WHEN PURPOSE CALLS: A GROUNDED STUDY ON THE LIFEWIDE

LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF HIGH POTENTIAL YOUNG ADULTS

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Grandma Madea (Aretha Johnson). The last time we spoke you asked if I was almost done with my dissertation—even during your final days on earth you were there to motivate me. June 15, 1922 - March 8, 2017. Your legacy lives on.

I also dedicate this book to the future generation. May you run the race set before you with purpose, steadfastness, and endurance.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explore the lifewide learning experiences of *high potential* individuals that were able to reach career success and have a sense of fulfillment in early adulthood (23-39). At a time where the need for productivity is commonplace in the arena of human resources, a movement for greater talent development is becoming more prominent (Boston Consulting Group, 2012). High potential programs were created to identify and retain talented individuals that have leadership potential. However, the focus of high potential research has primarily been on organizational programs, rather than looking at what causes high potential individuals to thrive and have a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their careers. Consequently, the talent development field is possibly missing out on the potential of gifted adults entering into the workforce, contributing to underachievement (Jacobsen, 1999).

Fourteen participants were enlisted in the study, seven of whom were women and seven men. The demographic make-up of the participants included racially diverse individuals from different social-economic backgrounds, differing regions across the US, and various career fields. The commonalities of the participants included their high-potentiality, age range within early adulthood (23-39) and having both success and a sense of purpose in their career fields. The primary mode of data collection included intensive interviewing and utilized theoretical sampling and methods of coding congruent with grounded theory analysis.

Based on the findings, there were two distinctive categories that emerged from the data; one that focused on lifewide learning and the second solely focused on purpose. The findings of the study that covered the lifewide learning experiences of the participants revealed how their formal, informal, and non-formal learning experiences overlapped heavily. However, formal learning was most notable for helping participants see from a different perspective, non-formal learning for providing a space for the participants to

explore their purpose, and informal learning was identified as facilitating the development of talent and providing "aha" moments. The findings of the study centered on purpose explored the idea of an innate purpose, factors that helped to shape their purpose, and perspectives surrounding success. The fuel that helped to shape their purpose was their people centric nature, as well as spirituality (believing in something greater than oneself). The participants identified contentment, positively impacting others, and achieving goals as causing them to have a sense of fulfillment. Ultimately the participants leveraged their lifewide learning experiences to step into career opportunities that aligned with their purpose.

Through grounded theory the data from the study were used to create a substantive theory of purpose development that can be used in crafting a coaching program to help high potential individuals reach success as young adults. Furthermore, the results of the study have implications that can be adopted by higher education and adult education professionals, talent managers, and practitioners working within the field of coaching.

Keywords: Lifewide, High Potential, Purpose, Connected Learning, Relational Learning, Identity Capital

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

Defining concepts such as purpose, giftedness, potentiality, and success can be quite complex, and definitions may vary depending on the culture and context by which they are being applied. Though these concepts can be somewhat abstract, organizations are keen on finding the best possible talent, promising opportunities for growth and validating success (Gordon, 2014). At a time where the need for productivity is commonplace in the arena of human resources, a movement for greater talent development is becoming more prominent (Boston Consultant Group, 2012). The centrality of the talent development movement is tapping into the core of human potentiality, with *high potential* programs eliciting attention in the Human Resources arena (Downs, 2015). In order to be considered a *high potential individual* the following traits of exceptional drive, ability, and desire to achieve at high levels must be present. The aforementioned traits can often be explored through ones' natural capabilities, engagement in effort to succeed, and high aspirations (Ready, Conger, & Hill, 2010). High potential programs were created to identify and retain talented individuals that have leadership potential. However, the focus of high potential research has primarily been on organizational programs, rather than looking at what causes high potential individuals to thrive and have a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their careers. Consequently, the talent development field is possibly missing out on the potential of gifted adults entering into the workforce, contributing to underachievement (Jacobsen, 1999). The term gifted is often attributed to children in gifted and talented programs in K-12 education;

nevertheless, traits associated with giftedness in adults are closely aligned with traits high potential programs typically describe as identifiers of high potential individuals. For example, some of the traits that are found in gifted adults include: the capacity for rapid learning, high intensity when it comes to their aspirations, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, high intuition and keen observation abilities, and having a strong desire to reach standards higher than the norm (Jacobsen, 1999). Organizations that have identified high potential individuals have found that they have trouble retaining talent or a lack of development may be associated with underachievement (Mattone & Xavier, 2013). Likewise, research trends in giftedness have shown underachievement within the gifted community where nurturing environments are not provided (Montgomery, 2009). One of the main issues that has been found in gifted adults is difficulty finding where they best fit, whether it be within a circle of friends or the workplace (Jacobsen, 1999). Thus, a lack of understanding in talent management for how to best cater to gifted employees can also play a part in the lack of realization of potential (Mattone & Xavier, 2013). In order to grasp abstract concepts like giftedness and potentiality, taking a deeper look at the life experiences of high potential (gifted) individuals was necessary.

Researcher Perspective

I was particularly interested in this research from three different angles, which include: a practitioner perspective, an organization development perspective, as well as my commitment to my own personal development. As a certified executive and life coach it is my desire to see individuals realize their potential, grasp the steps needed to fully develop, and live a life that they deem purposeful. In my experience with life coaching, I have made working with gifted young adults and career development two of my niche

areas. Overall, as a practitioner I have noticed that some of the most gifted individuals I know are often some of the most unsatisfied individuals when it comes to their career trajectory during their early adult years. This trend caused me to do more research and as I read books such as the *Gifted Adult* and *Gifted Grownups* it became more evident that this is a common experience for many gifted individuals, causing me to want to learn how I could better serve as a coach.

As an education administrator in higher education I have worked with numerous students, many of whom are high ability students with equally high aspirations. However, time and time again I have received e-mails and messages from previous students that find themselves disillusioned and struggling once they have transitioned into the workforce. Consequently, I think of the time and financial investment that they have put into school and the capabilities and skillsets that they embody, and I wonder what is it that has caused their transition to be so daunting. On the contrary there are other students that have graduated that I also keep in contact with that are able to transition well, engage in careers where they feel they are making a difference, and by societal standards are achieving at high levels. For me this always begs the question of "what is the difference between these students"?

Furthermore, while this study is specifically focused on the career success and sense of purpose in high potential young adults, I was also drawn to research this topic for the purpose of organizational development and talent management. I believe the strength of an organization is the strength of its people and by adding to the body of research that helps to strengthen strong talent, it will in turn strengthen organizations as well as provide talent development managers with an advantageous body of knowledge.

Lastly, in undertaking this research I knew I would grow as an individual. I believe that my purpose is tied to helping other individuals live out their purpose. This grounded study allowed me to fully commit to developing my own purpose, while simultaneously providing new insights into the lifewide learning experiences of successful high potential individuals, and ultimately help people and organizations excel. My diversity of experiences, passion, and the void of research that spoke to high potential young adults in combination with lifewide learning experiences piqued my curiosity to undertake this research endeavor.

<div align="center">**Research Approach**</div>

This study enlisted participants in early adulthood, ranging from 23-39 that were identified as having high potential traits. Among adolescents having a sense of identity, connecting with others and a sense of purpose are key developmental factors (Erikson, 1998; Erikson, 1980) and as an individual steps into early adulthood, navigating a career is often an expectation (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). The developmental period of early adulthood brings about thoughts of what is next in life and having the means to reach desired goals (Erikson, 1998) as well as serves as a time of defining and redefining life roles (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Furthermore, it can also be a time of emotional unrest (Baltes & Silverberg, 1994). In adult life course theory, Levinson (1976) identified early adulthood (ages 20-40) as a time where "exploration and provisional commitment to adult roles, memberships, responsibilities, and relationships" take root (p.22). The overall task of early adulthood according to Levinson's (1976) life course theory is to:

Explore the available possibilities of the adult world, to arrive at an initial

definition of oneself as an adult, and to fashion an initial life structure that

provides a viable link between the valued self and the wider adult world (p.22).

A solid foundation in early adulthood sets the groundwork for continued growth.

Researching the life experiences of high potential adults that have reached success in

early adulthood helps to shed light on ways to create a more holistic coaching program

for *high-potential* individuals.

Rather than take a deductive approach to this study, I used grounded theory.

"Grounded theory research does not normally proceed in the usual iterative manner of

literature search, hypotheses development, followed by field research. As a rule,

grounded theory evolves from tentative literature base to begin with" (Goulding, 2002, p.

163). The goal of grounded theory is to construct an "integrated and comprehensive

grounded theory that explains a process or scheme associated with a phenomenon" (Birks

& Miller, 2011, p. 12). Whereas other approaches of qualitative research are more

focused on describing and exploring a phenomenon, grounded theory is concerned with

explaining a phenomenon, with an emphasis on understanding processes (Birks & Miller,

2011; Charmaz, 2006). Process in this case is defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as

"ongoing action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations or problems" (p.96).

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of lifewide learning and how it

has helped to spur on a sense of purpose and high achievement in the careers of gifted

individuals in early adulthood. Based on the information presented in the study, the goal

was to construct a theory that would help develop a holistic coaching program for young

adults that recognizes the role of lifewide learning experiences.

In grounded theory it is important to frame a broad research question in order to avoid constraining the study from taking shape according to the data. Birks and Miller (2011) warn, "avoid locking yourself into a specific topic of study as this will hinder your application of grounded theory methods and draw strong criticism from experienced grounded theorists who review your work" (p.21). Charmaz (2014) also echoes the same sentiments, advising researchers to start with a broad research question, as well as to be prepared to make slight alterations to the research question as needed depending on where the data directs. In alignment with grounded theory I used one broad overarching question, as well as some additional guiding questions to help look at different aspects of the broad question.

Research Questions

The primary research question framing the study was:

1. What lifewide learning experiences thus far have helped high potential (gifted) adults reach success and a sense of meaning in their careers during early adulthood?

The following additional questions helped to look at different angles of the primary question:

A. What forms of learning (formal, informal or non-formal) have had an impact on helping high potential adults develop their talent?

B. What beliefs, motivations, and factors have spurred success in high potential adults?

C. What are high potential adults' ideas of success and what causes them to have a sense of purpose?

Definition of Key Terms

Lifewide Learning. The second dimension of lifelong learning, which consists of intentional (formal, self-directed, non-formal) and unintentional learning (informal, impromptu, teachable moments) that takes place in different settings across the lifespan (Reischmann, 2014).

Gifted. "Gifted behavior occurs when there is an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits: above average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment (motivation), and high levels of creativity" (Renzulli, 1978) and is a psychological reality that is lifelong, "creates qualitatively different life experiences" and "involves developmental differences in abstract reasoning, emotional sensitivity and intensity" (Silverman, 2014, p.1). Such developmental differences provide exceptional abilities that manifest in different domains (e.g. arts, sciences, math).

High Potential. *High potential individuals* is also used synonymously with gifted, as they are individuals with high drive, ability, motivation, and commitment to achieve (Ready, Conger & Hill, 2010).

Roadmap of Dissertation

This study is interested in grasping a better understanding of lifewide learnings' effect on the transition into early adulthood for *high potential individuals*, and specifically as it relates to their career trajectory. The need for talent is prevalent and there is an abundance of research focused on organizational development, however this study steers away from studying organizations and talent management itself, to looking at the lifewide learning experiences of high potential individuals that are successful and identify as having a sense purpose within their career field.

Looking ahead, chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, including data-based and theoretical discussions of lifewide learning and the development of purpose. Chapter 3 discusses the overall research design of the study; methods used for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis; ethical considerations guiding the study, and approaches to enhancing the trustworthiness of the study. In chapter 4, study findings related to the research questions are presented along with profiles of study participants. In chapter 5, these study findings are interpreted, incorporating discussion of how findings relate or expand the existing literature. Finally, chapter 6 covers implications for future research and provides a researcher's reflection with concluding thoughts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of the literature review in grounded theory takes shape different from most other forms of qualitative research. The first step of traditional grounded theory states "(a) do not do a literature review in the substantive area and related areas where the research is to be done, and (b) when the grounded theory is nearly completed during sorting and writing up, then the literature search in the substantive area can be accomplished and woven into the theory as more data for constant comparison" (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 23). Rather than take a traditional grounded theory approach, I utilized constructivist grounded theory which included a two-phase literature review. Phase 1 took place prior to the study and focused on topics that were related to the topic as a general overview; and phase two which was added following data collection keyed in on areas that are more specific to the research (Charmaz, 2014) and is included in the discussion and interpretation section of the study. As a result of this study utilizing a grounded theory methodology, the following context by Glaser (1978) should help to bring greater clarification to the role of phase two of the literature review:

> The logic of phasing reading with research differs between predominantly deductive and inductive research. In deductive research the analyst first reads the literature of the field… In our [inductive] approach we [primarily] collect the data in the field first. Then start analyzing it and generating theory. When the theory seems sufficiently grounded and developed, then we review the literature in the field and relate the theory to it through integration of ideas. If there is a particularly good theory in the field, one may cover this earlier and look for

emergent fits. The result is usually extending and transcending the extant theory

rather than verifying a deducted hypothesis or replicating an earlier one. (p.31)

Charmaz (2006) expands on the idea of a literature review as analysis by stating "through

comparing other scholars' evidence and ideas with your grounded theory, you may show

where and how their ideas illuminate your theoretical categories and how your theory

extends, transcends, or challenges dominant ideas in your field" (p.165). Because this

study focused on the development of a grounded theory for talent development, the

literature review took place in two phases to prevent the emerging theory from being

constricted by overarching influences of other theorists and ideologies (Glaser, 1978;

Goulding, 2002; Straus & Corbin, 1998). Essentially phase one served as more of a

theoretical review of the general subject matter (located in the literature review section)

and phase two served as a review of literature that related to data emerging as a part of

the research, which was incorporated into chapter 5 and 6.

Phase I took place prior to interviews or any type of data collection and helped set

the groundwork for phase II by gaining a greater understanding of the historical context,

ideas surrounding purpose and meaning, early adulthood and career, talent management,

and lifewide learning. Phase I also helped to further solidify a need for grounded theory

research as well as narrow in on questions that helped to guide the study during data

collection (Goulding, 2002). This phase was concerned with learning more about

concepts that define the subject matter, rather than primarily gathering theories or results

from previous studies. This helped to prevent the study from initially being heavily

influenced by other studies.

Phase II of the literature review was conducted after collecting data and gaining greater understanding through the research process and comparing emerging data to existing data. Phase II goes more in-depth in the discussion section (chapter 5) and theory development section (chapter 6) by focusing on other theories related to purpose, high potentiality and giftedness, adult development, career success, talent development, and talent management. The practical application of frameworks associated with lifelong, lifewide, and lifedeep learning were also explored to identify learning spaces that contributed to success or served as barriers to success as well as models associated with talent and developmental coaching programs. Additionally, the literature review explored ideas associated with young adulthood. In phase II through discussion and theory development the comparison process took shape in order for emerging trends to evolve alongside other ideologies (Goulding, 2002).

