning and purpose in life through types of social support (Krause, 2012). It is suggested that older adults' anticipated support from family members and close friends has mediated the effect of the support they actually received on the increase in meaning in life over time (Krause, 2007). In contrast, negative social interactions were associated with lower sense of meaning in life but not the changes over time. In this current study, when discussing their family relationships, the participants focus on defining family as the core of their lives, including marital or partnerships relationships, providing support for adult children and family members, as well as the enacted or anticipated role of being grandmothers. Less is known about how they actually make meaning and purpose in life through these relationships. Given the consistent emphasis of relationships with others throughout the lifespan, it is important to further examine the process through which family and close relationships may contribute to midlife adults' meaning and purpose in life.

Faith and spirituality are mentioned among a smaller subset of the female participants. Spiritual participation has been shown positively associated with meaning and purpose in life

(Emmons, 1999; Greenfield, Vaillant, & Marks, 2009; Krause, 2008). It is important to examine the centrality and functionality of spirituality to their meaning and purpose in life both on a daily basis and during crises (Park, 2013). That is, the participants often reflect on the importance of having faith in God, but less is known about how their faith has guided or would guide them when their meaning and purpose in life is questioned. It is to be anticipated that at some point in life, individuals are likely to experience such negative events as marital hardship, health, and losses, which tend to challenge their meaning and purpose in life (Sommer, Baumeister, & Stillman, 2012). The fact that nearly all participants in this study emphasize personal strength and resilience in their lives suggests the importance of finding positive meaning in the midst of negative life experiences (McAdams, 2012). In a study, Brown and colleagues (Brown, Matthews, & Bromberger, 2005) found that African American midlife women tended to view their lives more positively than did White midlife women. The authors speculated that African American midlife women might thrive through gaining knowledge and confidence in their experiences of adversity. In contrast, both White and African American female participants in this study reported finding self-strength and/or resilience to be a critical resource for them to maintain purpose in life. Especially in the process of suffering, spiritual individuals tend to show stress-related growth (Aldwin, 2007). Moreover, it is likely that individuals who are able to *actualize* their faith in daily actions are more likely to make higher meaning and purpose in life. Indeed, two participants with higher PIL discuss how their faith has guided them to mentor others and to understand God and Buddhism, respectively. Being able to keep one's life integrative, one's action consistent with one's value, may contribute to meaning and purpose in life through identity coherence towards ego integrity with age (Erikson, 1963). Moreover, with age individuals are more likely to rely on faith and spirituality to find meaning and purpose in

life (Krause, 2012; Park, 2013). Because one's faith and spirituality change through normative and non-normative, often stressful, experiences across the lifespan (Levenson, Aldwin, & Igarashi, 2013), future studies should also explore how change in faith and spirituality relates to stability or change in purpose in life.

Pathways to Higher versus Lower Purpose in Life

First of all, the clear distinction between proactive versus reactive approaches to the future among higher- and lower-PIL participants suggests the importance of internal and external control for purpose in life (Rotter, 1966). The ways in which the female participants describe their major life theme indicate a distinction regarding their overall sense of control, that is, the extent to which individuals believe they have control over what happens or will happen in their lives. Female participants higher and lower in PIL express their agency and efficacy to direct their future. Many of them have experienced some forms of life challenges and understand the uncertainty in the future. However, those higher in PIL tend to emphasize their determination to make the best control of their future experiences in contrast to those with lower in PIL, who tend to view their lives as reacting to what may happen in the future. People with internal control expect their behaviors would lead to desired outcomes whereas people with external control believe the outcomes are mostly determined by fate, luck, or unpredictable factors out of their control. Those higher in PIL are more likely to express internal control. In contrast, those lower in PIL seem to focus more on external control. This is also consistent with the effects of life control (Reker & Peacock, & Wong, 1987) and sense of manageability (Antonovsky, 1987) on predicting higher meaning and purpose in life. Life control refers to one's sense of freedom to make choices in life and freedom to exercise responsibilities, which is one of the essential components to meaning in life in Frankl's original proposition (Frankl, 2006; Reker & Peacock, & Wong, 1987). Sense of manageability is defined as the extent to which one believes having

necessary resources to respond to internal and external demands of one's environment (Antonovsky, 1987). In particular, sense of manageability is one of the three components in Antonovsky's (1987) sense of coherence construct, in which research has shown that greater perceived coherence in life contributes to higher sense of meaning and purpose in life (Korotkov, 1998).

The difference in such proactive and reactive sense of control to life may be associated with midlife roles (Skaff, 2007). Studies often suggest the importance of women's roles in family, work, and the combination of both on sense of control in midlife. A general finding is that sense of control varies by the age of the children, parental stress, caregiving responsibility for aging parents, types of work, and role overload. Higher autonomy and rewards in family and work roles also contribute to higher sense of control. In the context of this dissertation study, participants were not directly asked whether their role fulfillment or constraint affects their proactive or reactive sense of control to life. However, a closer examination of their sources of purpose in life suggests that only two of the participants higher in PIL and with proactive orientation talk about supporting their adult children and family members while six of the participants lower in PIL and with reactive orientation discuss supporting their adult children and family members. It is likely their sense of control towards family caregiving responsibility may contribute or hinder their purpose in life.

Second, the distinction between serving others versus serving self among the participants higher and lower in PIL is consistent with other studies. In the hierarchical model of meaning (Reker & Wong, 1988, 2012), there are four levels of sources of meaning, representing qualitatively higher to lower depth of meaning and purpose in life, from self-transcendence to self-preoccupation. Research has shown that people who create meaning through sources

beyond self-needs tend to have higher degree of meaning and purpose in life whereas those who focus more on hedonistic pleasure and comfort tend to report lower degree of meaning and purpose in life (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker, 1991; Reker & Wong, 2012). This is consistent with the distinction between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989a). Focusing on self-needs and hedonic pursuit is definitely one of the important sources for creating a sense of purpose in life. However, perceiving and pursuing happiness does not necessarily bring meaningfulness in life (Baumeister, Voh, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013). To further understand how people pursue others- versus self-focused purpose in life, further examination of how people experience meaning and purpose in life through cognitive, motivational, and affective processes in different life domains (Fave, Brdar, Wissing, & Vella-Brodrick, 2013; O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker & Wong, 1988) would be necessary.

Differences by Race and Conscientiousness

The quantitative analysis indicates two significant factors predicting the difference in higher and lower purpose in life. African American participants are more likely to report higher PIL than White participants. Moreover, those with strong conscientiousness tend to show higher PIL than their counterparts. The qualitative analysis did not provide sufficient explanation as to how the two factors may operate to influence female individuals' sense of purpose in life.

Contrary to the quantitative result of significant race effect, the qualitative analysis identifies mostly racial similarities yet minor differences in purpose in life regarding family relationships and spirituality. The racial difference in the ways they discussed family relationships depends on their current and/or life long marital status. During the five-year study period, there are more White female participants remaining in marriage as compared to more

African American female participants being single. As a result, how the White participants discuss their future correlates considerably with their husbands' current situations. In contrast, the African American participants discuss pursuing marriage or partnership in the future. Even though both White and African American participants seem to equally value romantic relationships, it is critical to examine how much their emphasis on marriage or partnership changes in relation to their marital status as they transition into older adulthood. Moreover, there may be differences in how White and African American females construct their identity of being married or single. Living in the context where marriage is still the norm, a "standard" midlife woman should be married, have children, own a house, and live a financially and socially comfortable life (Moore & Radtke, 2015). A qualitative study on Canadian midlife women's construction of single identity (Moore & Radtke, 2015) shows the distinction between their "transformative midlife" and their married peers' "standard midlife". Their findings suggest that the single midlife participants, aged between 35 and 45, actively created an alternative identity of singleness to counter the standard midlife identity. Moreover, the increasing diversity and volatility in romantic partnership may have a latent effect on how the participants view their relationships in relation to their purpose in life with age (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000). No matter whether they are married or single currently, many of them have experienced more than one type of romantic relationship, including cohabitation, marriage, divorce, widowhood, and remarriage. Similarly, a review of adults' well-being varying by parenthood and childlessness (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010) also suggests the consideration of the nature and meaning of these diverse family experiences, especially by racial and ethnic differences.