Literature Review Method

The research for this literature review was conducted using over 20 databases through the Texas State University Library research system. The most prominent databases used were ERIC, Education Source and ProQuest. Key search terms included definitions, conceptualizations and discourses of: purpose, meaning, meaning making, calling, vocation, career, career success, sense of fulfillment, talent, potential, human potential, potentiality, giftedness, gifted adults, capability, potential training, potential development, human capacity, high ability, human capital, talent development, talent management, talent identification, high achievement, high performance, organizational development, 'war for talent', talent crisis, lifelong learning, life-wide/lifewide learning, and life-deep/lifedeep learning. Using the same keywords to complete a more

comprehensive search, Google Scholar was used to access any additional literature. The selection of articles and books used in the literature review include: articles that address purpose and a sense of meaning, giftedness, high potential and high ability, talent in the work place (i.e. Talent development, talent management), career success and ideas surrounding lifelong education, lifewide learning, and the process of adult development.

Part I: Chasing Purpose

The desire to know and understand the why behind life has produced a multi-billion-dollar industry. Books, movies, classes, professional developments, workshops, spiritual journeys, and coaching programs have been dedicated to helping people find their life purpose. The answer to the why behind life, although very relevant today, has been present across the generations. From pre-existentialists like Thoreau and Socrates to more modern existential philosophers, the answer to the meaning of life has been pondered for centuries.

Today a plethora of self-help books can be found on the shelves of prominent bookstores alongside Rick Warren's the *Purpose Driven Life,* which remained on the best-seller list for over 90 weeks (Donadio, 2004). Personal development and life coaching moved strongly onto the scene in the 1990s and has continued to climb and grow into this 21st century (Rogers, 2004). The search for purpose and meaning can be seen as an underlying desire in almost every industry. There is no doubt that grasping the role of purpose is essential in many lives. In a Google search, the phrase "life purpose" brings up over 527,000 results and "purpose" alone, brings up over 1,030,000,000 results. So, with this fascination, what is it that we have come to learn thus far?

One of the first things to tackle, is defining purpose. While purpose is a weighty word, grasping all that it entails can be difficult. The reach of purpose is vast, and seems infinite. This section of the literature review is intended to bring clarity to defining purpose as well as providing exegesis on additional words born out of purpose that will also be mentioned in this literature review such as, meaning, calling, and spirituality. Additionally, subject matters associated with meaning making in adulthood, giftedness and career are explored, in light of purpose.

The Intersections of Purpose, Meaning, and Life's Calling

Ryff and Singer (1998) view life purpose as the "feeling that there is meaning in one's present and past life" (p. 707). In *The Development of Purpose During Adolescence* (2003) authors Damon, Menon and Bronk craft their own definition after surveying multiple sources, stating "purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (p.121). Purpose is central in that a person's identity and meaning making stems from their sense of purpose and it is "self- organizing in that it provides a framework for systematic behavior patterns in everyday life" which includes, stimulating goals and a sense of meaning (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009, p.304). The interplay between purpose and meaning are woven into each other, after all, it is the fascination with having a life of meaning that drives one to seek out their life purpose (Hororwitz, Subotnik, & Matthews, 2009; Kashdan & McKnight, 2013). Reker and Wong (1988) see purpose and personal meaning as one in the same and define it as "the cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment" (p. 221). While many use purpose and meaning

interchangeably, there are authors that have distinguished between the two. Nash and Murray, (2010) define purpose as "certain goals, reaching resolutions, seeking results, and realizing particular objectives and ends" and meaning as "interpretations, narrative frameworks, philosophical rationales and perspectives, and faith or belief systems that each of us brings to the various worlds in which we live" (p. xx).

In the landmark book on meaning-making, *The Will to Meaning: Foundation and Applications in Logotherapy,* Frankl (1969) proposes that mankind can face anything that life throws its way as long as the will to meaning remains. He defines the will to meaning as "the basic striving of man to find and fulfill meaning and purpose" (p.35). Existential writers frequent the message of the importance of individuals finding and applying meaning to their lives (Barash, 2000). Frankl (1969) is rooted in existential psychotherapy and asserts: 1) meaning is relative and individuals draw meaning from diverse situations in different ways, 2) meaning is found when man commits himself to something bigger than himself, 3) man is responsible for making meaning of his personal life, 4) meaning serves as a motivator in life and when it is not found it serves as a frustration and births feelings of emptiness, 5) and meaning can be made by what man invests into the world, what man takes in and the attitude man maintains in the midst of difficulties. Park and Folkman (1997) introduce two different forms of meaning, *global* and *situational meaning*. *Global meaning* focuses on a person's long held beliefs, values and goals, while *situational meaning* "is formed in the interaction between a person's global meaning and the circumstances of a particular person- environment transaction" (p.116). This concept emphasizes the idea that individuals subscribe meaning to the situations that they encounter based on their overarching enduring value system (Park &

Folkman, 1997). Thompson and Janigan (1988) introduce the idea of *life schemes* as a conceptual framework that gives a "sense of order and purpose" (Thompson & Janigan, 1988, p. 260) to life. Essentially, *life schemes* consist of the meaning making process that is constructed as a result of one's own perceptions, which ultimately directs their life aims and the fulfillment of their desired purpose (Thompson & Janigan, 1988).

In addition to purpose and meaning, purpose and calling are often coupled together or used synonymously. Questioning the meaning of life helps to propel one towards finding purpose (Steger &Frazier, 2005). The more recent work of Dik and Duffy helps highlight calling in light of purpose by concentrating on what it means to have a calling. Dik and Duffy's (2009, 2011) provide the following analogy of life being a map and calling representing a GPS system giving direction to life and *purposefulness as* the motor that brings about life satisfaction (2009, 2011). Three core principles are outlined in Dik and Duffy's (2009) concept of calling, which include: value-oriented motivations, life roles, and contribution to others beyond self. Dik and Duffy make a distinction between vocation and calling, defining vocation as "an approach to a particular life role that is oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" and calling as a "transcendent summons, [and] experiences as originating beyond self" (p. 427). Hall and Chandler (2005), simplify calling to a person doing the work that they believe they were born to do.

Closely aligned with a sense of calling and sometimes used interchangeably is spirituality, which is a construct that is also used in referring to gaining meaning and purpose (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Tolstoy (1884) synched spirituality and meaning

together, suggesting that a person must make a difference in the world that is bigger than oneself in order to have a true sense of meaning. Religious thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas also subscribe to having a sense of divinity in playing a role in life's meaning and having a sense of purpose (Metz, 2013).

Hill (2010) defined spirituality as "the search for what the individual considers to be sacred, and the process of keeping this in their life." The construct of sacredness may change depending on the individual, but the desire to live in the place of sacredness is what permeates (Hill, 2010; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Ng, Yau, Chan, Chan, & Ho, 2005; Paragament, 1997). Cloninger (2007) defined spirituality as "the search for, and a means of reaching something beyond human existence, creating a sense of connectedness with the world and with the unifying source of all life" (p.1). The key focus of spirituality is the search for life's meaning and questions rooted in existentialism (Hill, 2010). While spirituality and religion are often tied together as one, authors are increasingly separating the two, as one does not necessarily have to fuel the other (Bartoli, 2007; Worthington & Sandage, 2001; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). It is important to remember that meaning making is as complex as the individual, thus the drive of purpose will look different depending on the individual (Nash & Murray, 2010).

Meaning and Early Adulthood

Various authors have taken different stances on when concerns with meaning in life is most prominent across the life span, with some theorists stating early years and others seeing a spike in later years (Ryff & Essex, 1992; Lawton, Moss, Winter & Hoffman, 2002). Levinson, Darrow, Klein, and McKee (1977) believed that understanding the meaning of life unfolds throughout adulthood and introduced the

concept of *the dream*, stating "if I have no dream or can find no way to live it out, my life lacks genuine purpose or meaning" (p. 246). Levinson also believed that discovering meaning in life primarily takes place during adult years, between the ages of 17-22 and gradually increasing or becoming neglected as adulthood continues (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, & McKee, 1977).

Another phrase used to identify the transition between adolescence and adulthood (17-35) is *quarterlifer*. During this period many questions are usually evoked and the desire to know and understand how one's past, present and future fit together tend to come to the surface (Nash & Murray, 2010). According to Nash and Murray (2010) many quarterlifers can experience periods of meaninglessness, or as a result of having an unlimited desire for high levels of success can even experience their own success as forms of failure when they don't reach their desired goals.

Erikson (1968) believed that life cycle development takes place through a series of different crises that include: trust vs. mistrust (infancy), autonomy vs. shame (early childhood), initiative vs. guilt (play age), industry vs. inferiority (school age), ego identity vs. role confusion (adolescence), intimacy vs. isolation (young adult), generation vs. stagnation (adulthood), and ego integrity vs. despair (maturity). However, some have pointed to recent trends indicating identity development is consistently being delayed, mostly because of more young adults pursuing education and for longer periods of time (Arnett, 2004). Chickering (1969), who completed a study amongst college students found that young adults face seven developmental trajectories of "achieving competence, managing emotions, becoming autonomous, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, clarifying purposes, and developing integrity" (p. 19).

As a result of changes and prolonged development in identity formation, the construct of *emerging adulthood* was coined and is considered to be late teens into the mid-twenties (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adulthood is associated with 5 phases, which include: *seeking identity*, *experiencing instability*, *focusing on self-development*, feeling *in-between*, and optimistically believing in life's possibilities (Arnett, 2004; 2005). Ideas of a young adulthood have changed as a result of the modern industry, prolonged education and late marriages (Roisman, Masten, Cotsworth, & Tellegan, 2004).

Finding Meaning in Work

"Work is one of the most basic and important activities for people in modern society" (Harpaz & Fu, 2002 p. 641) and finding meaning in one's career can especially play a big role in adulthood, with "work constituting more than one-third of waking life for most human adults" (Wrzeniewski, McCauley, Rozin &Schwartz, 1997). In fact, studies have shown that work comes second to family in adult priorities, with community, religion, and leisure often ranking lower (Haring & Hikspoors, 1995; Mow International Research Team, 1987). Harpaz and Fu (2002) captured these ideas through the phrase *work centrality,* which focuses on the idea of work playing a central role in adulthood.

Authors Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997) discovered that often people view their work from the following perspectives: financial award, as opposed to a sense of fulfillment; a career focused on steady advancement; or a calling that produces a sense of meaning and fulfillment. While financial provision is an important aspect of career planning, purpose is at the core of what brings career satisfaction (Kosine et al., 2008). Research suggests that when a sense of calling is

connected to one's work, individuals experience a greater sense of career fulfillment (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008). Vocation or career then builds on a sense of calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009), essentially serving as a bridge that connects a sense of purpose to the work that they do. Locke and Taylor (1990) take this idea even further stating that "meaning in work and in life can only be achieved by the pursuit and attainment of important values" (p.163)

The way that people derive meaning in the workplace varies, with two of the main components being finding a career path congruent with one's identity as well as developing strong social relationships at work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Grimaland, Vigoda, & Baruch, 2012). Individuals draw meaning based on their value system. Thus, in order to draw true meaning from work, it is important that it fits with one's value system (Holland, 1997;Young, Valach, and Collin, 2002). The well-known Holland's Career Development Theory looks at how an individual's value system correlates to whether or not they will be a good fit, by suggesting that individuals have work personalities that determine their environmental fit (Holland, 1997). Steger and Dik (2010) take a similar stance suggesting an individual's fit in an organization as the contributing factor to meaningfulness, which requires an individual to have a sense of self to pick accordingly.

Measuring Career Success. Whether or not an individual finds a sense of meaning in their work also is attributed to whether or not they feel successful in their work endeavors (Zunker, 2006). Mirvis and Hall (1994) define career success as "the experience of achieving goals that are personally meaningful to the individual, rather than those set by parents, peers, an organization, or society" (p. 366). Consequently, these different ideals

change across the life-span along with shifting priorities, such as a college-age students drawing meaning from completing a degree, versus a new mother drawing meaning from her role as a parent (Dany, 2003; Sturges, 1999). When it comes to gauging career success, subjective and objective measures are used in defining success by many career theorists (Brown, 2002; Callanan, 2003; Dries, 2011; Feldman, 2014; Grimalan, Vvigoda, & Baruch, 2012; Heslin, 2005; Van Hoorn, 2015; Vascular, 2010; Wang, 2008). Callanan (2003) distinguishes between the objective and subjective stating, "objective indicators of career success include such factors as total compensation, number of promotions, and other tangible accomplishments" and a "subjective career is viewed as a function of the individual's perception of satisfaction with the job and with career progress" (p.127). In alignment with objective and subjective career success, the terms *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* success have also been used. Seibert and Kraimer (2001) define extrinsic career success as "measures in terms of salary and promotions that are both instrumental rewards from the job or occupation" (p.2), and "intrinsic success, measures in terms of career satisfaction, refers to factors that are inherent in the job or occupation itself and is dependent on the incumbent's subjective evaluation relative to his or her own goals and expectations" (p.2). In Kazanas' (1978) research he found that individuals with an intrinsic focus (altruism, self-actualization, interesting work) find more work satisfaction than individuals with an extrinsic focus (economic dependence, social status, security, working conditions). Some individuals assume that objective achievement drives the success, but in some cases researchers have found it to be the opposite, with feelings of passion about their field driving their achievement (Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel., 2008).

Gifted and High Potential in Career. Finding the right fit and having a sense of meaning in the workplace can be a daunting task for high potential individuals and can either be a place of joy when things unfold well or extremely frustrating when it seems like a tireless search (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Gifted individuals sometimes feel dissonance between choosing things from which they gain social fulfillment versus intellectual fulfillment, as a result of the conflict of not being able to find a position that meets both needs (Freeman, 2006). Furthermore, when gifted individuals are able to find where they feel they fit, they are often are met with jealousy or experience envy from coworkers that feel threatened by their abilities (Plucker & Levy, 2001).

A lack of understanding what it means to be gifted in some cases has been shown to stifle gifted individuals from reaching their potential or cause them to attempt to mask their traits associated with giftedness, as a result of seeing them as a hinderance. (Horowitz, Subotnik, & Matthews, 2009; Jacobsen, 1999; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986). Sternberg and Horvath (2002) believe that giving a blanket definition of giftedness is not possible as a result of giftedness being specific to the individual and their ability. Nevertheless, as a result of giftedness at one point being primarily focused on academic abilities, studies have found that individuals that were considered gifted as children were not necessarily living up to their potential and sometimes had trouble applying their high abilities to their careers (Green, 2006; Kim, 2008). Some researchers suggest that individuals identified as gifted are not necessarily given opportunities for development beyond childhood, even though their gifted traits continue throughout life (Pfeiffer, 2001). Sauder (2009) found that an academic based model of giftedness associated with the school system, stunted the growth of gifted individuals across the lifespan. While

some researchers focus strictly on intellectual ability as it relates to ideas of giftedness, over time researchers have spent more time looking at the process, emotions and overall experiences of the gifted (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Jacobsen, 1999; Neihart, 1999). Shavinina (2004) captures traits of high potential individuals as having well-developed intuitive processes, strong intellectual values, creativity, specific performance abilities and creative ways of expressing feelings. One of the main differences being highlighted on how gifted individuals think and feel has been described as *intensity* or *overexcitabilities* (Jacobsen, 1999*)*. In some cases gifted adults find excitement to enter the workforce only to be told to slow down or be more patient, which most likely is as a result of their intensity (Jacobsen, 1999). Descriptors associated with intensity have been given as a result of gifted traits associated with intense feelings, high intuition and awareness of what is taking place in ones surroundings, including sensitivity to others (Sword, 2005).

Williams (1981) found that gifted adults often faced difficulties fitting into an organization, having fears of failure as a result of perfectionism, and sometimes being disliked by their own employer. One of the reoccurring difficulties of adults labeled high ability or gifted is their inability to go with the status quo of their work environment (Jacobsen, 1999; Streznewski, 1999) or in some cases their high expectations or life views can lead to existential depression when things do not turn out as expected (Jacobsen, 1999; Webb, 2008). Often gifted individuals are highly intuitive and able to see patterns which causes them to make decisions based on intuitive thought processes, such as identifying and acting based on trends discovered, rather than the protocols of the organization that may not align with their intuitive process (Nauta & Corten, 2002;

Streznewski, 1999). In *Gifted Grownups*, Streznewski (1999) reports on a 10-year-study

on gifted adults and found that traits exhibited in gifted children were also still prominent

in adults and their traits sometimes caused difficulties adapting to work environments.

Additionally, there was a trend of it taking multiple tries before gifted individuals were

able to find their career fit (Streznewski, 1999). Surprisingly, in order to find where they

fit in the workplace, a percentage have pushed their gifts completely aside just so that

they could make money and avoid standing out, or in some cases to avoid being exploited

(Freeman, 2010). While there are very few current studies on the desires and needs of

gifted adults in the workplace, Scott (2012) listed the following findings on gifted adults

in the workplace:

    (1) They work based on their passions;

    (2) they need challenge and variety;

    (3) problem solving, organizing and technical ability are areas that they shine in

        giftedness;

    (4) they experience frustration with average thinking in the workplace;

    (5) people at work feel threatened by their abilities;

    (6) And engagement in socialization is different than their counterparts (p.89).

The amount of current literature focusing strictly on the experience of gifted and

high potential adults in the workplace is limited. Conversely, there is a growing amount

of literature from an organizational perspective on talent management with the aim of

obtaining high potential employees.

Organizations' Search for Talent

　　With the introduction of the "War for Talent" in 1997 from the McKinsey Consultant group, the fight for talent was thrust to the forefront, making ideas surrounding talent development and talent management take center stage (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). In 2000, the McKinsey Consultant group conducted a follow up survey of 13,000 executives including 27 case studies from prominent companies, and the results indicated that proper talent management led to better performance (Michaels et al., 2001). The Boston Consulting Group (2012) looked at emerging trends and relevant topics to the field of human resources and found that talent management was identified at the top of the list as an area that has a direct effect on organizational success (Boston Consulting Group, 2012). However, a clear definition supported by research and clear elements that make up talent management are not easily found (Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

Defining Talent

　　A lack of an agreed upon definition makes it difficult for researchers to give scholarly credence to the field of talent management, which in turn hinders the reach and goals of the talent management domain (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Scullion, Collings & Caligiuri, 2010). As a result of the word "talent" itself being used so broadly, defining its meaning can become difficult. Just in the workplace alone, talent has a multiplicity of meanings. In some cases talent is considered having an ability that is superior to the norm that includes a person's intrinsic characteristics that manifest in their daily habits and way of being (Buckingham & Vosburgh 2001; Cheese, Thomas, and Craig, 2008; Gagne, 2000; Michaels et al., 2001). Some organizations look at talent strictly from a

performance standpoint of what competencies and achievement the employee offers and

in meeting desired organizational goals (Silzer & Dowell, 2010; Tansley, Harris, Stewart,

and Turner, 2006). In some cases talent is considered a mixture of both intrinsic

motivation and high performance, while in other cases talent is used as a synonym for

employees that work for an organization (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Ulrich & Smallwood,

2012).

After surveying multiple definitions of talent, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and

Gonzalez-Cruz (2013) identified an "objective" and "subjective" approach to viewing

talent. The objective approach focuses on talents as characteristics of people (ie. natural

ability, mastery and the right fit) and the subjective approach focuses on talent as people

(Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & Gonzalez-Cruz, 2013, p. 297). The subjective approach

that looks at talent as people has two viewpoints. One viewpoint is the exclusive

approach and looks at talent as high performers and or high potential, while the inclusive

approach takes a human capital angle and looks at all employees as talent (Gallardo-

Gallardo et al., 2013). What separates talent management from other areas in human

resources is its focus on developing talent through strategy with futuristic goals in mind

as well as ensuring "a set of processes designed to ensure an adequate flow of employees

into jobs through organization" (Lewis & Heckman, 2006, p. 140).

As a result of the demand for the right talent and the ability to identify the future

leaders of organizations, high potential employee programs have taken shape within

talent management and development programs. There are primarily two approaches to

identifying high potential employees. One group strictly focuses on measuring the

potentiality of employees by looking at their learning agility, capability, commitment and

drive, while the second group focuses more on potentiality combined with performance (Dries, Vantilborgh & Perpermans, 2012; Gelens, Hofman, Dries & Pepermans, 2014; Mattone &Xavier, 2013). Organizations that regard performance highly before considering someone high potential typically have a 1-2 year preliminary period before considering them as a high potential employee (Dries, Vantilborgh & Perpermans, 2012). Moreover, depending on the organization, some employees are told that they are high potential employees, while others are not aware that they have been highlighted as a high potential (Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2014).

Part II: Lifewide Learning as a Launching Pad to the Fulfillment of Purpose

Lifewide learning is about seeing life through a holistic lens by recognizing that learning is not confined to one domain, but learning rather is encapsulated in everyday living spaces (Jackson, 2014). The scope of lifewide education is broad and its dimensions 'takes place in a variety of different environments and situations' and cannot be confined to just formal or informal settings (Skolverket, 2000, P. 18). On the contrary lifewide learning involves learning in different places simultaneously. "It is literally learning across an individual's lifeworld at any moment in time" and "these places of learning may be profoundly different" (Barnett, 2011, P. 22). The breadth of spaces that people learn in that make up the lifewide learning experience are sometimes referred to as *learning ecologies* (Barron, 2006). A learning ecology is defined as the set of contexts found in physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning (Barron, 2004). Rather than focus on a physical landscape, learning spaces are now being seen as "containers" that give perspective to interactions (Milne, 2007, P.18).

This portion of the literature review will seek to bring to shed light on the origins of lifewide learning, lifewide learnings purpose, and the current methods by which lifewide learning is being used.

The Birth of Lifewide Learning

Jost Reischmann, while explaining the idiosyncrasies of lifelong learning was the first to use the actual term *lifewide learning*.   Reischmann described lifewide learning as the breadth of adult learning that occurs in formal as well as intentional, unintentional, incidental, or hidden learning spaces (Reischmann, 1986). He especially wanted to bring greater clarity to unintentional learning that takes place in lifewide learning by creating a typology of categories, that included "special activity learning", "single event learning", and "mosaic stone learning" (Reischmann, 1986 p. 5). For "special activity learning" although the events are planned, the primary intention is not necessarily learning, but rather centered around a specific event. An example of "special activity learning" could be learning that takes place at a political, cultural or social event (Reischmann, 1986, p. 5). "Single event learning" is an unplanned event that can be minimal to a traumatic situation that triggers change, such as a car accident. Lastly, "mosaic stone learning" is learning that is "woven into life-routines" such as watching TV, family time or reading books (Reischmann, 1986, p. 5). In essence, lifewide exemplifies the centrality of lifelong learning by looking at the breadth of learning spaces that take place across the lifespan (Reischmann, 1986). The vast number of places that contribute to lifewide learning range from home, the workplace, places of worship, public spaces of interest, schools and places of incidental life experiences (Jackson, 2014). The learning that takes place can even include 'core issues such as adversity, comfort, and support' and can

range from learning to adapt in new situations to learning unfamiliar terms that are encountered on a tax form (Banks, Ball, Bell, & Gordon, 2007).

Kjell Rubenson, who has also been a prominent voice in lifelong learning saw fit to affirm the role of lifewide learning as an integral part of lifelong learning "recognizing that learning occurs in many different settings" and cannot be confined to non-formal education (Rubenson, 1998; Rubenson, 2001, p. 5). While Reischmann emphasized the role of non-formal learning in lifewide education, Rubenson wanted to make known that although it included non-formal education it went beyond just non-formal education to formal education (Rubenson, 2001; Rubenson, 1998). Richard Desjardins then built onto Rubenson's ideas of lifewide learning by examining the interlocking nature of formal and informal educations effects on economic and social outcomes, further solidifying the importance of lifewide learning and its widespread effects (Desjardins, 2003). Reischmann, Rubenson, and Desjardins all recognized the importance of including formal, informal, and non-formal learning together rather than just study them separately, which falls into alignment with Lindeman's ideas of learning as a life experience and looking at the 'whole of life' (Lindeman, 1926; Reischmann, 1986; Rubenson, 2001, Desjardin, 2003).

In order to fully comprehend lifewide learning, defining learning, and understanding the difference between formal, non-formal and informal education is essential. Marsick (1987) describes learning as "the way in which individuals or groups acquire, interpret, reorganize, change or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills and feelings. It is also primary to the way in which people construct meaning in their personal and shared organizational lives (p. 4)."

In the article *Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Interdependence in Education*
(2014) by Melnic and Botez, they provide a clear definition for formal and non-formal
education, as follows:

1) Formal education corresponds to a systematic organized education model
   structured and administered according to a given set of laws and norms,
   presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and
   methodology. Formal education has a well-defined set of features.

2) Non-formal education characteristics are found when the adopted strategy
   does not require student attendance, decreasing the contacts between
   teacher and student and most activities take place outside the institution-
   as for instance, home reading and paperwork. Educative processes
   endowed with flexible curricula and methodology, capable of adapting to
   the needs and interests of students, for which time is not a pre-established
   factor but is contingent upon the student's work pace (Botez & Melnic, p.
   2, 2014).

Marsick and Watkins (2015) help to give a clear picture of informal learning, defining it
as "a predominantly experiential and non-institutional" and describing incidental learning
as a subset of informal learning that is an unintentional byproduct of another activity (p.
7). In order to delineate between the two it is important to note that incidental learning is
never planned, while informal learning can be intentional. Some examples of informal
learning include coaching, mentoring, and self-directed learning; and incidental learning
includes learning from mistakes, beliefs, and hidden though processes (Marsick &
Watkins, 2015).

The LIFE (Learning in Informal and Formal Environments) Center has helped to give further credence to the need for highlighting lifewide learning in context of lifelong learning by creating a visual that brings to light the percentages of time that are spent in formal and informal learning settings. Figure 1, below pulls from the best available statistics to show on a whole year basis the amount of time spent during an individual's waking hours in both formal and informal learning settings (LIFE Center: Stevens & Bradford, 2005).
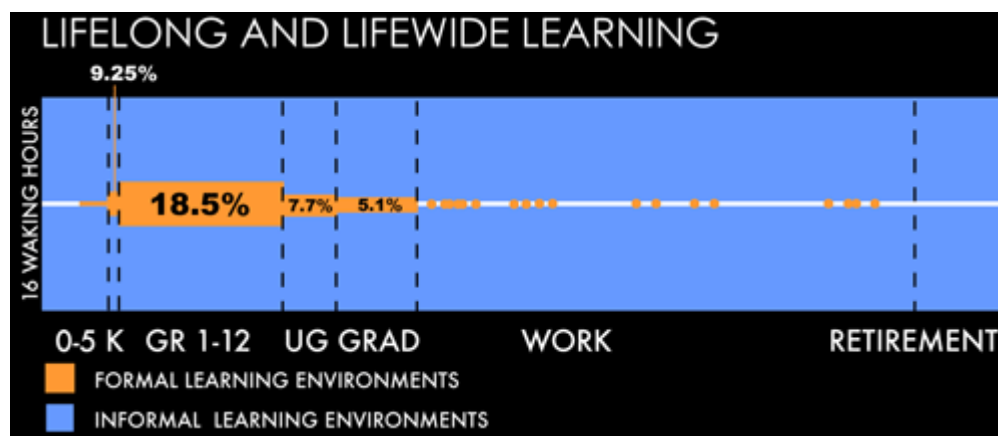
Figure 1: The LIFE Center Lifelong and Lifewide Learning Diagram

The percentages shown on the diagram give a clear picture of how every moment of our life is taking place in a type of learning setting and how our life experiences shape our meaning making (Banks, Ball, Bell, & Gordon, 2007). When Reischmann introduced lifewide learning his goal was to help people embrace the holistic learning experiences of adults' lifelong learning (Reischmann, 1986). Possibly seeing the pitfalls of separating formal and informal education from the lifelong learning experience, Reischmann (1986) pointed out the consequences of using lifelong and lifewide learning "as an activist banner for getting people into classes". He was concerned that if lifelong learning was

being restricted to classroom-like settings that it would allow for professionals to manipulate the profession by edging out "full life" learning so that they [educators] are important and admired and ultimately causing the students or clients to be dependent upon them for education, rather than their own learning experiences (Reischmann, 1986, p. 6). Lindeman (1926) also saw the power of synchronized learning, rather than segmenting education, stating

> We do not, as learners, first secure intelligence, next power, then self-expression, and last freedom. On the contrary, we experience these aspects of personality as concurrences, as forces which flow into each other at moments of creativity"
> (p.53).

Furthermore, Lindeman introduced adult education as "a process through which learners become aware of significant experience" by recognizing "life as experience and intelligent living is a way of making experience an education adventure" (p. 109). Lindeman was explaining the importance of recognizing lifewide learning prior to the inception of the lifewide term

Stephen Yip narrowed the concept of lifewide learning by describing it as a "learning-focused strategy" (Yip, 2002, p. 1). In *Life-wide Learning: Extending, Enriching, Enabling* (2002), Yip explains how lifewide learning does not fit into the box of informal learning or formal learning, but is rather a continuum of them both. Yip asserts that lifewide learning can play the role of a connector in the meaning making process of formal and informal learning stating,

> Life-wide learning is in between them [formal and informal] and contains more or less their features. It functions as the interfacing of the two different types of

learning experiences. For example, when a student goes out of the classroom or school, his/her study does not end. On the contrary, he/she unconsciously and continuously "learns" in real contexts (Yip, 2002, p.2).

Lifewide learning puts on display how the learning settings within formal, non-formal, and informal education are interdependent and often work together simultaneously. Norman Jackson, who has done extensive work in the UK on lifewide learning, has lent his voice to championing a lifewide learning perspective of a "comprehensive understanding and practice of learning, development, knowledge and knowing and achievement" (Jackson, 2014, p. 1-2). Lifewide learning is transient, flowing in and out of intentional, unintentional, and self-managed learning, that ultimately "emerges during the course of our daily activity" (Jackson, 2014, p. 2)

How Lifewide Learning is Being Discussed Today

While Reischmann originally used the term with reference to adult education, in recent years it has become a phrase that is more commonly used in primary and secondary education (Reischmann, 1986). For instance, lifewide learning is being used to refer to curriculum enrichment, primarily in a K-12 education setting. (Jackson, 2014; Yip, 2002; Craft, 2002). One of the ways lifewide learning is being used is in conjunction with learning taking place in a more formal setting, such as field trips being used to further help solidify learning in action. Furthermore, community service activities can be used as part of the lifewide learning experience (Yip, 2002). Yip's definition for lifewide learning from an operational point of view states,

Life-wide learning is a context-based learning, which flexibly coordinates time, place and people in learning to create a unique environment different from in school learning (Yip, 2002, p. 4)

The goal is to break beyond the constraints of traditional classrooms' fixed variables of time, place, space, and lessons given by teachers to a lifewide learning experience that breaks through limitations. This form of lifewide learning is created to inspire and motivate students (Yip, 2002). Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to compliment learning taking place in the classroom during everyday life experiences outside of the classroom. It grants students ownership for their continual learning and development (Yip, 2002). In essence, the concept of life-wide learning is being used as a replacement tool of typical homework, to making continual learning as a way of life. The initiative of lifewide learning is for "whole person development" (Yip, 2002). The three developmental objectives of life-wide learning, (being used in Hong Kong region) include: strengthening of the cohesive forces through curriculum, increasing clarity as a result of the complexity of life-wide strategy, and establishing quality framework (Yip, 2002).