Another finding is racial difference in spirituality. Spirituality is often cited as one of the most significant components in African American culture (Chatters, Nguyen, & Taylor, 2014).

Among these midlife female participants whose spirituality is an important source of purpose in life, those with higher PIL are all African Americans while only one of the four participants lower in PIL is an African American. Moreover, two of the African American participants actively practice spirituality by teaching others; three African Americans and three White Americans mainly state having faith as being important to them. The difference may reflect African American cultural implications of spirituality compared to White American. However, without more information as to the content and function of each participant's spirituality towards purpose in life as discussed earlier (Park, 2013), it remains yet a puzzle to determine the observed difference in PIL as merely the effect of spirituality or a combination of racial and spiritual experiences.

The quantitative analysis indicates the significant effect of baseline trait conscientiousness on the PIL trajectories. However, the qualitative inquiry did not find a sufficient interpretation concerning what forms people higher in conscientiousness make meaning and purpose in life compared to those lower in conscientiousness. Due to the focus on female participants in the qualitative analysis, it could be possible that male participants were driving the significant effect of conscientiousness in the quantitative analysis. Further examination suggests no significant gender difference on levels of conscientiousness at Time 1. Nevertheless, the failed attempt to identify how conscientiousness may contribute to higher versus lower purpose in life is not surprising in that personality traits are considered to be psychological resources (McAdams, 2012). Individuals use these trait-related psychological resources to derive their meaning and purpose in life in a variety of sources. Indeed, even with the small subset of the sampled participants, three participants higher in conscientiousness and four lower in conscientiousness located their purpose of life differently, such as self-needs,

family relationships, and caring for others. One potential solution to understand how conscientiousness contributes to purpose in life is suggested to incorporate the other levels of personality constructs (Hooker & McAdams, 2003; McAdams, 2012). In particular, conscientious individuals tend to be goal-and-action oriented. They tend to work hard to fulfill their commitment and accomplish their goals. Given that purpose in life is mostly shaped by goals and life projects (McAdams, 2012), future studies can explore what kinds of goals that higher and lower conscientious individuals tend to focus on, how they strive to achieve the goals, and to what extent these goals are important for their purpose in life.

Generativity and Midlife Purpose in Life

The quantitative analysis does not support the theoretical hypothesis that generativity significantly contributes to purpose in middle adulthood (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2012). However, the qualitative findings suggest that generative action seems to be important for purpose in life for some although not all the female participants. It is likely that with increasing societal challenges adults strive to find meaningful roles and opportunities to fulfill purpose in life with age (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Research has shown various forms of generativity, including bearing children as biological generativity, parenting children as parental generativity, teaching others as technical generativity, and passing on values and meaning as cultural generativity (Kotre, 1984). Expanded from Erikson's (1963) original proposition of generativity mainly as a midlife developmental task, generativity could be expressed across the lifespan in that people develop generativity through interactions between inner desire and sociocultural contexts (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). Moreover, generativity is the product of having a responsibility to contribute to others, *generative concerns*, and of taking actions to fulfill the concerns, *generative behaviors*.

To be more specific, having children does not guarantee the actualization of generativity as adult men and women without children are also able to achieve generativity (Cohler, Hostetler, & Boxer, 1998). It is consistent in the present finding that even though many of the participants have had children, they do not necessarily associate their parenting behaviors with generative concerns but more about fulfilling their roles as mothers. In contrast, for the four participants who explicitly express their generative concerns and actively mentor others, they have accomplished various forms of generativity. All of them have accomplished technical and cultural generativity in that they mentor others through work and religious practice as well as pass on values of altruism. Moreover, three of them discuss their parenting concerns and behaviors to fulfill their parental generativity. They have helped their children overcome developmental issues associated with their own marital challenges. Their ability to find positive meaning from their negative life events and give back to society is similar to the “redemptive self” narrative that McAdams and colleagues consistently find among quantitatively-highly-generative Americans (McAdams, 2006, 2012; McAdams et al., 1999). Those with redemptive-self narratives tend to construct clearer and higher sense of purpose in life.

The findings from this study highlight the importance of contextual factors in developing purpose in life across the lifespan (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Elder & Johnson, 2003). Future studies should incorporate individuals’ earlier life experiences to examine the development of their generativity to better examine its link to purpose in life. For example, using the same FLSA data, Jones and McAdams (2013) found significant racial and gender differences on becoming generative through earlier socializing experiences in various contexts, including family, mentorship, education systems, and other institutional influences. Although African Americans on average showed higher generativity than White Americans, none of the contextual

experiences significantly predicted generativity for African Americans. Their results indicated that socioeconomic status rather significantly predicted African Americans' generativity. In contrast, White Americans seemed to promote generativity through family, teacher/mentor, and other institutional settings. Moreover, for females generativity was significantly correlated with family influences while all the socializing experiences, except family, seemed to contribute to males' generativity. To further explore the discrepant quantitative and qualitative results in this study, one approach is to examine how individuals express various forms of generativity in their life stories and whether their concerns and behaviors contribute to their purpose in life.

Strength and Limitations

This mixed methods study has some limitations but also offers directions for future research. Although there is a sample constraint of applying Growth Mixture Modeling in the quantitative analysis, other researchers argue for its effectiveness using a sample between 100 and 200 participants (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014b). The comparable results between the normal and non-normal modeling results also support taking this statistical approach. Quantitative measures of purpose in life over five years during late midlife show a stable trajectory, with most participants having higher purpose in life and fewer participants reporting lower purpose in life. The qualitative findings support the quantitative results and provide further details about what and how the participants may develop their purpose in life. However, with a subsample focusing on females, I am only confident to elucidate the quantitative results for midlife female participants rather than similarity and difference across genders. Nevertheless, the consistency of the sources of purpose in life in the Time 1 and Time 5 narratives may imply the quantitative stability of purpose in life over time. The salient differences in proactive versus reactive major life themes and caring for others versus self-help

explain the reasons *why* and *how* some participants show higher purpose in life whereas the others maintain lower purpose in life.

For the qualitative analysis, the discovery of themes should begin optimally during the process of data collection, where researchers could gather information from participants and reflection during interviews and write extensive field notes (Creswell, 2014; Luborsky, 1994). Relying on interview transcripts might lead to a one-sided approach to identify themes of purpose in life in this study. To avoid the drawback, I supplemented the participants' life stories in the thematic analysis using their life-story overviews. Several suggestions from experienced mixed method researchers are adopted (Creswell, 2014). I provide detailed descriptions of themes with the support from the participants' own perspectives and contrast the results with negative cases from the subsample. As a non-American, younger graduate student in the process of immersing, analyzing, and interpreting the narratives of late midlife White and African Americans, I have been aware of potential self-biases. I have written research notes and had ongoing discussions with my researcher mentors as much as possible during the entire process.