Anna Craft (2002) explores the effects of lifewide learning in her book *Creativity and Early Years Education: A Lifewide Foundation.* Craft focused on creativity development and creating individuals that reach potential beyond normal traditions, through 'lifewide resourcefulness' (Craft, 2002). Craft believes that a strong lifewide learning foundation in a child's early years (2 ½-8) will strengthen an individual's chances of reaching their creative potential (craft, 2002). Crafts idea of lifewide learning and creativity are so intertwined that she views lifewide learning as "creativity in

everyday life", with learning enabling "the individual to chart a course of action by seeing opportunities as well as obstacles" throughout the breadth of their learning (Craft, 2003, p. 148).

Lifewide learning in adult education. When looking at lifewide learning in the context of adult learning the amount of literature is somewhat limited. Desjardins and Rubenson (2001) have served as pioneers in adult education lifewide initiatives. Desjardin specifically focuses on how lifewide learning encapsulates formal, informal and non-formal learning and explains that it "is to explicitly consider the interrelationship between the multiple dimensions of learning as well as their impact on outcomes" (Desjardin &Tuijnman, 2005 P. 359). Desjardins (2003) points out the interdependencies of literary competencies connection to everyday engagement and interaction. As a result of the learning settings encountered across the lifespan an individual's literary intelligence evolves. Desjardins refers to the different learning settings that become prominent during different times in a person's life, ranging from the community, school, home and work life as lifewide learning perspectives (Desjardins, 2003).

Desjardins has also used a lifewide perspective to look at the determinants of economic and social outcomes by reviewing independent factors that influence formal learning, informal learning, and non-formal learning (Desjardins, 2003). His research indicated formal education had the strongest influence on economic outcomes and informal learning had the greatest influence on social outcomes (Desjardins, 2003). Non-formal learning was typically associated with job-related training and showed little influence on increasing earnings (Desjardins, 2003). Differentiating between social and

economic outcomes was important, because where one exerted a strong influence in one capacity it had the opposite effect or neutral effect when looking at a different outcome.

Authors Desjardins, Rubenson and Milana (2006) keyed in on the role of lifewide learning as it relates to public policy by posing questions such as, "does a coordinated policy exist between sectors?" and posed questions that seek to "recognize and value the learning that has taken place outside the formal system" (Desjardin, Rubenson, & Milana, 2006, p. 20). Finding a way to bridge policy that covers formal, informal and non-formal learning together could pose a daunting task as a result of having to shift "from a preoccupation with education to developing coherent strategies for learning over the lifespan" (Desjardin, et al., 2006, p. 20).

Ramsey (2006) looked at the effects of a lifewide learning framework on primarily helping part-time students that had "fallen out" of the secondary education system and were looking to re-enter school. This study came about as a result of Australia's concern with student persistence, completion and re-entry, especially as it relates to students returning from disadvantaged circumstances. Ramsey's study found that the policies in place that are geared towards adult re-entry were in sync with the student's lifewide experience. The concentration of part-time students re-entering were low in many schools, yet in schools geared towards adult learners, part-time students constituted more than half (Ramsey, 2007).

Literature Review Summary

While there is separate literature on the meaning of life and theories associated with career development and measures of success, there has been a literature gap when it comes to looking at the interplay between high potentiality and the role of lifewide learning's contributions to discovering purpose and reaching career success in early adulthood. The literature search revealed considerable research on meaning making, inquiry surrounding purpose, and ideas surrounding career and high potential programs from an organizational desire to capture talent. However, the research was lacking in revealing what high potential individuals prefer in an organizational setting as well as what causes them to reach a sense of fulfillment and achievement in their career endeavors. Likewise, the literature on lifewide learning primarily focused on curriculum development, education supplementation, and literacy and social economic issues, but prior to this study lifewide learning had not been looked at in context of career. Beyond quantifiable outcomes that can be directly correlated with career success, authors Hall and Chandler (2005) suggested looking at the process that led to success with hopes of gaining an understanding of contributing factors to career fulfillment. Looking at the process leading to a sense of career fulfillment was needed. Nicholoson and De Wall Andrews (2005) found that there were not clearly defined subjective or objective successes that led to a sense of career fulfillment, but it was dependent upon their own personal rationalizations. Every individual has unique learning experience and one's life experiences play the most influential role in their career choices (Zunker, 2006). Career counselors especially recognize that in order to be effective they must utilize methods that endure from childhood across the life span (Zunker, 2006).

As a researcher I also recognized that it is important to look at how lifewide learning plays a role among high potential young adults as it relates to living out their purpose and attaining success in their careers. Moreover, "a proactive personality and a high quality education, are important determinants of advancement in early career years" (Callanan, 2003, p. 128). By exploring the interplay between objective achievements and subjective career perceptions, a cross analysis of one's lifewide learning was beneficial in comprehensively examining the process that led to career success in high potential young adults (Banks, Ball, Bell, & Gordon, 2007; Dries, 2011; Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Through grounded theory research, I studied the lifewide learning experiences and processes of high potential individuals that were able to not only reach career success, but also have a sense of purpose in early adulthood. Grounded theory allowed me to go where the data led, while constructing a theory that can be used by high potential young adults and practitioners alike.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the lifelong, lifewide, and lifedeep experiences of high potential individuals that reached career success in early adulthood in order to create a substantive talent development theory that could be used to help high potential individuals reach success as young adults. Four research questions served as guides for the study. The first question asked *what lifewide learning experiences thus far have helped high potential adults reach success and a sense of meaning in their careers during early adulthood?* The focus of this question helped to understand learning that occurred across their lifespan thus far by highlighting impactful moments that have guided the participants' life trajectories. In order to better understand their life experiences, the second question focused on the spaces that learning took place in by asking *what forms of learning (formal, informal or non-formal) have had an impact on helping high potential adults develop their talent?* By looking at the contexts of lifewide learning experiences it helped to gain understanding on how learning spaces serve as shaping factors in the process of reaching success. The third question looked at *what beliefs, motivations, and factors have spurred success in high potential adults?* Lastly, the fourth question explored, *what are high potential adults' ideas of success and what causes them to have a sense of purpose*? The last two questions focused on the lifedeep experiences of high potential adults. Lifedeep learning explores components that make up a person's moral and ethical belief systems that influence their judgment themselves and others (Banks et al., 2007).

This chapter details the methodological approach to the study, including the historical context of grounded theory, the tenets of grounded theory, and discussion of the

constructivist approach to grounded theory. Moreover, this chapter will cover the process of recruiting participants, ethical protection of participants and the methods used to collect, manage and analyze data. The chapter closes by summarizing the measures taken to assure the validity of the study.

Research Design and Framework

The desired goals of this study were underpinned by a constructivist epistemology that sought to understand the meaning making processes of high potential young adults and discover their life shaping factors in a comprehensive manner. The aforementioned goals led me to a qualitative approach. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon" (p. 23). This specific study was concerned with understanding processes in order to form a substantive talent development theory. Grounded theory in particular was "useful for addressing questions about process; that is, how something changes over time" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 32) and based on the data collected a theory was able to emerge. As I approached the undertaking of this study "the notion of generating new theory from data, as opposed to testing existing theory" resonated with my role as a researcher (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 2). The process of creating a theory comes through constant comparative methods in the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2014). This study's need for both flexibility and focus made grounded theory an ideal choice as it is an inductive methodology that allows for research to take place without firm preconceived notions, yet provides a methodology that is rigorous in its data collection and analysis processes. The constructivist approach to grounded theory looks at the how and why

variables of the participants' construction of meaning and actions taken in a given situation (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, grounded theory is most necessary when:

A.) Little is known about the area of study.

B.) The generation of theory with explanatory power is a desired outcome.

C.) An inherent process is imbedded in the research situation that is likely to be explicated by grounded theory methods. (Birks & Mills, 2011, p.16)

Lifewide learning and giftedness in adults is an area that has been the subject of a limited amount of research and has yet to be connected with career success. This study was ideal for grounded theory as all three components (lifewide learning, adult giftedness, and career success) were areas where little was known about how they interact with one another. Second, the generation of a talent development theory for high potential young adults would be beneficial for organizations that are looking to retain high potential individuals, as well as for talent development practitioners (including coaches) looking to help high potential individuals, as well as for the development of a self-help guide for emerging adults seeking to create a strong foundation in their career trajectories. Lastly, the interplay between lifewide learning and the shaping factors of an individual that help to spur on a sense of fulfillment and career success required the study of a process.

Qualitative Design

Aligned with an interpretivist paradigm and a drive to uncover the components that help individuals to succeed in their potentiality while still in young adulthood, I found qualitative research as an appropriate approach. The motivation to uncover components of success shaping factors goes beyond curiosity, to the practicality of utilizing these data to then formulate a talent development theory. Hence, I chose a

qualitative constructivist approach to grounded theory to provide new insights to the organizational and talent development industry, as well as help individuals reach their potentiality by enacting principles that have brought success in the lives of others. Merriam and Tisdell (2011) help to give understanding to the inductive process of qualitative research, sharing "Qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field" (p. 17). The ways that the findings are formed through the inductive process are diverse ranging from, "themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses, and even theory about a particular aspect of practice" (p. 17). The core of qualitative research design allows for better understanding of the essence of a phenomenon in a rich, evolving holistic manner through inductive reasoning that lends itself to flexibility, purposeful sampling and relentless comparative methods to ensure an expansive body of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2011). The strategy behind the qualitative research design of this study aligns with Patton's (2002) ideas of qualitative inquiry. The three areas of focus in qualitative inquiry consist of *naturalistic inquiry*, *flexibility*, and *small sampling*.

In "naturalistic inquiry" the phenomenon being studied must be viewed in the context of its natural setting without attempting to control or alter in any form the phenomenon that is being researched (Patton, 2002). As I endeavored to learn about the participants' life experiences that shaped their success during young adulthood I had no desire to manipulate the outcome, but instead I sought to uncover variables that have helped to shape their success. To manipulate or alter the outcome would have served as a hindrance to extrapolating accurate data for the development of a substantive talent development theory.

Rather than working within a rigid research agenda, qualitative inquiry allows for trends to emerge from the data and serve as guiding posts during the research process (Patton, 2002). This was especially important as I sought to gain understanding of the participants' experiences and allowed for the data to dictate the specific direction of my study, as is necessary in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz & Bryant, 2007). Moreover, a constructivist approach to grounded theory as outlined by Charmaz (2014) highlights the flexibility of grounded theory and "resists mechanical applications" (p. 13). As I explored the lifelong, lifewide and life-deep experiences of high potential young adults it was important for me to have the flexibility to discover patterns that emerged without having a preconceived hypothesis, but rather approach the topic to see what constructs developed through the data collection and analysis processes.

A third characteristic of qualitative inquiry is that of small samples. Contrary to quantitative research that seeks to have a relatively large number of subjects in order to make generalizations from statistical analyses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), qualitative inquiry is concerned with having a purposeful sample that seeks to engage participants that have experienced the phenomenon being researched. The focus is the depth of meaning that the participants can provide rather than broad generalizations that can be made (Patton, 2002). In this study I enlisted participants that are thriving, talented high potential young adults that self-identified as being successful in their career as well as having a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

In alignment with grounded theory, I utilized theoretical sampling. Charmaz (2014) states,

Theoretical sampling prompts you to retrace your steps or take a new path when you have some tentative categories and emerging, but incomplete ideas. By going back into the empirical world and collecting more data about the properties of your category, you can saturate its properties with data and write more memos, making them more analytical as you proceed. (p. 192)

I initially pre-screened participants based on the criteria outlined on the Participant Rubric (See Appendix B) in order to select initial participants, as the study evolved based on theoretical sampling, additional participants were enlisted to further discover areas surrounding non-traditional education and more non-traditional forms of employment to see how they fit the emerging categories and best served the purpose of the study in creating a substantive talent development theory. The objective was to seek and collect "pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in emerging theory" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 192).

Theoretical Framework

The broad theoretical framework for this study included a constructivist approach to grounded theory, while exploring lifewide learning and career success. A Constructivist perspective asserts that "individuals define themselves as they participate in events and relationships in their environment" (Zunker, 2006, p.69). In order to grasp the lifewide experiences of high potential young adults that have reached career success, as a support, I used symbolic interactionism and social ecology as the lens by which I observed the participants lifewide learning experiences. By gaining a greater grasp of their life experiences I was able to learn about their meaning making and the factors that contributed to their talent development. The foundation of symbolic interactionism looks

at meanings and recognizes its centrality to human behavior (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbuken, 2009). Symbolic interaction is great for looking at the construction of meaning making because it takes an interpretive approach to symbols by recognizing that meaning is formed differently based on the individual and their experiences (Aksan et al., 2009). Blumer (1986) states three major premises that make up symbolic interactionism,

(1) The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.

(2) The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.

(3) The third premise is that these meaning are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters. (p.2)

One of the criticisms of symbolic interaction theory is that it forgets to take into account the social context by which the interaction takes place (Aksan et al., 2009). In order to create a harmonized framework for this study that looks at meaning making contextually, I also utilized social ecology. In congruence with the ideals of symbolic interactionist theory, a social ecological approach sets a framework for looking at the multiplicities of interdependencies that help to influence an individual's formation of knowledge. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Social Ecology Model helped to look at the different meaning making layers by focusing on the individual's intrapersonal life, interpersonal relationships, as well as organizational and community level facets. Lifewide learning is about exploring the different learning spaces (also referred to as learning ecologies) that take place in an individual's life at any moment or time across

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the lifespan (Barron, 2006). The different lifewide learning spaces fall into the ecology categories of Bronfenbrenner's model. The different spaces outlined in the social ecology model helped to see if there were certain areas that proved to be more influential in the talent development process that led to career success. By merging symbolic interaction and social ecology together it helped bring precision to underlying factors that have helped shape the lifewide learning experiences of the participants.

Furthermore, Career Construction theory by Savickas (2002) served as a supportive lens to explore the participants' career experiences that led to success, and particularly their journey to a sense of purpose. Career Construction theory is made up of the following:

1. developmental contextualism, such as the core roles developed through an individual's life structure, preferences of life roles, and an individual's career pattern;

2. development of vocational self-concepts that include individual differences, vocational characteristics, occupational requirements, work satisfaction, how self-concepts develop and are implemented in work roles, and continuity of self-concepts; and

3. vocational developmental tasks experienced as social expectations, the growth experienced during career transitions, vocational maturity as a psychosocial construct, career adaptability as psychological construct, and how career construction is fostered (Zunker, 2006, p. 70).

The developmental contextualism that is emphasized in career construction theory is built around Brofenbrenner's Social Ecology Model. Ultimately the emerging data led this

study, in alignment with grounded theory. However, symbolic interactionism, social ecology, and career construction helped to serve as a lens to view the data, rather than steer or constrict the study.

Grounded Theory

The views of grounded theory are varied, with two prominent approaches. The foundation of grounded theory lies in four publications by Glaser and Strauss, which include: *Awareness of Dying* (1965), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), *Time for Dying* (1968), and *Status Passage* (1971) – all of which served to give this new methodology a platform for understanding its processes (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The centrality of grounded theory was the mantra of 'theory emerges from data' and was designed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to serve as a valid and reliable method of presenting qualitative research in the face of criticism from quantitative proponents (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, pp. 32-33). This came at a time in the 1960s when the tensions between quantitative researchers and qualitative research where thick within the field of social sciences. Perhaps one of the biggest criticisms was qualitative studies' emphasis on the gathering of data and fieldwork to the neglect of the analysis process. Grounded theory was juxtaposed to staunch criticisms by highlighting the method of analysis as a central part of qualitative inquiry (Charmaz, 2014). In Glaser and Strauss' (1965) study on death and dying, the analytical process that they constructed to examine dying allowed for them to develop methodological strategies that could be used by other researchers for a myriad of different topics. The adaptability of the methodology and success of the study caused grounded theory to be propelled forward as an effective method for analyzing data. "Glaser and Strauss proclaimed a revolutionary message.

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They proposed that systematic qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7).

As it relates to my qualitative design strategy, I ascribe to Charmaz's (2014) constructivist approach to grounded theory. "The constructivist approach treats research as a construction but acknowledges that it occurs under specific conditions – of which we may not be aware and which may not be of our choosing" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). Bryant and Charmaz (2007) outline the following canons as constructivist grounded theory (CGT) on pages 556-557:

- Both data and analyses are social constructions reflecting their process of production.

- Each analysis embodies a specific index in terms of time, space, culture, and situation.

- The scientists' data and values are inter-linked, for which reason data are value-related.

- In constructivism, methods play a lesser role than in objectivism and the theories generated in the style of the CGT rather tend to be 'plausible accounts' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132) more than theories that can claim any objective status.

- Instead the CGT calls for 'an obdurate, yet ever-changing world but recognizes diverse local worlds and multiple realities, and addresses how people's actions affect their local and larger social worlds' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132).

I chose to use Charmaz's (2016) *Constructing Grounded Theory* as my primary text for reference because her constructivist ideologies underpin my approach to this study. As I approached this study I saw "knowing and learning as embedded in social life" (Charmaz, 2016, p. 14) and aspired to extrapolate such experiences during the investigative processes of the research. In conjunction, I also recognized that as the researcher I played the role of an instrument and helped construct "plausible accounts" that were derived from the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132). Furthermore, I utilized Bryant and Charmaz's (2007) *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* to gain a more comprehensive understanding of grounded theory and Birks and Mills' (2011) *Grounded Theory* as a simple guide for conducting grounded theory as a new researcher.

Participant Selection

In the following section I will underscore the initial criteria necessary to launch this grounded study investigating high potential adults that were able to reach career success in early adulthood.

Characteristics

The group of participants varied regarding gender, race and ethnicity, and class; however, all of the participants fell within the range of early adulthood, ages 23-39. In addition to age characteristics, characteristics associated with being a high potential adult was screened in order to participate in the study. Furthermore each participant self-identified as being both successful and having a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their careers.

Early adulthood. The age range for this study consisted of individuals ranging from 23 to 39. According to Erikson's (1980) developmental life cycle, 23-39 years of age falls

within the range of early adulthood. During adolescents to identity formation are key to transitioning to young adulthood, where connecting with others, and having a sense of purpose are key developmental factors (Erikson, 1980; Erikson, 1998). With early adulthood also comes navigating career choices, which can range from staying home with children to climbing the corporate ladder. A crucial part of early adulthood is invested in answering the questions of what's next in life and reaching one's desired goals (Erikson, 1994). Early adulthood is a critical foundational season in adulthood and understanding individuals in early adulthood that have managed to reach levels of great success and fulfillment helped to gain a greater understanding of possible patterns that helped to aid their accomplishments.

High potential. Potential is a concept that can seem somewhat abstract, so for this study the following criteria outlined by the Corporate Executive Board Company (2010) was utilized to explore high potential individuals': aspiration, ability and engagement. Aspiration refers to a person's drive and motivations to want to achieve at levels much higher than the norm. Ability refers to an individual's innate and learned skills that allow for effectiveness in leadership roles, and engagement explores a person's emotional and rational commitment level to her/his success (Campbell & Smith, 2010).

Successful. Every participant selected for the study was expected to meet the criteria of reaching success in early adulthood. The measure of career success was two-dimensional. The first element consisted of subjective (psychological) career success (which includes job satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment) and the second element consisted of objective success (which includes high achievement in the workplace). To be psychologically successful is to be focused on one's own sense of fulfillment and

purpose, therefore participants are best able to self-identify their own sense of subjective

success. Objective success is focused on tangible factors that display an individual's

impact within one's career. "Objective indicators of career success include such factors

as total compensation, number of promotions, and other tangible accomplishments"

(Callanan, 2003, p. 127). In order to identify objective success, prospective participants

were asked questions that focus on achievements that have taken place, their sphere of

influence, and themes surrounding their growth and or promotions in their field.

Locating and Recruiting Participants

Participants were recruited through organizations geared towards gifted adults,

employer referrals, distinguished alumni programs, coaching programs, as well as

personal referrals from individuals that knew people that fit the participant requirements.

An initial screening was given after individuals identified themselves to make sure they

actually matched the profile of a qualified participant of the study. Please see

Appendices A and B for the survey tool used during the screening process, as well as the

rubric used in reviewing survey responses to identify individuals who met study criteria.

<center>**Researcher Role**</center>

In congruence with qualitative methodology, I served as the instrument for

collecting and analyzing data (Merriam, 1998). From a constructivist perspective I

recognized the need for flexibility in the way that I approached the data and the research

process in general. I remained aware of the fact that I am not simply a "neutral

observer," causing me to examine my own "privileges and preconceptions [that] may

shape the analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). Recognizing that the subject matter of this

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study is an area of passion, I answered the following areas suggested by Birks and Mills (2011) via my own personal research journal.

- Your philosophical position (how you see the world) and how it relates to both the topic area of your study and your application of grounded theory methods and principles.

- What you already know about the topic of your research, from both formal study and personal/professional experience.

- What you expect you will find from your research; while it is important not to influence the outcome, often it is only through acknowledging your predictions that such preconception can be avoided.

- Any apprehension, concerns or fears you have in relation to your study and how your strengths and limitations may impact the process.

Addressing the aforementioned areas allowed for me to go into the study already acknowledging my assumptions (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 19-20). Furthermore, throughout the process I kept a journal to keep record of biases that I may have or ideas that are shared that are not congruent with my own ideologies. Recognizing my own preconceived ideas by keeping an audit trail helped me to separate any presumptuous thoughts that I had from perspectives shared by participants. My goal was not to create a theory based on my own ideas, but to allow the theory to be grounded in the data.

Data Collection and Analysis

In qualitative inquiry the depth of the sample is more important than the breadth of the sample to ensure purposeful, focused research (Patton, 2002). This study enlisted 14 participants. A questionnaire was used to screen and select participants, with interviews and artifacts (i.e. awards and pictures) as data collection for the analysis process.

Interviews

I utilized an intensive interviewing style as part of the data collection process in this study. This form of interviewing works well with grounded theory because it allows the researcher to serve as a guide in the interview process, but ultimately leaves the conversation open enough for the interviewee to share candidly (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) outlines the following as key characteristics in intensive interviewing:

- Selection of research participants who have first-hand experience that fits the research topic.

- In-depth exploration of participants' experience and situations

- Reliance on open-ended questions

- Objective of obtaining detailed responses

- Emphasis on understanding the research participant's perspective, meanings, and experience

- Practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints, and implicit views and accounts of actions. (p.56)

The main role of the interviewer is to encourage, listen and learn during the interview process (Charmaz, 2014). This form of interviewing is flexible and allows room for emergent ideas consistent with grounded theory.

In preparation for the interview process I developed an interview guide. The guide consisted of broad, open-ended questions that were non-judgmental by nature. The goal of the guide was two-fold. First, having a guide helped me be more prepared, and second, it provided well thought-out questions that assist the participant to be comfortable in the way that the questions are phrased (Charmaz, 2014). "Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted (Charmaz, 2014, p. 85)." I conducted 2 interviews with each participant, allowing me to follow-up and seek clarity as needed. One hour and thirty minutes was set aside for each interview, however the interviews often were approximately one hour. The nature of the questions explored the lifewide learning experiences that helped the participants become successful, the life-deep (intrinsic motivations and belief systems) that have been their driving force, and their ideas of career success and impactful life experiences that have spurred on their success. See Appendix B to review the interview guide that was used during the study. Please note that in keeping with a semi-standardized style of interviewing, I did not always use all of the questions, but pulled from the bank as needed to elicit a full sharing of each participant's experience. Where participants already provided pertinent information, questions may have been skipped, while in other cases questions were added to probe further the meaning of a statement made by the participant. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. In addition to using interviews and observations I also

supplemented data as needed with literature data, artifacts, elicited materials and diagramming that helped towards building a substantive theory (Birks & Mills, 2011).

In some cases, I also used artifacts selected by the participants as part of the data collection. The objects were primarily used to prompt deeper conversation during interviews, as well as to add supplementary information for contextual purposes. For example, in cases where participants were able to provide me with artifacts prior to the second interview, it allowed me to review the document(s), gain context, and ask pivotal questions about the artifact(s).

Coding

To analyze the transcribed interview data, I utilized a thorough coding process. Charmaz (2014) explains the two-phases of coding in grounded theory, as such

1) An initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data, followed by

2) A focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data (p.113).

Initial coding. For the initial coding process, I remained open to where the data lead me. During this process I asked questions to figure out what the data was depicting, what the data showed, suggested or omitted, and what the viewpoint being highlighted was as well as figuring out what theoretical categories the data best fit (Charmaz, 2014). I did not go in with any pre-existing categories, but instead I focused on refining and understanding the implications of the data being received.

To stay open in the initial coding process, rather than code by themes, I utilized

Glaser's (1978) suggestion of coding with gerunds. Gerunds, which are action focused,

such as describing, stating and leading, can translate codes into topics (Charmaz, 2014).

In particular, I used the line-by-line coding method where I named each meaningful line

of my data (Glaser, 1978). The line-by-line coding method helped to see patterns that

may have been difficult to see had the data not been observed closely in small spurts.

Charmaz (2014) helps to make clear the importance of initial coding and the role of line-

by- line coding by stating

> Line-by-line coding prompts you to look at the data anew. Initial codes help you
>
> to separate data into categories and to see processes. Line-by-line coding frees
>
> you from becoming so immersed in your research participants' world-views that
>
> you accept them without question (p.127).

In addition to line-by-line coding, I used incident coding as a secondary

supplement to the line-by-line coding process. Incident coding is closely associated with

line-by-line coding, except the focus is a comparative analysis that compares incident

with incident. An example of incident coding that I used is when I listened to the

participants' share about their experiences that provided a sense of fulfillment and

compared their processes.

Another form of coding that I used minimally was called *in vivo codes,* which are

codes that are created when participants create their own special terms to give meaning to

something. Charmaz (2014) points out how in vivo codes lead the researcher to pay

closer attention to language and recognize areas of significant meaning for the

participants. Throughout the coding process *constant comparative methods* were used to analyze the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

> Part of the process of concurrent data collection and analysis is the constant comparison of incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories. This is termed constant comparative analysis and is a process that continues until a grounded theory is fully integrated (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 11).

Constant comparison analysis sets grounded theory apart from many other research designs. The analysis process starts immediately for grounded theorists (Birks & Mills, 2011). The comparison process continued throughout the entire data collection and analysis process. The comparison process is at the core of grounded theory and allows for patterns to continuously emerge and be recognized.

Although I was aware that as a researcher I came with my own positionality and previous experiences, my aim was to go into this study as open-minded as possible, minimizing the influence of pre-conceived ideas about what I would find during the analysis process, in alignment with Glaser's (1978) approach to initial coding in grounded theory. The initial process allowed for me to create provisional codes that ultimately helped lead into the second phase of coding. "Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain tine what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 113). As guidance, I followed Charmaz's coding direction of "remaining open", keeping codes "simple and precise, constructing "short codes", "comparing data with data" and "moving quickly through the data" (p.120).

Focused and theoretical coding. After initial coding was complete, the process of focused coding began. In order to figure out the focused codes from my data I used Charmaz's (2014) guiding questions outlined on pages 140-141:

- What do you find when you compare your initial codes' data?

- In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?

- Which of these codes best account for the data?

- Have you raised these codes to focused codes?

- What do your comparisons between codes indicate?

- Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data?

As a follow-up to focused coding, I used theoretical coding. Theoretical coding was used to see "how substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory" (Glaser, 1978, p.72). Theoretical coding narrows in on abstract ideas in the data that can lead to the substantive theory of the study. Below is an overview of the coding process:

Table 1

Coding Process

Initial Coding- Line-by- Line	Naming each line or segment of data (if there is no relevant gerund per line)
Initial Coding- Gerunds will be used during the line-by-line process	Gerunds are action focused, such as describing, stating and leading (codes can be translated into topics).
Initial Coding- in vivo codes	Anytime a participant creates their own special terms to give meaning to something, it will be marked as in vivo codes.
Coding- Constant Comparative methods will take place after initial coding	Constant Comparison includes: incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories.

Table 1. Continued

Focused Coding (with theoretical coding)	Focused coding takes place after initial coding and should be a "straight forward and quick process" (Charmaz, 2014, p.140). This starts the process of theoretical coding.
Theoretical Coding	Theoretical coding is used to see "how substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into theory" (Glaser, 1978, p.72). Theoretical coding narrows in on abstract ideas in the data that can lead to the substantive theory of the study.

Theoretical Sampling

This study utilized theoretical sampling, which inherently lends itself to expand as needed, based upon the emerging categories. "By remaining open to the data, researchers can sense when implicit meanings, rules, and actions are at play, even when they cannot yet define them" (Charmaz, 2016, p. 193). Theoretical sampling is "strategic, specific, and systematic" and involves constructing tentative ideas about the data, and then examining these ideas through further empirical inquiry" (p. 199). The original idea of theoretical sampling defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was " the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (p.45).

Theoretical sampling was used until the place of saturation was reached. I used Charmaz's (2014) definition of reaching saturation:, "Categories are saturated when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories" (p.213). In this study theoretical sampling was used to enlist participants from non-traditional education and employment backgrounds as well

as to enlist an additional participant in the 23-25 range, to investigate if similar trends would emerge.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

In order to provide a reliable and ethical grounded research study, taking the proper ethical procedural precautions could not be ignored. Going into this study I recognized that as a researcher I came with my own assumptions whether consciously or subconsciously. In order to identify my assumptions, I used a journal to track my thoughts prior to, during, and after the study (as outlined in the researcher role section). Key components of trustworthiness include, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam, 2009). To ensure the accuracy of the themes that developed from the initial interview and artifacts, I reported themes, descriptions, and profile overviews back to the participant during the follow-up interviews to determine if they perceived these as accurate (Creswell, 2009). Utilizing the method of member checking with participants brought a greater level of credibility to the study as well as built a level of trust for the participants to open up even more during the follow-up interviews. Furthermore, upon completing final transcripts, the participants were able to review their transcripts and interpreted data to verify it is accurate. I also provided participants with a survey allowing them to confirm that my interpretations given to their experiences were accurate, which further helped with both the authenticity and confirmability of the study. Authenticity refers to the importance of presenting data with impartiality or manipulating the data out of its original context (Creswell, 2009). As mentioned earlier, I bracketed my own biases in a journal to help limit the influence of my own biases. Additionally, my

dissertation chair also had access to selectively review reporting to see if there were apparent instances of conclusions not based in data.