The other limitation is that the participants are not directly asked about whether these future goals, plans, and values are tied up with their purpose in life in the qualitative interviews. However, the existing research has demonstrated the necessity of goals and values in providing meaning, sense of purpose, and direction to one's life (Emmons, 1999; McAdams, 2012; Reker & Wong, 2012). Moreover, to fully experience meaning, individuals are prompted to incorporate three structural components, including cognitive, motivational, and affective components, in their descriptions of sources of meaning (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Reker & Wong, 1988, 2012). That is, they cognitively articulate their beliefs, worldviews, and values, select and pursue their goals, and react affectively in the continuous process. As a result, they

would develop a clear life purpose and a sense of direction (Reker & Wong, 2012). They continue to strive for goals consistent with life purposes, feel satisfied with past, present, and future, and are determined to make the future meaningful. This study expands our understanding in this meaning-making process that the participants higher in purpose in life tend to take “action” to fulfill their sources of purpose in life. That is, they describe their behavioral component in their experience of meaning.

I attempted to minimize sample selection biases in both the phases of quantitative and qualitative analyses. It is possible that the discrepancy between theories and empirical findings might come from the focus of this study on an age-homogeneous, White and African American sample in late midlife. In addition, the qualitative analysis focuses on only female participants. However, the longitudinal design and the life-story interviews provide a unique opportunity to explore diverse paths to purpose in life among the participants. For example, self-redemption is likely to be one of the paths (McAdams, 2012; Sommer, Baumeister, & Stillman, 2012). Those who have overcome suffering and negative life events exhibit resilience and realize their purpose in life as service to others, especially people who are suffering as they themselves have experienced. Moreover, some of those lower in purpose in life talk about actively changing their attitude toward life to be more positive, finding inner strength, and having compassion. Regardless whether the participants rate themselves with higher or lower purpose in life, people seem to have certain psychological capacities and they could take actions to maintain or promote purpose in life as they move on to the future.

Although it is certainly not my attempt to generalize the results to the population, the findings suggest a direction of multiple paths to purpose in life for future studies to explore, especially how individuals perceive their major life themes as more proactive or reactive. To

better understand the process of developing purpose in life and its importance beyond late-middle adulthood, this study suggests exploring a few salient sources, including family, work, self-needs, personal development, caring for others, and spirituality. It is also important to explore the effect of social roles, life events, and mental and physical health on purpose in life (Lachman, 2004; Piquart, 2002; Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003; de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Especially for African American midlife adults, it is important to consider how experiences of racial discrimination and prejudice as part of their life experiences help them conceptualize their purpose in life (Brown, Matthews, & Bromberger, 2005).

Conclusion

This mixed methods study expands our theoretical and empirical understanding of purpose in life over time in late middle adulthood. With consistent cross-sectional findings regarding the drop of purpose in life between middle-aged and older adult samples, this study is the first longitudinal attempt to explore the trajectory of purpose in life in late midlife. I quantitatively identify a stable non-normally distributed trajectory of purpose in life among the sample, in which the majority of participants showed higher-stable purpose in life over five years whereas a small subset of participants had relatively lower-stable purpose in life. Moreover, African Americans are more likely to report higher-stable purpose in life than are White Americans. Those stronger in baseline trait conscientiousness tend to have higher-stable purpose in life. The qualitative findings further provide contextual details how female participants with higher and lower purpose in life differ in their sources of purpose in life and how race and trait conscientiousness, in part, might relate to higher purpose in life for White and African American female participants. This study approach that incorporates survey and narrative interview data

allows for the meaningful discussions between theories of purpose in life and individuals' subjective experiences of purpose in life in daily lives. Indeed, the integrative findings indicate the important roles of midlife in balancing self and others' needs within and beyond family contexts. Midlife adults are the connections between older and younger generations. Future research is compelling in that we need to learn more about purpose in life development from a larger and more diverse sample, taking into account cultural and ethnic backgrounds, socio-demographics, age, and gender differences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Purpose in Life Subscale (PIL)

Purpose in life was assessed with 7 items as a subscale in the 42-item Psychological Well-Being scale (PWB-42). The FLSA study assessed participants' psychological well-being using the entire scale. For the purpose of this study, I only included the PIL subscale. They are item 17, 26, and 33, and four reverse-scored items, including 8, 20, 24, and 36 from the PWB-42.

Instructions. The following set of statements deals with how you feel about yourself and your life. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

Circle the number that best describes your present agreement or disagreement with each statement.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
8. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix B. Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)

The Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) is a 20-item scale and has been used to assess generativity in many studies.

Instructions. For each of the following statements, please indicate how often the statement applies to you, by marking either “0,” “1,” “2,” or “3” in the space in front.

Mark “0” if the statement *never* applies to you.

Mark “1” if the statement *occasionally* or *seldom* applies to you.

Mark “2” if the statement applies to you *fairly often*.

Mark “3” if the statement applies to you *very often* or *nearly always*.

- _____ 1. I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences.
- _____ 2. I do not feel that other people need me.
- _____ 3. I think I would like the work of a teacher.
- _____ 4. I feel as though I have made a difference to many people.
- _____ 5. I do not volunteer to work for charity.
- _____ 6. I have made and created things that have had an impact on other people.
- _____ 7. I try to be creative in most things that I do.
- _____ 8. I think I will be remembered for a long time after I die.
- _____ 9. I believe that society cannot be responsible for providing food and shelter for all homeless people.
- _____ 10. Others would say that I have made unique contributions to society.
- _____ 11. If I were unable to have children of my own, I would like to adopt children.

- _____ 12. I have important skills that I try to teach others.
- _____ 13. I feel that I have done nothing that will survive after I die.
- _____ 14. In general, my actions do not have a positive effect on other people.
- _____ 15. I feel as though I have done nothing of worth to contribute to others.
- _____ 16. I have made many commitments to many different kinds of people, groups, and activities in my life.
- _____ 17. Other people say that I am a very productive person.
- _____ 18. I have a responsibility to improve the neighborhood in which I live.
- _____ 19. People come to me for advice.
- _____ 20. I feel as though my contributions will exist after I die.

Appendix C. Time 1 Life Story Protocol

For the purpose of this study, I focus on the sections and questions marked with asterisks.

The Life Story Interview – Final Version (T1)
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Dan P. McAdams

The Foley Center for the Study of Lives

Northwestern University

Revised: February 2008

Introduction

This is an interview about the *story of your life*. As a social scientist, I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things in your life – a few key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life and how you imagine your life developing in the future. I will guide you through the interview so that we finish it all in about two hours or less.

Please know that my purpose in doing this interview is not to figure out what is wrong with you or to do some kind of deep clinical analysis! Nor should you think of this interview as a “therapy session” of some kind. The interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story. As social scientists, my colleagues and I collect people’s life stories in order to understand the different ways in which people in our society and in others live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

I think you will enjoy the interview. Do you have any questions?

A. Life Chapters

Please begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book or novel. Imagine that the book has a table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters in the story. To begin here, please describe very briefly what the main chapters in the book might be. Please give each chapter a title, tell me just a little bit about what each chapter is about, and say a word or two about how we get from one chapter to the next. As a storyteller here, what you want to do is to give me an overall plot summary of your story, going chapter by chapter. You may have as many chapters as you want, but I would suggest having between about 2 and 7 of them. We will want to spend no more than about 20 minutes on this first section of the interview, so please keep your descriptions of the chapters relatively brief.

[Note to interviewer: The interviewer should feel free to ask questions of clarification and elaboration throughout the interview, but especially in this first part. This first section of the interview should run between 15 and 30 minutes.]