This study included a diverse body of participants and data was coded using multiple techniques (initial line-by-line coding with gerunds, in vivo coding, constant comparison, focused coding and theoretical coding) to enhance the transferability of the study. Triangulation was also used as a method to ensure transferability. To achieve data quality, I utilized Charmaz' (2006) guidelines of gathering data that "captures a range of contexts, perspectives, and timeframes", "provides rich detail in respect of the view and actions of participants." "looks beneath superficial layers of data," and "considers the value of data for the purpose of comparison and category development" (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 66). For dependability, I created an audit trail that includes audio, transcripts, and notes. I will save additional copies of transcripts and audio as back-up that are saved under pseudonyms and stored in confidentiality.

In accordance with University IRB procedures, the following precautions were taken in order to preserve the rights of the participants:

1. At the outset potential participants were given an overview of the study, objectives associated with the study, methods of data collection, and expectations of the participants (in writing).

2. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the study and their rights to withdraw from the study without penalty at any time (in writing).

3. Participants were informed that at any time that they are uncomfortable answering a question that they may decline to answer, without penalty (in writing)

4. Participants signed a written consent form agreeing that they understood their rights as a participant.

5. Actual participant names were not used in managing and analyzing data; rather use of a pseudonym during data analysis, in the dissertation, and in any presentations or publications based on the study data is used to protect their identities. Additionally caution was taken in sharing identifiable details about participants in profiles of participants.

6. Transcripts and interpretation of the data was made available to participants.

Summary of Methodology

The purpose of this grounded qualitative study was to explore the lifewide and life-deep experiences of high potential individuals that were able to reach success in early adulthood (23-39). Three research questions served as guides for this study with the primary guiding question asking *what lifewide learning experiences thus far have helped high potential adults reach success in early adulthood?* This study aligned with an interpretivist epistemological standpoint and a constructivist approach to grounded theory. The primary mode of data collection included intensive interviewing and utilized theoretical sampling and methods of coding congruent with grounded theory analysis. Through grounded theory, the goal of the study was to create a substantive talent development theory that could be used in crafting a coaching program to help high potential individuals reach success as young adults.

4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative grounded study was to explore the lifewide learning experiences of high potential individuals that were able to reach career success in early adulthood. In order to gain multiple viewpoints, participants from various backgrounds and fields were explored—including both the corporate and non-profit sector. Data was collected from 14 individuals through two open-ended interviews. The research questions that helped to guide the study consisted of the primary research question of (1) *What lifewide learning experiences thus far have helped high potential adults reach success and a sense of meaning in their careers during early adulthood?* and the supplemental questions of (2) *What forms of learning (formal, informal or non-formal) have had an impact on helping high potential adults develop their talent?* (3) *What beliefs, motivations, and factors have spurred success in high potential adults?* (4) *What are high potential adults' idea of success and what causes them to have a sense of purpose?*

In order to provide a greater understanding of the background of the participants, the findings section will begin with profiles of each participant for contextual purposes, after which, the emerging themes of the study will be presented.

Study Participants

The study took place in multiple settings based on the participant's location, ranging the Northern region, Southern region, West Coast, and the Midwest. The initial interviews were in person and the follow-up interviews were completed via the telephone (with the exception of one interview which was conducted only by phone). All 14 participants met the screening criteria of being high potential individuals with a sense of

purpose and measures of career success in early adulthood (ages 23-39). The criterion for

meeting the aforementioned traits were identified through the screening survey (See

Appendix A & B). Furthermore, the backgrounds of the participants are diverse in

background in terms of economic status, education, career fields, race, and gender. The

mean age of the participants in the study was 30. Eight of the participants identified

themselves as Caucasian, three identified themselves as African American, two as

Hispanic, and one as Asian Pacific Islander.

Table 2

Participant Profile Overview

Name	Career Field	Age Range	Gender	Race	Education Background
Ben	Medicine	30-35	Male	Asian Pacific Islander	Post-Grad
Cindy	Medicine	30-35	Female	African American	Post-Grad
Daniel	Government	23-25	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors
David	Sustainability	30-35	Male	Caucasian	Post-Grad
Ian	Leadership Development	36-39	Male	Caucasian	Post-Grad
Jackie	Physical Therapy	30-35	Female	Hispanic	Associates
James	Marketing	30-35	Male	African American	Post-Grad
Jessenia	Beauty Industry	23-25	Female	Hispanic	Bachelors
Jessica	Midwifery	23-25	Female	Caucasian	Licensure
John	Non-Profit/Sports	30-35	Male	Caucasian	Post-Grad
Levi	Ministry	26-29	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors
Miranda	Higher Education	30-35	Female	Caucasian	Post-Grad
Patricia	Government	30-35	Female	Caucasian	Bachelors
Olivia	Real Estate	26-29	Female	African American	Some College

Participant Profiles

<u>Ben</u>

I think the one purpose in life is to be with passionate and caring people, no matter who they are, where they're from, what their background is – [I] just want to be a witness to them and show them that no matter what they've done you can still be nice to them.

As I sat across from Ben his gentle nature was evident and his care for the betterment of others was woven throughout the words that he shared. From a young age Ben knew that he wanted to go into medicine, but it wasn't until after he finished school that he found himself working in the prison system—a place that he originally would not have expected. However, the more that I learned about Ben, it actually was not that surprising that he chose to serve a population that is typically looked upon with disdain. Ben's core values of acceptance and love help him to facilitate a caring environment for his patients, regardless of their background or past mistakes. When I asked Ben about his experience in the prison he shared "I really enjoy trying to help these guys that society has pretty much said you're worthless" and he expressed how working in a correctional facility helped him to discover his purpose of caring for others and showing people love without holding them to past mistakes.

Ben has been working as a physician assistant for almost eight years and is dedicated to serving people from all backgrounds. Beyond the workplace, a major motivator in his life is his faith and family. He desires to model his life after Jesus to be a good role model for his son and a loving husband to his wife.

<u>Cindy</u>

"I think learning is important in terms of being able to experience things and allow them

to change you for the better, or allow you to do things differently for the better."

Cindy found herself drawn to the field of medicine when she was very young. She

enjoyed learning about the intricacies of the body and especially seeing how different

things can have a ripple effect on an individual's health. At the core of her desire to learn

more about the body is her desire to be able to help care for others and teach them how to

best take care of their own bodies when she is not present. This philosophy has caused

her to incorporate the importance of making lifestyle changes when speaking to patients.

While making sure people are healthy is one of her main focuses, the centrality of

Cindy's words kept circling back to the importance of treating everyone fairly and

serving as a strong team member. One of her greatest values is selflessness, which she

contributes to her faith and from that place she is motivated to help others. Her combined

attention to detail with her patients, stellar work ethic, and reputation of being willing to

step in when needed among her co-workers has caused her to play a pivotal role in the

workplace.

Initially when she began working in healthcare she thought that she strictly

wanted to focus on pediatrics, but through an assistantship opportunity she realized there

was a special place in her heart for working with young women. Cindy has been working

in healthcare for six years, and in addition to working is a very engaged mother and wife.

<u>Daniel</u>

"[My purpose is] to be able to help people and make things better than when I found them. In whatever aspect, whether that's government or starting my own small business, that is sort of my driving purpose and force."

Social, funny, energetic, and charismatic are a few of the ways that Daniel describes himself—all traits that serve him well in the government relations industry. As Daniel reflected on how he found himself working in politics, it was a journey of discovery that grew over time. He attributes a major part of his development to some of the hardships that he faced in college, and the rally of friends and family that helped to encourage him and push him through what he describes as a "dark time." The core of what drew him to his field was what he described as his political philosophy of "recognizing how we need certain structures to help society and humanity function in a virtuous way." He strongly attributes his philosophy and ideas around building a stronger society to Aristotle. He shared,

> I believe that there is virtue in everything, and I know that politics and government can sometimes be very brash, competitive, and ugly, but I look for the good that comes out of all that.

Beyond looking for the virtue in everything, the purpose behind why Daniel does what he does is to ensure that he leaves everything better than when he first found it. This mind-set has especially helped him in his role of working with a prominent senator. He has been making an impact in the arena of government and politics fulltime for two years, with previous internship experience.

David

"[Part of my purpose is] to be supportive of the people I'm in relationship with and to

contribute meaningfully to the world in whatever way I can, rather big or small."

From the moment I met David his fervor for life and the work that he does was

evident. He works in the field of sustainability where he has married his passion of social

change and the betterment of society through social enterprise. He became aware of

social enterprise while in college through a fellowship that brought together a cohort of

people interested in changing the world through organizations and their place of work.

When he was participating in the fellowship he met the CEO of the company where he

now serves as the Vice President. The heartbeat of David's work is built around people

and the power of relationships. He emphasized how he is continuously working hard at

building strong relationships as well as expanding his capacity to grow as a person so that

he can contribute to the growth of others. One of the most prominent ways that he uses

his relationship building skills as a manager is through working to correct what he calls

"emotionally raw situations." He enjoys having opportunities that allows for him to bring

people in a room that may have conflict and find a place of common ground through

negotiation.

David has been working in the sustainability field for eight years and is happy to

be working with people that he both likes and respects. Furthermore, he feels blessed to

be in a position to provide for his family doing something that he enjoys.

<u>Ian</u>

"My purpose is helping other people achieve theirs."

When I started speaking to Ian about his success, he would quickly shift gears to the people that he works with and how they are making an impact. After asking him a few questions about his work and hearing answers about his team it started to click for me just how intertwined his view of success was in relation to others. In fact, he conveyed that he saw his purpose as helping others achieve their purpose; making the success of others and his success inseparable. It is no surprise that at the core of this concept is creating an environment of inclusivity. Ian insisted that it is important for everyone to know that they have a voice and it is especially the responsibility of leaders to make sure that everyone is included and able to be heard. It is this drive that has led Ian to oversee a leadership development program, where leading with integrity and highly esteeming collaborative work is essential.

Ian grew up in a home of educators, with both of his parents teaching in a K-12 setting; this helped to spark his love for education and respect for its impact. Originally, he thought he would follow suit, but shifted gears when he found that a college-age population was a better fit for him. His success in the field and impact on countless students is the fruit of his decision.

Ian has been working in leadership development in higher education for 13 years and is a respected leader that others call upon in his field. He is a big picture thinker that is motivated by his work, which is focused on producing strong ethical leaders.

<u>Jackie</u>

"I can always see where improvement needs to take place and I can always come up with

multiple ways to improve something."

Determination sets the tone for Jackie's accomplishments. When she describes

her family upbringing she explained that she uses it as motivation for what not to do.

Though she emphasized how much she loves her family, she also recognized that if she

followed similar patterns (broken relationships, drugs, alcohol) that they would be a

hindrance to her growth. Her determination to break the mold has propelled her into

being a strong leader. Upon finishing high school, continuing education was not

something that was initially part of her plan, but after being given an observation

opportunity in the field of physical therapy, she realized it was something she thoroughly

enjoyed. Subsequently, she pursued an Associate Degree in Physical Therapy, which

opened the door to opportunities that she previously thought may have been out of reach.

Upon passing her licensure exam, she worked in homecare for four years and her work

ethic was noticed by an individual working for a private physical therapy practice who

then referred her to what is now her current place of employment.

Jackie went from working as a physical therapist assistant at the practice for three

years, to being promoted as a supervisor for her CEOs busiest physical therapy office.

Her work ethic, determination to continue growing as an individual and employee, and

dedication to the patients has caused her to be a value-added and trusted member of

leadership.

James

"I think my purpose really is to give back what I've received... just as an example – you
have a message and you're responsible for corralling the message, making it authentic
and you have to give the message to someone else. I think that's really what my purpose
is, to internalize everything, work through things, showcase them and then give it to
someone else."

Connecting and giving to others are foundational pieces to James' endeavors and the desire for connecting and helping others lends itself to his ability to build authentic relationships with others. Moreover, it is the successes of others and being surrounded by passionate people that serves as an inspiration for him. When I asked him about what drives him in life, he answered

I would say my friends and family motivate me. They encourage me to do better, I'm very blessed to have some of the very best individuals around me that support me that I have a relationship with. So, I feel that they drive me as well to be better and to push myself and push people that are around me as well.

In addition to his family and friends being a source of motivation, James also mentioned his faith and how important it is to him to keep Jesus as the center of his life. He desires to model to others what they can achieve as long as they keep God first. Furthermore, James is committed to making opportunities for others through mentorship.

James has been working in the marketing and communications administration field in different capacities for the past 10 years and currently works for one of the top automobile companies in the nation.

<u>**Jesenia**</u>

"I would love to be able to stand in front of thousands of people and be able to instill passion and change someone's life and make them come alive, and just exude excitement. That I feel like is my purpose, because I have all this built up enthusiasm and optimism and I want to share it."

If I were to give Jesenia's interview a title, it would be "Anything is Possible". Every word that she spoke seemed to be rooted in ideas of possibility, perseverance, adventure, and enthusiasm. Motivation is at the core of who she is, so when I asked her what motivates her in life she shared,

> Well my upbringing really motivates me because my parents came from a really tough background…they came from nothing and were able to succeed and really instill that drive and passion and adventurous side of me that really nothing is holding me back besides myself.

Jesenia's parents came to the US after a war caused them to have to leave their home country and navigate gaining citizenship in the United States. Jesenia often reminds herself of her parent's story and uses it to continue plowing ahead in her own endeavors. In fact, shortly after graduating college Jesenia moved over a thousand miles away from her hometown to pursue her passion. Thanks to her hard work, she has found herself in the center of her dream. She has combined her love for the beauty industry and inspiring others through her role as a beauty educator for one of the top luxury brands in the world. She is one of the youngest members of the corporate team and for Jesenia it is all about helping people and as she says, "loving what you represent".

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Jessica

"My purpose ultimately would be in some way to work with women, specifically my target is abused women, women that come from the same background that I have."

Inquisitive, transparent, and resilient are a few of the words that describe Jessica. As we engaged in conversation during the interview process, passion flowed from her words. Expressions of her confidence in the things that she believes in and ability to reach her goals were the fruit of her self-motivation. Though the woman sitting across from me was very pleasant and candid in her answers, it was not because everything had been easy for her growing up. When we began to scratch the surface of her upbringing she shared:

> My family was probably pretty close to the poverty line, they all grew up on and lived on welfare [paused] very abusive family... The way that [my] family taught was that we were supposed to live this poverty life as part of our faith, but I did not accept that and as I learned more about who God was to me I learned that I could be successful and also still be a faith-filled person.

Jessica grew up with a nontraditional education of homeschooling and was discouraged from continuing education; nevertheless, her passion for learning caused her to spend time reading and taking in all that she could during her alone time. Then an unexpected path presented itself to Jessica when she met a midwife as a guest speaker. Upon learning about the field, she knew it was something of interest right away. Now as a licensed mid-wife of three years, serving on different boards locally and regionally, her drive for helping and impacting women is felt by her clients and colleagues alike.

John

"I think my purpose is linked to what I'm doing. I think it's making a difference for

people, that's something I've always loved doing when I was in youth group, high school,

middle school and through volunteering. I think even more so it is to make a difference

for people through sports."