B. Key Scenes in the Life Story

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your life, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your life story that stands out for a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly vivid, important, or memorable. For each of the eight key events we will consider, I ask that you describe in detail what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. In addition, I ask that you tell me why you think this particular scene is *important* or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a person? Please be specific.

1. High point. Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be *the* high point scene of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a person.

2. Low point. The second scene is the opposite of the first. Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not *the* low point in your life story. Even though this event is unpleasant, I would appreciate your providing as much detail as you can about it. What happened in the event, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so bad and what the scene may say about you or your life. *[Interviewer note: If the participants balks at doing this, tell him or her that the event does not really have to be **the** lowest point in the story but merely a very bad experience of some kind.]*

3. Turning point. In looking back over your life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your life wherein you went through an important change of some kind. Again, for this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

4. Positive childhood memory. The fourth scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *positive* in some way. This would be a very positive, happy memory from your early years. Please describe this good memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or about your life?

5. Negative childhood memory. The fifth scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *negative* in some way. This would be a very negative, unhappy memory from your early years, perhaps entailing sadness, fear, or some other very negative emotional experience. Please describe this bad memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

6. Vivid adult memory. Moving ahead to your adult years, please identify one scene that you have not already described in this section (in other words, do not repeat your high point, low point, or turning point scene) that stands out as especially vivid or meaningful. This would be an especially memorable, vivid, or important scene, positive or negative, from your adult years. Please describe this scene in detail, tell what happened, when and where, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

7. Wisdom event. Please describe an event in your life in which you displayed *wisdom*. The episode might be one in which you acted or interacted in an especially wise way or provided wise counsel or advice, made a wise decision, or otherwise behaved in a particularly wise manner. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you and your life?

8. Religious, spiritual, or mystical experience. Whether they are religious or not, many people report that they have had experiences in their lives where they felt a sense of the transcendent or sacred, a sense of God or some almighty or ultimate force, or a feeling of oneness with nature, the world, or the universe. Thinking back on your entire life, please identify an episode or moment in which you felt something like this. This might be an experience that occurred within the context of your own religious tradition, if you have one, or it may be a spiritual or mystical experience of any kind. Please describe this transcendent experience in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

Now, we're going to talk about the future.

***C. Future Script**

1. The next chapter. Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future. Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story?

2. Dreams, hopes, and plans for the future. Please describe your plans, dreams, or hopes for the future. What do you hope to accomplish in the future in your life story?

3. Life project. Do you have a project in life? A life project is something that you have been working on and plan to work on in the future chapters of your life story. The project might involve your family or your work life, or it might be a hobby, avocation, or pastime. Please describe any project that you are currently working on or plan to work on in the future. Tell me what the project is, how you got involved in the project or will get involved in the project, how the project might develop, and why you think this project is important for you and/or for other people.

D. Challenges

This next section considers the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your life. I will begin with a general challenge, and then I will focus in on three particular areas or issues where many people experience challenges, problems, or crises.

1. Life challenge. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you have faced in your life. What is or was the challenge or problem? How did the challenge or problem develop? How did you address or deal with this challenge or problem? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your own life story?

2. Health. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe a scene or period in your life, including the present time, wherein you or a close family member confronted a major *health* problem, challenge, or crisis. Please describe in detail what the health problem is or was and how it developed. If relevant, please discuss any experience you had with the health-care system regarding this crisis or problem. In addition, please talk about how you coped with the problem and what impact this health crisis, problem, or challenge has had on you and your overall life story.

3. Loss. As people get older, they invariably suffer losses of one kind or another. By loss I am referring here to the loss of important people in your life, perhaps through death or separation. These are *interpersonal* losses – the loss of a person. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest interpersonal loss you have experienced. This could be a loss you experienced at any time in your life, going back to childhood and up to the present day. Please describe this loss and the process of the loss. How have you coped with the loss? What effect has this loss had on you and your life story?

4. Failure, regret. Everybody experiences failure and regrets in life, even for the happiest and luckiest lives. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest failure or regret you have experienced. The failure or regret can occur in any area of your life – work, family, friendships, or any other area. Please describe the failure or regret and the way in which the failure or regret came to be. How have you coped with this failure or regret? What effect has this failure or regret had on you and your life story?

E. Personal Ideology

Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about questions of meaning and morality in your life. Please give some thought to each of these questions.

1. Religious/ethical values. Consider for a moment the religious or spiritual aspects of your life. Please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs and values, if indeed these are important to you. Whether you are religious or not, please describe your overall ethical or moral approach to life.

2. Political/social values. How do you approach political or social issues? Do you have a particular political point of view? Are there particular social issues or causes about which you feel strongly? Please explain.

3. Change, development of religious and political views. Please tell the story of how your religious, moral, and/or political views and values have developed over time. Have they changed in any important ways? Please explain.

***4. Single value.** What is the most important value in human living? Please explain.

***5. Other.** What else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world? What else can you tell me that would help me understand your overall philosophy of life?

***F. Life Theme**

Looking back over your entire life story with all its chapters, scenes, and challenges, and extending back into the past and ahead into the future, do you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story? Please explain.

G. Reflection

Thank you for this interview. I have just one more question for you. Many of the stories you have told me are about experiences that stand out from the day-to-day. For example, we talked about a high point, a turning point, a scene about your health, etc. Given that most people don't share their life stories in this way on a regular basis, I'm wondering if you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?

Appendix D. Time 5 Life Story Protocol

For the purpose of this study, I focus on the sections and questions marked with asterisks.

The Life Story Interview – FLSA Time 5

Dan P. McAdams

Revised by Regina Lopata Logan

The Foley Center for the Study of Lives

Northwestern University

Revised: August, 2012

Introduction

As you may remember from your previous interviews, especially the first one, we are interested in hearing about the *story of your life*, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The interview is selective; it doesn't include everything that ever happened to you. As before, I'll ask you to focus on a few key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers. Whatever comes up in response to my questions is fine. I'll guide you through the interview so that we finish it all in about two hours.

Again, as you know from your previous interviews with us, please remember that this interview is not to figure out what is wrong with you or to do some kind of deep clinical analysis! Nor is this a "therapy session." This interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story. My colleagues and I collect people's life stories in order to understand the ways people live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

I think you'll enjoy the interview. Do you have any questions?

A. Key Scenes in the Life Story

(Note to interviewer: participant may ask if it's ok to repeat some of the same scenes described at T1. Do not prompt participant by saying up front that it's ok, but DO tell them it's fine if they ask. However, do not skip a scene just because the participant has previously narrated it. Ask him/her to please repeat and that we'd like to hear it again if that's the scene she/he would like to tell about.)

This section is the same as in your first interview. I'd like you to focus on a few key scenes that stand out in your story. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your life story that stands out for a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly vivid, important, or memorable. For each of the eight key events we'll consider, please describe in detail what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. In addition, please tell me why you think this particular scene is *important* or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a person or about your life? Please be specific.

1. High point. Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be *the* high point scene of your entire life, or it may be a moment that was especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, tell me why you think this particular moment was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a person or about your life.

2. Low point. The second scene is the opposite of the first. Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not *the* low point in your life story. Even though this event is unpleasant, please provide as much detail as you can about it. What

happened in the event, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please tell me why you think this particular moment was so bad and what the scene may say about you or your life. [*Interviewer note: If the participants balks at doing this, tell him or her that the event does not really have to be **the** lowest point in the story but merely a very bad experience of some kind.*]

3. Turning point. In looking back over your life, you may be able to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular episode that you see as a turning point in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point, please describe some event where you went through an important change of some kind. Again, for this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please tell me what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

4. Positive childhood memory. The fourth scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *positive* in some way. This would be a very positive, happy memory from your early years. Please describe this good memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or about your life?

5. Negative childhood memory. The fifth scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *negative* in some way. This would be a very negative, unhappy memory from your early years, perhaps entailing sadness, fear, or some other very negative emotional experience. Please describe this bad memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

6. Vivid adult memory. Moving ahead to your adult years, please identify one scene that you have not already described in this section (in other words, do not repeat your high point, low point, or turning point scene) that stands out as especially vivid or meaningful. This would be an especially memorable, vivid, or important scene, positive or negative, from your adult years.

Please describe this scene in detail, tell what happened, when and where, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

7. Wisdom event. Please describe an event in your life in which you displayed *wisdom*. The episode might be one in which you acted or interacted in an especially wise way or provided wise counsel or advice, made a wise decision, or otherwise behaved in a particularly wise manner. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

8. Religious, spiritual, or mystical experience. Whether they are religious or not, many people report that they have had experiences in their lives where they felt a sense of the transcendent or sacred, a sense of God or some almighty or ultimate force, or a feeling of oneness with nature, the world, or the universe. Thinking back on your entire life, please identify an episode or moment in which you felt something like this. This might be an experience that occurred within the context of your own religious tradition, if you have one, or it may be a spiritual or mystical experience of any kind. Please describe this transcendent experience in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

B. Work and career

In your first interview, we asked you to think of your life as if it were a book or novel and what the chapters would have been. Today, we're asking you to focus on your work story. So, if

you were telling the story of your work career, what would be the chapters, beginning with your first job all the way until today or until you retired. Please include part time as well as full time work and tell me a little about each job. If the choice to marry or be in a committed relationship or not and to have or not have children affected your career decisions, please explain how. If you had your own children or were responsible for any children, please tell us how you arranged for child care. Also, do you have any career-related decisions that you now wish you had done differently? In addition, would you describe how you balance your personal life with your work life? Overall, what do your career decisions say about who you are as a person or about your life? Last, is there an overall theme that relates to your career? Please explain.

C. Challenges

This next section considers the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your life. I'll begin with a general challenge, and then I'll focus in on three particular areas or issues where many people experience challenges, problems, or crises.

1. Life challenge. Looking back over your entire life, please describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you've faced in your life. What is or was the challenge or problem? How did the challenge or problem develop? How did you address or deal with this challenge or problem? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your own life story?

2. Loss. As people get older, they invariably suffer losses of one kind or another. By loss, I'm referring here to the loss of important people in your life, perhaps through death or separation. Looking back over your entire life, please describe the greatest loss you've ever experienced. This could be a loss you experienced at any time in your life, going back to childhood and up to

the present day. Please describe this loss and the process of the loss. How have you coped with the loss? What effect has this loss had on you and your life story?

3. Failure, regret. Everybody experiences failure and regrets in life, even for the happiest and luckiest lives. Looking back over your entire life, please describe the greatest failure or regret you've ever experienced. The failure or regret can occur in any area of your life – work, family, friendships, or any other area. Please describe the failure or regret and the way in which the failure or regret happened. How have you coped with this failure or regret? What effect has this failure or regret had on you and your life story?

D. Historical Context

We all grow up and live in the contexts of our families, our neighborhoods, our society, and the political and social events of our time. As a Baby Boomer, you may have some special historical moments you remember.

Historical context. Please describe TWO (only) historical events, social movements, and/or societal changes that have affected you. What have these events or social changes meant for you and your life?

E. Continuity and Change

You've just been talking about historical events that have affected your life. You may think about how you've changed or how you've stayed the same, either as a result of these events or any of many other things that affect how people develop. Now I'm going to ask you to think about the ways in which you think you've stayed the same or the ways in which you've changed throughout your life. Would you please tell me the main ways you think you've changed or stayed the same since you were around 18-20 years old. What would you say are the biggest changes in how you think of yourself? What are the major ways you think you're still the same?

Up to this point, we've been talking mostly about your past. Now, we're going to talk about the future.

***F. Future Script**

1. The next chapter. Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future. Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story?

2. Dreams, hopes, and plans for the future. Please describe your plans, dreams, or hopes for the future. What do you hope to accomplish in the near and far future?

***G. Values and Life Theme**

We're almost to the end of the interview. There are two questions in this section: one is about your most important value and the other is about the theme of your life. First:

1. Single value. What is the most important value in human living? Please explain.

2. Life theme. Looking back over your entire life story with all its chapters, scenes, and challenges, and extending back into the past and ahead into the future, do you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story? Please explain.

H. Reflection

I have just one more question for you. Many of the stories you've told me are about experiences that stand out from the day-to-day. For example, we talked about a high point, a turning point, a scene about your childhood, etc. Given that most people don't share their life stories in this way on a regular basis, I'm wondering if you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and

feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?

Thank you so much for your time. All of us involved in the project appreciate your participation in the study.

Appendix E. Life-Story Overviews

Hanna (Age 56 at Time 1) (African American)

	a	b	c	d	
Age	Childhood				Time5
Year	(1952)	1976-1989	1992	Time1 2008	2012 2013

a. She had valued her education since childhood. Pursuing knowledge had been her resort from her schizophrenic father and depressed mother.

b. Her wedding in 1976 was her high point in life. She was a stay-at-home mother with two boys. Her husband was working and started his own business. She also returned to work sometime. He committed suicide suddenly due to the stress. She had been through a lot of therapies for herself and her sons.

c. She met her second husband and got married a year later. She thought her young son needed a father role model. She also got her masters to work in the health service field. She helped others through her work because she had benefited from health services.

d. She divorced her second husband. She did not feel connected with him. In fact, she still loved her first husband a lot.

My impressions:

- She confronted the challenges in life. She asked for help when her first husband committed suicide. She also helped her two sons get psychotherapy over their younger years.
- She focused on education as a form of upward mobility in her development even though her family did not support her. She also encouraged her children in pursuing their education.
- She decided to divorce her second husband because she had not been happy in their marriage. After her sons left home, she decided to file a divorce for her own well-being. She has an interesting idea of defining happiness: to adjust one's expectation to meet one's need.
- She's being flexible and adaptable in life, in terms of finding balance in life (e.g., work and family). At this period, she seemed to focus more on her own needs, how to make herself happy, for example, after overcoming these challenges in life and not being a "professional" wife. She is currently looking for partnership as her safety net as always. However, she also wants to be mindful not to jump into a relationship that is not for her. She does not have many regrets because she always tries to look things in a positive perspective.
- She's always interested in politics and promoting social good. The death of Kennedy was a huge loss like losing her own family. She also got involved with supporting Obama's elections.

Hailee (Age 56 at Time 1) (White American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	
Age	Born	14	17	21	26	40			
Year	(1952)			1972		1990	1993	2008	2011
							Time1		Time5
								2011	2013

a. At 14, she was trained as a lifeguard, which was exceptional because people usually became lifeguards around 16. She talked about having a wonderful childhood, in which her parents loved all of their children and each other. She talked about being very conservative and only focused on school.

b. At 17, she went to NIU for college.

c. At 21, she married to her boyfriend from a fraternity, whom she had been dating over the four years in college. She talked about *following the norm*! She was hired right after college graduation at her high school as a counselor.

d. At 26, she divorced her first husband. She talked about how they had been living separately over the past five years. She had made progress in her career while he did not figure out what he wanted to do.

e. She took a sabbatical leave from her school to Australia. She met her second husband when traveling in New Zealand. He was the head Physical Exercise teacher where she volunteered.

f. She got married. They had compatible values and interests in life. A few years after marriage, they moved back to Chicago, taking care of her aging parents. In the meantime, they had enjoyed traveling over the years.

g. A severe earthquake happened in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2011. They were on a road trip there and she was shocked still when recalling the disaster. At Time 5 interview, she talked about hoping to get their house fixed and relocate permanently to New Zealand in the next five to ten years. She also planned to keep in contact with her siblings' families and friends in the U.S. by traveling back to visit them.