Growing up, John always loved sports and could always be spotted outside,

whether it be playing basketball in his driveway or a game of baseball. His passion for

recreation was evident and early on he imagined doing something working in

professional sports. Yet, it wasn't until his motivation of being service oriented met

sports that he truly found what he believes to be part of his purpose. After I asked John

what motivates him in life, he recounts:

> I think for me service is part of that. When I was graduating I knew I wanted to
>
> work with either nonprofits or something in sports or recreation and so this is kind
>
> of the best of both worlds. I get to work with individuals with intellectual
>
> disabilities [in sports], and they are motivating.

John has spent the past nine years working within the nonprofit sports sector and

has headed up his current program for the past three years. His value of acceptance,

integrity in leadership, and enjoyment of meeting new people has served him well in his

career field. He currently is an advocate for individuals with disabilities, volunteers in his

spare time, and has helped create sports leagues across multiple campuses that are still

expanding today.

Levi

"What drives me is Jesus, and making sure that others know about him– my job is to bring as many people to him as I can. That's what drives me is just knowing that's my purpose and teaching about Christ."

Lively. Undeniably lively is one of the ways to describe Levi. When he speaks, he speaks with his entire being; hands moving, eyebrows raising, and an intent focus to share his heart, with a dash of humor. When you think of a minister, he may not be what comes to mind, but that has not prevented him from impacting youth from all different backgrounds. When I asked him about how he would describe himself 'creative,' 'very out of the box', 'persistent', 'non-conformist' and 'fly by the seat of my pants' are some of the descriptors he gave. He has been serving as a children's pastor for five years and full time employee of a church for about a year. Levi explained the following encounter as what caused him to go into ministry, "I was driving and God put the verse where Jesus says 'bring the children to Me' on my heart and that's been my purpose, to bring people to Christ." Tears began to fill Levi's eyes when shared about his experiences as a youth and children's pastor. Growing up Levi remembers the pain he experienced as a child of seeing his parents struggle with drug and alcohol addictions and ultimately losing his mother while still in elementary school. Now when he works with youth, he wants to make sure that he is a stable support system and reminder to them of how much each person is loved by God.

Levi has taken small children's ministries and increased them significantly, developed curriculums, and mentored others in ministry. Levi explains that fulfilling his purpose right now is "seeing youth grow closer [to God]".

Miranda

"I think my purpose is to help students better understand and love who they are and help

them have a desire to make a positive difference. I feel like I get to do that with my work

in our Student Affairs program."

Miranda works as a professor, with a focus on leadership education in Student

Affairs, but the passion that exudes from her when discussing her love for the field

cannot be captured on paper. From a young age Miranda had a love for education, but her

journey into student affairs was one of discovery. She recounts her experience of walking

through a career fair that led her to higher education stating,

> I saw somebody who did sales for a wholesale plumbing company and they were
>
> talking about how much they love their job and how the best part of their job is
>
> going to happy hour every day after work with their friends. I'm like well that's
>
> good, but at the end of your day if the best part of your job is drinking after work;
>
> I can't get excited about selling plumbing equipment to somebody…Then I ran
>
> into Student Affairs and I decided wow, I can make a difference in the lives of
>
> people, I can help people gain confidence and do things that people my whole life
>
> have been doing for me whether I knew it or not.

Shortly after Miranda started her master's program in higher education and later gained

her Doctorate before turning 30. She is an accomplished author, a recipient of many

awards, and a leader in her field. Miranda has 12 years of experience in her career field

and is passionate about achieving her goals and positively impacting students through

leadership development.

Patricia

"When I leave this earth, I want to know that I have made an impression and I want that impression to be good, whether it's put on my headstone that I was a good person or that I saw the best in everyone."

Everyone has intentions and motives, and while actions may be obvious, sometimes the intent behind something can go unnoticed. In Patricia's case, she has honed the skill of tracing the motives behind decisions that are being made. From as early as she can remember she has always been intrigued by people's intentions and navigating why people do what they do. Now working in government relations, she states that she uses her skill of getting to the root of things to "looks at everything from multiple angles to try and figure out what her clients are trying to achieve, or what competitors are trying to achieve, or what someone at the capital is trying to do for the good or bad." Pat then uses that information to shed light on how to best help and navigate a situation. She enjoys a challenge and vocalized how she works best under pressure. Her intensity in getting to the bottom of things is also matched with her kind-hearted nature. In the office she is always checking in with others to see how they are doing and is willing to extend a helping hand when needed.

Additionally, her family serves as a major motivator for her, especially when it comes to being a role model for her son. It is important that she demonstrates to her son that there is not a difference between women and men in the workplace and she believes that as long as you work hard you will get what you deserve. Pat's impact can be felt within her organization as well as in the community, earning her awards such as 40 under 40. One of her mottos is "the harder you work, the luckier you are."

<u>Olivia</u>

"Every day I'm my most productive self. Every day. The only day that I find where I would get non-productive would be Sundays, because I'm trying to give myself a rest day."

Generosity is one of Olivia's core values and it can be seen in how she engages with people, and her appreciation of how others have poured into her own life. When she shared about her background, she mentioned the struggles of growing up in poverty, but recognizes the role of her grandmother as a pillar in helping to raise her, as well as her siblings and cousins (totaling seven children under one roof). It was the exemplary role of her grandmother that she distinguishes as a shaper of her own generosity that she is now able to channel in to her role as a real estate agent. Due to her own background of coming from poverty, Olivia shared how she enjoys having the opportunity to help people find homes, and the excitement that they experience when their dream of becoming first time home owners becomes true. Real estate was not something that Olivia had thought of as a career path on her own, but she was introduced to it when a close friend referred her to one of the top real estate agents in the nation. She started off as an assistant and through encouragement of the team moved forward with getting her license.

Typically, new real estate agents get off to a slower start of selling two to four homes in their first year, but Olivia managed to sell 22 homes in her first year and attributes her success "to the glory of God." Moreover, Olivia is an avid learner and is currently pursuing her Associate's Degree in Business.

Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Table 3

Themes & Subthemes Emergent in Findings

Theme

      Subtheme

I. The Role of Purpose in Fulfillment

    A. Impact

       1. People Centric

       2. Perspectives of Success

          1   Being Content

          2   Impacting Others

          3   Achieving Goals

    B. Spirituality

       1. Faith as a Guide

       2. People Being Interconnected

       3. Belief in Something Greater than Self

II. Lifewide Learning Shaping Factors

    A. Defining Learning

    B. Informal Education

       1. Mentorship

          1   Expert to Novice

          2   Peer Mentors

       2. Family Upbringing

    C. Formal and Non-formal? Education

       1. Education as a Life Training

       2. Education as Exploration

The Role of Purpose in Fulfillment

"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."

Ecclesiastes 3:1

As a seed is to a fruit tree, purpose is to life. In the broadest sense the Cambridge Dictionary defines purpose as "why you do something or why something exists" and life as "the period between birth and death." When combining life and purpose together, in essence, life purpose, is looking at the why behind what an individual does with their life. Getting to the core of why we do what we do can seems like an endless journey that beckons many philosophical questions; yet, all of the participants in this study identified as having a purpose that helps to drive their lives. The extent to which the participants identified their purpose varied. All 14 of the participants identified as knowing their purpose during their pre-participation survey, although a portion of them recognized that they only understood their purpose to a degree and were still hoping to gain greater understanding. Furthermore, all of the participants identified as currently living out their life purpose, while also maintaining that it is still evolving. The pre-survey gave insight into the participants' assurance of having purpose, which then opened the door for me as the researcher to ask questions to learn more about what has contributed to a sense of purpose in the participants' lives. While grasping the concept of purpose may seem complex there were three prominent themes that emerged surrounding ideas of purpose, (1) innate purpose, (2) spirituality as a propeller towards purpose, and (3) the power of impact.

Innate Purpose

A seed is a beautiful picture of the future being wrapped up in the present. Though it may seem small and insignificant upon first observation, what is being carried on the inside has the capacity to grow into a large fruit tree. Though the participants did not officially launch their careers until early adulthood, the seed of their purpose was present from a young age. Pat who currently works in government relations as a consultant mentioned how she loved politics growing up, so much so that in 4th grade she ran her first political poll for the state governor. Pat's interest in politics from a young age particularly piqued my interest. Hearing phrases like I want to be a firefighter, astronaut or superhero may be expected from a child, but listening to Pat share about her love for politics caused me to want to look deeper into the idea of an innate purpose. As I ventured into this area, the theme of the future being present in the beginning was magnified when participants shared about their purpose and what brought them to their career field. Levi who now serves as a youth pastor at his local church recounts, "I've always wanted to be a teacher…I was probably 7 or so [and] I would bring all the kids into a room and then we'd do this thing called Bible study and we would just start at the first page of the Bible and we'd talk about it." Olivia declared, "I've always had a passion for luxury brands, fashion, and beauty, and really kind of getting to the branding side of the industry." Typically I would not think of politics, the beauty industry or being a youth pastor as something that would already be lying dormant in the heart of a child, but the participants were painting a different picture. Many also attributed their upbringing as a contributor to helping them realize their purpose that was already residing in their heart at a young age. In particular Jackie recognized her purpose of being a leader and helping

people as a result of her tendency to take the lead role in her family, even though she was the third born of four children. John who now oversees a non-profit sports organization mentioned finding his love for sports through his background of always playing sports and loving all things sports related while growing up. Likewise, Ian shared "education has always been both a family value, and something that I saw purpose in [and] was a passion very early on" and now Ian finds himself working in an educational setting developing leaders. Ben and Cindy both described recognizing their purpose at a young age, while highlighting educations role as narrowing the focus:

- I think from the time I was very young I was interested in medicine and I initially wanted to become a doctor; and then when I was in high school I took a class, a health profession class and was able to research different fields in the health profession and came across the field of physician assistant and it seemed like it would be a good fit for me. (Cindy)

- I always wanted to be in medicine as I went through middle school and high school. I always enjoyed that type of science, so I knew I always wanted to be in medicine. (Ben)

Miranda also recalled how she had a love for learning as a child, and through life experiences ultimately found her way to the education sector and now finds joy in facilitating learning for her students. As I listened to the participants repeatedly mention how they have loved what they now share as their purpose from childhood, questions that gained a deeper understanding into the link between an innate purpose and living out one's purpose came to mind. One of those questions was, if an innate purpose is present from the beginning, what are some of the factors that help to bring it into fruition? For the

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participants there were themes surrounding spirituality that helped to spur on their purpose.

Spirituality

Cloninger (2007) defines spirituality as "the search for, and a means of researching something beyond human existence, creating a sense of connectedness with the world and with the unifying source of all life" (p.1). Some of the participants subscribed to a specific faith, while others did not claim a specific doctrine, but still believed in something greater than themselves. Even with their varying views on faith, all of the participants identified with a form of spirituality that was helping to propel them forward in their purpose. Many of the participants saw their faith as a guide in their life and decision-making process. Below is a snapshot picture of some of the participant's views on faith as a guide:

- My faith is something that's always kind of guided me, something now that I kind of look at with everything that's going on around us in the world we're living in that is challenging my perception to those sort of things and what I believe. But certainly, for me, I think where I look at value in my belief system is just kind of through service and those kind of things right now is where I'm at with that. Certainly, something that is kind of gone through and I actually take time to think about it and reflect on it, it's kind of – gone through growing up and learning about Christianity and those type of things and then actually going through and putting it forth. (John)
- My Christian faith helps guide my life. (Levi)

- I'm a man of faith, I believe in God, in Jesus, Holy Spirit. I allow the Bible to guide my life, principles. Psalms and Proverbs are great books in the Bible that kind of help guide you through life, those first foundational stones (James)

- I'm a strong Christian. I am not an active churchgoer but I definitely believe in a higher power and that God is directing my life and that he has a plan for me. (Pat)

- Basically, the way I look at my faith is I just have a relationship with Jesus and so in the foundation of having a relationship with him I know that I need to pray and just trust and believe that he is going to lead and guide me. I don't know if there are like signs but certain things like if my heart really feels drawn to something I prayed for I go ahead and I go with it and I just trust in him that it's going to work out. In this case I didn't know applying to the program that I would ever be where I am right now. I just trusted him that's what I was supposed to do. (Jackie)

Jesenia also mentioned how she had a personal relationship with God, but did not subscribe to a particular denomination, but a more universal view. Comparatively, some of the participants highlighted how they see the world as being interconnected. David encapsulated his thoughts with,

I believe in the universe, I believe that there is something that connects the spirit, that there is really something higher something out there and I think we call that God in a lot of different ways for different religions but that is all getting at the

same thing, and so for me a spiritual bonding connection with people in the

universe and that higher element, but not like that I believe in a specific religion.

Miranda echoed similar sentiments stating,

> I don't have a certain belief system based on a religious ideology, but I do believe
>
> this strong feeling like we have a purpose here and we have a responsibility.
>
> We're all interconnected too. (Miranda)

Dan was guided by the philosophy that there is virtue in everything and looks for the

good in others as much as he can. Faith as a guide and views on interconnection caused

all of the participants to have a centralized theme of believing in something greater than

oneself as an essential part of their purpose. James articulated how his faith, ideas of

being interconnected and his purpose being greater than himself,

> I think my purpose is to show – really to show what God can do and I think God
>
> uses me in a great way to show black men that you can have a successful career
>
> no matter where you come from.

Levi attributes his success in living a purposeful life stating, "one of the reasons for [my]

success is that I know it's not for me, it's not for myself that I'm doing this but it's for a

higher purpose or a greater cause"; similarly, Miranda shares "I just have these beliefs

that we are here on this planet to do good, and some of this comes out in the leadership

stuff that I've learned and studied". After learning more about the participants' views of

having an innate purpose from a young age, and the role of spirituality in helping to

shape their world-views, I particularly keyed in on their perspectives of what caused them

to have a sense of fulfillment.

Impact

Having an innate purpose and spirituality helped to guide and shape the

participants values, nevertheless in order to actually have a sense of fulfillment in what

they were doing, impact was an important priority for the participants. The language of

impact was commonplace among all of the participants— so much so that purpose and

impact were almost seen as synonymous. Over 150 statements were made that directly

spoke to the importance of making a difference, causing impact to be one of the most

prevailing themes. A sample of quotes from participants that displayed a motivation

towards making an impact include:

- Finding a way to help or to make things work better is a big motivator and then for

  me being part of something that is making a difference is a big motivator, it's why

  I work at a social enterprise and not a typical for-profit company. (David)

- I like doing research, I like making an impact, but I love, like I mentioned earlier,

  making a difference in the lives of students and like helping them learn. (Miranda)

- I'm fulfilling part of my purpose right now in terms of how I'm able to touch

  people's lives, the way that I am through my career. (Cindy)

- My ultimate goal would be able to help other people. (Jessica)

- Making a difference for people, that's something I've always loved doing (John)

- I want to instill passion and change someone's life (Jesenia)

- I have a passion for helping [people]. We're making history. (James)

- I can always see where improvement needs to be [made] and I can always come up

  with multiple ways to improve it. (Jackie)

- [My purpose is] helping others achieve theirs [purpose]. (Ian)

- Impact those around you to make a difference. (Dan)

- Hopefully I can help make their lives better daily. (Ben)

People Centric Impact. Impact, while a powerful piece of the purpose equation didn't seem to hold much weight without people being the focus. All of the participants were very much driven by impacting people, phrases such as 'helping people', 'caring for others', and 'changing lives' were being etched throughout the interviews. After I asked participants about their purpose, answers that showcased the value of caring for people were shared. The participants particularly had a bent towards inclusivity, with a focus on valuing people regardless of their background. Dan shared,

> I look for the good as much as I can in every single person, it's funny, I'm kind of like a social chameleon a little bit. It doesn't matter who you are what you're wearing, what you look like, what bar or restaurant or where you are, you bring something to this world that's very valuable as a person and to me I just think that every single person has something to offer and that we should be nice and cordial and friendly to everyone because of the fact that they're human beings. That's kind of a pretty big belief system about my perception on people.