My overall impressions:

- She had no biological children. She enjoyed taking care of her parents and doing well in career.
- She had tight family relationships.

Haley (Age 55 at Time 1) (African American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
Age	Born	8 or 9							Time1		Time5
Year	1953		mid-1980s	1987	1993	1996/ 1997	1999/ 2000	2005	2008	2010	2013

a. One of her positive childhood memory was when she found out her parents were Santa Claus around age 8 or 9. She was not disappointed but thankful for her parents. One of the negative childhood memory was when she found out a guy passed out in the alley on the way home. He was drunk but she thought he was dead.

b. She lost her job in her late 20s as well as her used car, meaning losing mobility.

c. Her brother died from cancer at age 35, which was the first death in her family.

d. She started working, selling life insurance (until around 2010).

e. She quit smoking and drinking. She was determined to improve her health because she was over-weight and had lower self-esteem as a result.

f. She was very sad when talking about loss in family. Her father died from cancer and her mother died a year later, who was too sad for losing her father.

g. One of the high points was taking care of her little niece until her father got back on his own feet. She talked about the process as a family effort.

h. The other high point was when her little nephew was born.

i. Her younger sister committed suicide at age of 47 for her over-weight. She cried during the interview.

j. She got a new job as a marketing manager. She was excited for being valued as an experienced older worker. She had been looking for jobs about a year at that time. She talked about always having a job because she wanted to but also had no choices. She hoped to get retired (around 2016).

My overall impressions:

- Family as life project: She had no biological children but always cared for her nieces and nephews, which is her family as a whole (togetherness). She also respected her parents very much, helped her father when he lost his job, and took care of her younger siblings.
- Her family always prays to God. She talked about the power of prayer.
- She seemed to help others as much as she could.
- She recalled her mother taught her: "...you don't ever know when that (getting cancer) might happen to you. And it di later on in life so you just have to face it. You facing your fears and go ahead."

Heather (Age 57 at Time 1) (African American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f		g
Age	Born	10	17-20	20-30+	30+			Time1	Time5
Year	1951				1988 /89	2002	2007	2008	2013

a. Her mom left her abusive stepfather when she was around 10. At 12 or 13, she saved her mother and sisters at their apartment when someone broke in and set out the gas.

b. She got her own apartment at 17 and felt independent. She mentioned having her first daughter and left her at 20 but she did not mention anywhere else during both of her Time 1 and Time 5 interviews.

c. She went to real estate school and hair school and worked ever since. She seemed to have her first divorce during these years. She also mentioned her second marriage did not work out after 8 years.

d. She bought her first house. She mentioned another abusive relationship for four years.

e. She lost her daughter from cancer when her daughter was only 31.

f. Her mother died from cancer at 86.

g. She was doing part-time work at one antique mall.

My overall impressions:

- She is longing for a family, being loved, and getting married.
- However, her mother never “loved” her the way she had wished. She lost her daughter to cancer. Her two stepsisters did not love her. She divorced a few times.
- She has having health problems and going through some financial challenges.
- Her deep faith in God seems to be the most important support she has had.
- In terms of career, she always wants to be an entrepreneur. Except working for a real estate company for 2.5 years, she had been a freelance. She did not talk about retirement.

Helen (Age 58 at Time 1) (African American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
Age	Born	5	6-7	12			25	late 40s	50		Time5
Year	1950				1965 /69	1973			1999	2013 summer	2013 Sep.

a. She recalled being called as a “nigger” by a little girl on the bus to downtown Chicago. She was with her mother but her mother did not speak out for her. She did not feel special anymore and had low self-esteem.

b. She was molested by her cousin.

c. Her beloved grandmother died.

d. She talked about experiencing racism in high school.

e. She was first introduced to Buddhism. She started chanting.

f. She got married and had children. She was a stay-at-home mother. She had a stepdaughter, three biological children, and two adopted children (from her friend, who died accidentally). She divorced her husband sometime before her late 40s.

g. She started training for teaching. She began psychotherapy to cope with her being called “nigger” experience.

h. She began teaching.

i. She felt very proud and gained confidence in herself that she took a road trip by herself to visit her family members in the east side of the U.S.

j. She started a new teaching job.

My impression:

- She reflected that there are so many high points in her life.
- Her parents being married the whole life were her role models.
- She seems to be very conscientious and accountable. She sets goals and accomplishes them.
- She talks about having been practicing Buddhism for 40 years. It is important to take care of herself so she would be able to take care of others. She embraces the changes and uncertainties.
- She has no regrets in life.
- She hopes to retire in the future, be cancer-free, spend time with family, pursue romantic relationships, and contribute to world peace. She hopes to work to change school system to be equitable for poor students.

Holly (Age 57 at Time 1) (African American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
Age	Born	3-5	7-12	12-15	15-17	18-27	27-37	40s	Time 1	Time5
Year	1951				1970					

a. Her thought she had the best childhood with her mother, grandparents, uncle, and aunties. She was born in Chicago but her family was from Mississippi originally. She had a lot about their hometown. Her father was very violent.

b. She moved to city of Chicago to be with her mother. She was having a hard time and had to grow up in a child body with an adult mind.

c. She moved back to be with her father's family but she felt the family was not the same anymore. She tried to make friends to distract herself.

d. She moved back to be with her mother in the city of Chicago. She was making more friends and established her independence. She had a boyfriend. She mentioned Vietnam War happened.

e. She had no sense of direction in her life when she dropped out of high school and got married. Her paternal grandmother died and she was very sad. Her high point was having her daughter at 18 and had twins years later. During the years, she experienced two bad marriages. Both ex-husbands cheated on her. The first one even put a gun in her mouth! She talked about rectifying social norms as a Black single woman with three children.

f. She moved back to her mother's at 27. She got laid off and was unemployed for about 10 years.

g. She felt at peace more when she prayed and worshiped God.

h. She was in a inter-racial relationship and thought about getting married.

i. She joined online dating.

My impressions:

- Her dreams and hopes seem from her observation from her grandmother and aunties: getting married, raising children, and being a more traditional woman?
- She had struggled with her relationships with her mother and experienced two divorces. She felt lost from God for a while. Praying to God helped her through challenges. She has focused on her spirituality ever since.
- Health-wise, she was pre-diabetic. She had a few family members with cancers. She wanted to live longer and keep pretty. She started losing weight and eating healthier.

Hester (Age 56 at Time 1) (African American)

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	i	j
Age	Born	child-hood	17	18	26	32+	44	Time 1	Time5
Year	1952		1971	1975	1977			2008	2013

a. Her mother left all of her seven children with her grandmother for a while although she talked about how her parents loved her very much. She was molested by her brother and her father (once).

b. Her low point was when her mother died in a car accident suddenly after she had first baby. She went away for college and her grandmother and aunt came from Philadelphia to take care of her son for her.

c. She got into college right after the Civil Right Movement. She flew to New York city to get an abortion at 18. It was still illegal.

d. After she graduated, she worked a few jobs and did not like them.

e. She took the “Big Move” to Chicago after quitting her first formal job. It was her low point failing to find a job for a while.

f. The first time she felt validated when her play/performance was liked by the audiences. She felt her life was turning around.

g. She took the risk to quit her teaching job and pursue her dream as an artist.

i. She was having a younger boyfriend at Time 1 but she was still married. She talked about never wanting to get married but she needed health insurance from her husband’s plan.

j. She was divorced and was in a relationship with a married man. She decided to stop their relationship the day when she was interviewed at Time 5.

My impressions:

- She had some many high points in life.
- She always enjoyed reading.
- She started her own youth performing arts organization to help youth development through arts.
- She seems to be a career woman. Raising her own family was never her goal. However, she still wanted to get married in the future.

Helena (Age 58 at Time 1) (African American)

	a	b	c	d	e	f
Age	Born	child- hood	high school~		Time 1	Time5
Year	1950		1986	1994 /96	2003	2009 2014

a. She was the 5th child of her parents among the seven children. She took care of her siblings. She always attended schools although she was still trying to find what she wanted.

b. She had her only son in high school. She did not understand birth control then. She had been trying to work and finish school besides being a single mother. She had stayed in a company as an accountant for 25 years. She was the only Black in her department. She grew professionally. She learned how to better invest from her mentor at work.

c. The stock market dropped down dramatically to 400 points. She got her investment out and changed her career to education.

d. Her mother died in 1994 as her most significant loss. Her brother died in 1996. She had to be strong and did what she had to do in daily life.

e. She graduated from college. She got a teaching job but did not like it. She thought she should have gone to accounting.

f. She was looking for jobs at Time 5.

My impressions:

- She has been trying to remind herself to be positive. Things could have been worse so she is still lucky and fortunate that nothing dramatic happened to her (e.g., not being molested). She lives in that present.
- She feels younger generation does not care and respect others. She mentioned her neighborhood was not safe as a result.
- She has valued education for herself and her son. She was determined to get her college degree even when she was working and taking care of her son at the same time, with some help from her mother. Moreover, she thought it turned out to be a blessing to have her son.
- She considers herself not a home person but has worked her whole life.
- Her belief and faith in God has evolved from ego-centered to God-oriented. Whenever something she wanted did not happen, she realized it happened this way as God's will. I wonder whether and how she thought God's will for her life was (or is)?

Laura (Age 55 at Time 1) (White American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g
Age	Born	~15	17	20s	30s	40-50s	Time1	Time5
Year	(1953)		1970				2008	2013

a. Her father's entertainment career was very successful. She had a very spoiled and comfortable childhood and then experienced a dramatic change due to her father's business failure when she was 15. They moved a lot and to bad neighborhood. She and two other siblings all internalized her father's loss and depression afterwards.

b. She felt lost herself the beginning when she was diagnosed of Crohn's disease. It really disrupted her development in terms of her outlook, not being able to attend school, not getting a job, and not getting health insurance. She felt she was in a standstill for a while. She became inward and isolated in adolescence. The disease was rare at that time and people and she did not know it would be a chronic illness.

c. She became stronger as a result of psychotherapy, which also inspired her career pursuit. She went to college and pursued her career as an occupational therapist. She joined a lot of social movements, especially women right and abortion (Pro-Choice) etc. She was also helping her friends to avoid Vietnam draft by driving them to Canada. Her father died when she was 25.

d. She got married with her husband. They went through adjustment phase, during which she had close girlfriends. Her girlfriend, Becky, lived with them and later Becky found out she is lesbian and has been in love with her. It was a crisis for her romantic relationship. She finally broke up with Becky and reconciled with her husband that they work together to make their marriage work. She got pregnant.

e. She got relapse and stayed ill for a long time. It affected her daughter's development a lot.

f. She was getting back to her life from illness.

g. She was still struggling with her illness while taking care of her mother.

My impressions:

- She seems her first half of life as being reactive- doing whatever her family wanted her to do, never deciding for herself. As a result of dealing with the illness, she became proactive- realizing what she wanted and whom she was to be able to make decisions consciously.
- I think she has learned a lot to be proactive and not to react to things only emotionally. She sees the generational connection through her grandmother and her mother to her and her daughter. I think she's become stronger in believing in herself, her husband, and her daughter. To her, being nice to others and creating an environment for everyone to thrive (based on her ability) is the important human value.

Lany (Age 55 at Time 1) (White American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	
Age	Born	Child -hood	17	21~		44		Time1	Time5
Year	(1953)		1970		1983	1996	2006	2008	2013

a. She remembered her family moving a lot during her childhood because her father worked for AT&T Long Lines. Spending four years in the same high school was her first time staying in the same school until finish. Her father was a heavy drinker. She had a handicapped sister that her family had to take care for. She went to friends' house as an escape sometimes.

b. She went to college but it was a lot of Vietnam War protests going on and she chose a calmer environment.

c. She began working at an advertising agency in downtown Chicago for about 4.5 years until she got married. She mentioned her first and only adventure was to go camping in CA with her husband, who was her boyfriend at that time. She left her job to become a fulltime mother in 1983.

d. She has been a fulltime mother since 1983 until now. She is very close to her daughter and her son.

e. Her mother's sudden death was her low point in life. She and her siblings had to arrange the care for her father and their handicapped sister, who were cared by her mother.

f. Her friend's psychic friend told her that she had a lot of female souls in her kitchen. She was very close to her mother and grandmother.

g. She thought about relocating in the future but also wanted to stay closer to her children.

My impressions:

- She cares a lot about how people think about her. She knows she does not like doing something but would feel embarrassed or do it so that people would not judge her. She does not talk about religion or politics with others because she does not want people to judge her. She considers herself conservative, as her parents were, that everyone should take care of onself unless the situation is very extreme. For people like her sister, who was born with disability (physical and mental), government is not helping them enough.
- She also shares that she is a home person. She does not have many friends and she is fine with it.
- She always takes the safer and more comfortable choices, such as picking the university for her college and doing just fine rather than excellent in classes.

Leah (Age 56 at Time 1) (White American)

		a	b	c	d	f
Age	Born	childhood			Time1	Time 5
Year	(1952)				2008	

a. She was the 5th and youngest child in her family. Her parents had her by surprise after 25 years of their marriage. Having older parents in her upbringing was special, some positives and some negatives. Her brother was treating her very well. She also remembered a sweet 16 party that her parents held for her.

b. She went to college. After college, she got married shortly and ended after a while.

c. She enjoyed her career being a teaching for 35 years, in several different locations. She felt frustrated going through a divorce and did not have a successful relationship afterwards. She had been single.

d. She was retired at Time 1 but went back to be a substitute teacher a year later.

f. She hoped to continue to teach until 80s.

My impressions:

- She talked about not being respected a lot of times as a public school teacher in Chicago. However, she did have sense of achievement teaching her students.
- Her mother's gradual passing was tough for her. It sounded like she did not want to live so she finally willed herself to die at 88.
- She seems to be lonely for most of her life.
- There were many life story interview questions that she was not able to answer but rambled some reflection.
- She had many regrets about not expanding her social circle earlier in life even though she liked being alone, and about not taking computer class even though she really does not like computer.
- She seemed having negative views in life, and believes life events depend on luck and fate.
- She shows a strong tendency for less self-confidence that she did not think she is having a meaningful life story to share and wished to know what other interviewees were sharing.

Lydia (Age 55 at Time 1) (White American)

Age	Born	a	b	c	d	e	f	Time1	g	h	Time5
Year	(1953)	1963	1975	1976	1978-81	1989	2004-07	2008	2009	2011	2013

a. She could not think of any negative childhood memory. She reflected on her children positively, even when her family moved and she had to adjust to new schools a few times. She thought about JFK, 1963, as the salient event in her childhood.

b. She graduated from college and got married to her first husband in August.

c. A year later, her first husband, an Air Force pilot, died accidentally during a mission. The sudden loss was devastating for her. She felt empty in life and moved back to her parents in Chicago.

d. She met her current husband at 24 in 1978 and got married in 1981. In the meantime, she became a manager at Defense. She discussed that she felt independent more and less relied on others to validate her.

e. At 36, she was pregnant with twins. She felt it was a good timing to focus on family because it was when the Cold War ended and she was less busy at work. As she juggled with career and young children her parents helped over the years.

f. Her father died in 2004 and her mother became totally dependent on her family. Her estranged older sister, who is an alcoholic and was in rehab, came back to bother her mother and her. In 2007, her daughters left for college.

g. She retired in 2009 from Defense department. She talked about her bosses being unethical at work and decided to retire early.

h. Her sister sued her for mistreating her mother.

My overall impressions:

- She is very family-centered, taking care of her 85-year-old mother and supporting her two twin daughters in college.
- The most important challenge in her life was her first husband died unexpected when they were so young.
- She has learned to put everything “in perspective” after experiencing various losses (her grandfather, her alcoholic and abusive father, and her first husband) and losing some relationships (her good friends at work and her best friend).
- She identifies herself as Republican and being politically conservative. She thinks one should help people who help themselves, not redistributing wealth regardless.
- Her current challenge (since 2011) is that her sister sues her for abusing their mother.

Lisa (Age 55 at Time 1) (White American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	j
Age	Born	11	16	18–29	41	42	44	early 50	Time1	Time5

Year	1953				1994		1997		2008	2013
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a. She grew up with other five siblings in her family. Her father was very strict. She talked about having fun with many friends in her neighborhood. Her fondest memory was a family road trip to CA to visit her mother's sister at 11.

b. Her baby sister was born when she was 16. She had to help take care of her but it was also a time she felt like a grown-up, being responsible and trusted by her parents.

c. She got married right after high school as a rebellious act to her father being so strict. She drank and partied a lot with her husband. She called these years as "troubled years" until she had her daughter at 24 and her son at 29.

d. During her many years of struggle in her abusive marriage, she felt weak and worthless, and even had suicidal ideas. She also strived to help her son, who struggled with school as a result. At her 40th birthday, her first husband threw a surprise party for her and many people who loved her came, including her boss and her parents. She realized her parents had loved her but she had been trying to be independent from them. It was a turning point for her to ask herself: "whether I would like to continue this life style?" She decided to divorce her first husband at 41.

e. She took a family road trip with her two children to Disneyland after getting divorce and when her daughter just graduated from high school. She was longing for a new beginning for herself. She talked about experiencing the wholeness in nature in Montana during the trip.

f. She got married with her second husband in 1997. Her first husband died in 2001 from an accident after drinking too much.

g. She happened to run into a music festival and discovered that music made her happy.

h. She reflected on being anxious that her husband was going to retire soon but she would wait for 10 more years until she became 66.

i. She talked about being an older person. She wanted to be freer like she was at her teenage years.

My overall impressions:

- She is emotional and intuition-driven.
- She is determined to take care of her children well.
- She sounded low self-confident.
- For social events, she talked about not participating the Hippie culture because of her strict father. She did not like the Women's Movement because she had always dreamed to be a stay-at home mother. Women transitioning into work field had made her no choice but to work

Lulu (Exact age missing) (White American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f		
Age	Born	2-13	22-23	30+	36	40+	44	Time1	Time5
Year	1950s								2013

a. She had a very poor childhood, growing up in Chicago. Her mother separated from her father. She had two older sisters, 10.5 and 12 years older than her. She did not have really good or positive childhood memories. She remembered her sisters getting married when she was around 8. Her mother had been an alcoholic. One time she was terrified when her mother fell down stairs. When she was 13, her mother inherited a lot of money from her parents.

b. She dropped out from college and had a child. She divorced her alcoholic husband a year later.

c. She ended her relationship with an alcoholic rather than marrying him.

d. Her mother passed away from breast cancer. They had been close but not healthily close. She started to be independent and grew closer with her father and sisters.

e. She moved to Indiana with her daughter, who was attending Indiana University (IU) there. She accidentally signed up for a nursing program at 42. She loved the program. They moved back to Chicago six months later because her daughter did not like IU.

f. She finished her nursing program at Northwestern University eventually. She has been working as a nurse ever since. She also supports her daughter and her grandson. She talked about volunteering, doing yoga, and reading when she became less busy at work.

My impression:

- She has struggled with alcoholism in her family, including her mother, ex-husband, and ex-partner.
- She has been grateful and worked hard. She's been struggled financially.
- She thinks it is important to be kind to others.
- She talked about being the same since 18 or 20. I wonder whether she considered herself growth or not?

Lucy (Age 55 at Time 1) (African American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
Age	Born	5 or 6	13	14+	26	29	30s-50s	Time1	Time5
Year	1953							2008	2013

a. She recalled her happiest memory was spending Christmas with her family, especially with her grandfather. She felt only love and happiness.

b. Her beloved grandfather died. It was the first funeral in her life. She was child of her single mother.

c. She got herself in trouble but finally got herself out from the strangers' car. She thought herself being trusting and gullible because she was spoiled as the only and first child in her father's and mother's families. She got pregnant sometime in her teenage years but she had no choice. She did not mention what happened afterwards. She also began working. She talked about helping a girl, whose brother molested her.

d. She had her son. She did not marry his father because he was not at the hospital with her when she gave birth to her son. He did not pick them up from the hospital when he was supposed to be there. She quit her job and opened a daycare herself because her son's nanny was very irresponsible.

e. Her fiancée died in an argument. She was pregnant with her daughter with him.

f. She has been living her children ever since. She had stroke, nerve damage, and diabetes through the years. She was mourning for her mother and went through depression and drugs.

g. She was planning to get married with a man, who had been pursuing her for 20 more years.

h. She did not seem married.

My impression:

- She seems to have a pattern "loving at the first sight"?
- Her mother told her, "Life is bitter and sweet."
- She's been mostly working from home to take care of her children and other children.
- She talked about having a successful career before she was pregnant with her son at 26.

Lili (Age 58 at Time 1) (African American)

		a	b	c	d	e	f
Age	Born	early childhood	15+	mid-20s	30s	40+	Time 1
Year	1950						

- a. She grew up with knowing her father because he was on military mission. She always had to be together with her siblings. She talked about not wanting to be a girl.
- b. She felt isolated even with nine other siblings in her family. She was suicidal and lonely due to not being close to her mother.
- c. She was baptized as a Christian. Her mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia and she had to stop schooling to take care of her for 20 more years.
- d. She reconnected with her father and re-discovered herself because she felt like her father. She lost her father and stepfather. Her mother died 4 or 5 years later.
- e. She completed her college degree in her 40s and thought it was the wisest decision she ever made. After her parents died, she tried to be independent on her own. She got a job in a hospital and hoped to work until her 70s. She also worked on her own health issues and went to psychotherapy as well.
- f. She hoped to get married the first time with her current boyfriend.

My impression:

- She talked about being fearful. She recently became open to share something about herself more when working with cancer patients in the hospital. She called herself “late bloomer.” She was still serious about life but seemed to be able to laugh at herself more now.