Similarly, Ben stated,

> I think purpose is – the one purpose in life is to be with passionate and caring people, no matter who they are, where they're from, what their background is – just want to be a witness to them and show them that no matter what they've done you can still be nice to them…show them respect.

Ian emphasized the importance of inclusivity from the perspective of community building and providing an environment that is conducive to the development of all people.

I think we need to be more inclusive in our communities, we need to do work so

that everybody feels value and that they're safe. Because the truth is if we don't

have an environment where everybody knows that their contributions are valued

we're not letting people be at their best or being able to appreciate what they

bring to our teams or communities. I think the work we do is fundamentally

important that everybody should have an opportunity to engage with work like

this because it matters.

In addition to inclusivity the participants also placed a high value on being courteous and

respectful to others:

- I really believe in acts of kindness and really treating people with respect, so I

  think those guidelines, those principles guide my behavior and who I try to be.

  (Miranda)

- Work hard. But also, don't let it define you. Be nice to people, listen, it's really

  the simple things in life. (Pat)

- I try to be friendly to everyone no matter what position… I think they realize that

  I respect them for what they do and I don't look down on them because what they

  do may not be what I'm doing or because they may make less than I make. We're

  all there to get the job done and so I think they realize that I respect them for who

  they are and then they respect me the same. (Cindy)

- I'm always very nice and I'm always very conscious to not hurt people's feelings

  (Jackie)

Furthermore, not only was it important that people be respected, included, and positively

influenced by their work, it was also important to the participants that they themselves

are also surrounded by positive people that directly impact them. Miranda was adamant about the people that she connects herself with, sharing, "I really want to be around people who are good people and who make me feel good about myself and good about making positive impacts on the world." These sentiments especially held true for participants as they focused on the workplace. John helped to summarize such ideas with his statement on his work environment,

> I think one thing I really love about this office, and I think I kind of mentioned on how involved it's become in my life is that it really is a close knit group here that we work with. It's not only just our staff members but our volunteers. If you look at our organization we have people that have been volunteering every single year at the same event…they really are people I call friends. I always look at how that support system is also our volunteer base, it's incredible. They're very passionate people. It really becomes a family, your staff and your volunteers.

Olivia shared, "Being surrounded by people [at work] that are so good at what they do and so great, it inspires you to do better at what you do. So I think being on a team, it's really cool because no one competes with each other, they all help each other and what I do." Similarly Pat shared, "From day one and I've always been surrounded by amazing people, amazing teams, every work environment I've been in is more of a family than it is cutthroat... I've been fortunate since day one to have that and I think that helps you be successful, the people you surround yourself by for sure".

Outside of the workplace, the people that the participants engage with on a regular basis are also held at a high priority,

> My whole life does not revolve around this office and I hope that it never does. I like to spend time with my friends, my husband and I like to travel. I love being with my son. Working hard sometimes is working from my dining room table as he's playing around me. It's just making sure you're taking care of your responsibilities and doing it well, as well as you can – well is all in the eye of the beholder. (Pat)

Jackie highlighted how it is important that throughout her life she has long term good friends. Similarly, James acknowledged his friends and family and motivators in his life,

> They [friends and family] encourage me to do better. I'm very blessed to have some of the very best individuals around me that support me that I have a relationship with. So, I feel that they drive me as well to be better and to push myself and push people that are around me.

Cindy mentioned how being a parent impacted her positively and caused her to want to be a role model. Pat also spoke about how important it was to her that he son seen her as a role model. Similarly, Ben shared how his wife had an impact on him and how his success was connected to providing for his wife and being an example to his son. These shared idea of impacting others and being positively impacted by others as a push towards success unified all of the participants. With success being one of the qualifiers of this study, it was important that I learned more about the participants' perspectives of success.

Perspectives of Success

"Success motivates me, just knowing that there's a goal and I can achieve that goal" - Pat

Contentment. When I asked the participants what it means to be successful the primary answer did not revolve around money or status, but a much more abstract idea—contentment. Being happy and satisfied about the work that they were doing was what caused them to feel as though they were successful. Success sometimes may be tied to external things, but the participants, who are all leaders in their respective fields repeatedly shared sentiments about success that were more intrinsic in nature. As Cindy reflected on her ideas of success she shared,

> I would think success is, at least for me, being happy and content in what I'm doing in every area of my life. Of course, there are different things where you're going to want more, or make this better, but I'm okay I'm happy with what I've done so far and, so I would look at that as being successful.

When I asked John how he defined success he answered,

> I think for me it's being happy and making a difference. Certainly, working in the nonprofit field, you're not making a ton of money and that's not really something I'm driven by. I think for me it's being able to go out and create new programs and opportunities for people with disabilities to show who they are as a person. That's the stuff for me warms my heart, gets me motivated and fired up about stuff. So that's how I define success, there's that saying if you absolutely love what you do you'll never work a day in your life.

Comparatively Jackie mentioned,

> Success to me has multiple different levels to it. I think a lot of people kind of look at success like oh you make good money. I feel like money without feeling fulfilled is nothing. I feel like people blow through money. If your house caught fire and you don't have your money in a bank your money is gone, so I feel like success is really when you find what you feel you're supposed to do in life. When you find your purpose you're able to really go after it and then you feel joy with that and on top of that the other blessings come.

Levi expressed:

> Success for me isn't necessarily a career, it isn't necessarily a job, it isn't a pay grade, actually in the current job that I'm at I am getting paid half what I would at the other places that I got offered but I'm here because I know God called me to be here.

Jessica opened up about how her ideas of success evolved,

> Well for a while I would say, especially all growing up in school I always considered success to be like a grade or some type of thing that I could tangibly say I accomplished. But now I feel like I'm gauging my success more and more on if I am happy in where I am at in life and if I'm content.

Similarly, Ben stated, "I would probably describe [success as] just being satisfied with what you're doing… as long as you can say yes this is what I wanted to do I probably define that as success," and David echoed, "the easiest way for me to describe how I see success is being proud of the work you do, of what you do."

Jesenia candidly voiced her opinions on success,

> I define it in doing something that makes you come alive. Really you can't define it in a number or a title, if it makes you come alive in what you do and it really excites you then that's how I would define success… Someone wants to know what I think you know, and so that's how I define, I feel like I'm successful right now, working in the city that I love in a job that I love that people are waiting to kick me down to get, but I am able to go to work every day. I am grateful every day I get to walk through those doors.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier ideas of success are closely connected to making an impact. Ideas of contentment in relation to impact were shared by multiple participants. The selection of quotes below highlights how feeling successful hinged on impacting others:

- I'm very happy with where I'm at. In terms of just work and career wise I feel like I have a lot of respect for my peers and coworkers, and so they kind of come to me for advice. Just in general I'm proud of that, I'm happy to give recommendations to the staff. As I said before I can look myself in the mirror and say that I think I've done well or try to do the best I can do even though there have been mistakes I've made. I don't have any regrets about anything so I think that's how I look at myself as successful. (Ben)

- [Success] to me means more than getting an award. I like getting awards because it gives me that external gratification and assurance that I have done some things that is worthy, but I feel so much more successful and accomplished like at the end of

the day today when students are smiling and saying, "oh my gosh, that was so hard but I think I did really well" or whatever that might be. (Miranda)

- Success is very personal, it's very situational so I think I am successful when students that have contact with our office with that leadership self-efficacy, if they leave do they believe they can lead? I would say that's success or are they equipped to be able to create an impact, exponential – when they leave are they empowered to know that they can change environment. (Ian)

Achieving Goals. Closely associated with contentment being a factor in defining success, achievement was also mentioned by the participants. When the participants defined success, contentment was a clear identifier, but when I asked the participants to share how they had been successful, achieving goals was how their feelings of success were manifested. Pat and Olivia mentioned how success could look different in different situations, but ultimately saw success as setting goals and achieving them. This was not surprising because the participants' feelings of contentment were closely aligned with goals that directly impacted others, which spurred feelings of happiness in the participants (based on motivational factors shared as it related to having a sense of purpose). Miranda helps to show how contentment, impacting others, and achieving goals all work together in her statement about envisioning success.

When I really think about what is success and I think if you're able to do the best and highest quality work that you can that has a positive impact on something other than yourself. For example, I coordinate our masters and we have an event for students. This event didn't exist before I came here. I saw a need and rather than put together something kind of easy, I decided I want to put together this

really important event. Students come up with a few jobs that they're interested in, they come up with a resume and a cover letter for those jobs, and I identify specific interviews, we have like 25 different people come into campus today who represent all these different functional areas and they are coming in to interview our students. They give them feedback, we have turned this into a really, really great event, and to me that feels like success.

Jackie also helped to show how contentment, achieving goals and impacting others are interwoven through her experience.

Not even three years ago I started with this company and I'm now a supervisor over his busiest most successful office, so that's where I feel I'm successful there. And I'm doing enough to where I feel I contribute to the company, I can see where we're going to be going in the next few years and then I'm also able to be a blessing to others.

Jackie identified how she has been able to reach her goal of having a greater influence in the company, but ultimately highlights how she is wanting to be a blessing to others. Similarly, Levi shared how he has been able to grow in his role as a youth pastor, has expanded the amount of people that attend the ministry, and impacting leaders that serve under him that have went on to have their own successful thriving youth ministries. Additionally, the participants tend not to relish in their current accomplishments, but are looking for the next way to make an impact. Dan explained:

I think success for me is always kind of evolving in a way. So I set the goal and I work to achieve that goal and when I achieve that goal that's a success, but sometimes it's good and bad, a flaw or whatever, but I'm always looking for the

next goal. So, I get to the top of the mountain, I enjoy the view for a second and then where's the next mountain to climb. And so, success to me is setting out to achieve something, doing it with integrity, honesty, passion and bringing other people onboard with your vision and thought and achieving what you set out to do essentially. But it always changes, it's always changing.

The synchronization of purpose and impacting others coming together helps to produce feelings of happiness that ultimately cause the participants to feel successful in what they do. James helped to bring this point home when he voiced,

I would say success for me is overall being productive in your personal life, being productive in your spiritual life, being productive in your professional life as well, hitting your goals, hitting your objectives, surpassing them, making an impact, making history and doing it in an integral way. I think that's very important, I think nowadays success is a muddy term now because people will do anything they can to "be successful" that they will lower their standards to do so. So I think maintaining who you are as a person throughout your career or throughout whatever you're trying to achieve is essential.

Summary of Findings on Purpose

The findings on purpose help to demonstrate how the participants showed signs of an innate purpose from childhood that further grew as a result of the things that they were exposed to in their environment. Spirituality served as a guide for helping the participants navigate their purpose as well as the fuel to pursue something greater than themselves. These ideas of spirituality closely connected to their people centric nature and the push towards making a positive impact. Furthermore, the people centric nature of the

participants caused them to place a high value on relationships and surrounding themselves around people that they considered to be positive and value added both within and outside of the workplace. The participants shared their perspectives of success, which manifested in two different ways. First participants described success as experiencing feelings associated with being content; however, when describing how they have been successful the participants shared how they have been able to achieve their goals. In essence, impact served as the connector between their internal manifestation of success (contentment) and their external manifestation of success (achieving goals). Participants felt content when they were able to make an impact by achieving their goals. Some additional implications to note were that the participants never mentioned other people as it related to competition. While the participants were people focused, competing with others in order to reach their goals was not mentioned; their focus was on growing as an individual as it related to achievement. Lastly, the participants appreciated their victories, but did not relish in them long before looking to reach their next goal.

Lifewide Learning Shaping Factors

"The whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings"

- Eduard Lindeman

As water is to soil, learning is to purpose. From the moment that we enter the world, the learning process begins. Every space that we encounter holds a learning lesson, from something as minuscule as the purpose of a door knob, to our first language that we will one day speak from simply being immersed in an environment. Life is the classroom where we are continuously being educated and the spaces that learning takes place in are ever-changing. In the same way that the participants shared about the seed of purpose that has been present in their lives from as early as they could recall, the participants also painted a picture that revealed lifewide learning as the soil where their purpose is cultivated. Prior to looking at how lifewide learning has directly impacted the participants it may be important to first acknowledge how the participants defined learning. Interestingly the participants' perspectives on learning highlighted an underlying trait of humility, characterized by openness and a willingness to acknowledge shortcomings.

When I asked Jessica what learning meant to her she answered,

> I would say, well recognizing that I don't know everything and that's an okay thing, and that there are always new things to discover. And so, for me, it's being humble in recognizing that I don't know everything, especially in medicine because every year we have major changes happening.

Jessica further expounded on how she sees learning as an opportunity to continue learning about best practices as a midwife and discovering how different avenues help

affect change in people's lives. John also keyed in on the importance of being open,

explaining

> Learning means to me the ability to be open and to listen. I think we can learn every
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> day whether it's something that's [as] basic as learning how to use Google Docs or
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> learning information on what we're trying to accomplish and what our roles are
>
> here. So I think what it comes down to is you really have to be open to learning and
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> you have to say hey, you know what, this is something I want to do and you need
>
> to listen and not only when it comes to operational things like work, but I think we
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> can all learn from each other as well and that's where it starts, it is kind of having
>
> that willingness and openness to learn, being able to listen and really to offer
>
> suggestions.

Similarly, John closely equated being open to the importance of taking in feedback during

the learning process. He further expounded:

> I really value feedback, that's the core of learning, sometimes I teach a class and I
>
> learn from my students. Even though I'm the one doing the teaching I think you
>
> can learn from your students, from the people that are listening, so I think feedback
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> is extremely important because it allows you to evaluate what you're learning and
>
> how you can improve.

James defined learning as "reflection that could be after completing [a task] for the first

time [and] reflecting how to do something again differently," he also saw learning as

"obtaining new information, understanding it, [and] processing it." Additionally, James

showed his openness to learning as a way to also grow in maturity by acknowledging how

his behavior may affect others and making changes as necessary, he shared:

I think another piece to learning I've talked to a friend about is changed behavior.

So I know that if I did something wrong, if I did to somebody then when that

conversation happens and they explain to me what I did, I have to understand this

is what I did to such and such, even though I may not feel it's insulting they're

insulted so I shouldn't say that around them.

In all of the participants' examples of what learning means to them there was an openness

and willingness to learn that caused the participants to be able to grow from a multiplicity

of learning experiences.

Informal Education

The most prominent theme in lifewide learning was the role of informal

education, which includes learning in a variety of spaces that is not necessarily organized

or formal in nature like a school or organization (Melnic & Botez, 2014). Beyond

perspectives of learning, the participants shared the breadth of their lifewide learning

experiences and how they directly impacted who they are and ultimately their ability to

transition well into their career fields. As I listened to the participants share their stories,

conversations as learning, the social support of friends, and the motivational factors of

their families, it made the role of support systems as a mode of learning undeniable. A

support system can be defined as resource pool of people, things, beliefs, or an

environment that helps to support an individual by pushing them in the direction of their

choice (Seashore, 1980). In this study participants identified the role of mentors, friends,

family and upbringing, organizations and faith based communities, and even resources

such as books as elements of their support systems.

Mentoring as a catalyst learning. The pivotal role that mentors played in the lives of the participants was significant and the span of the types of mentors was as wide as the depth of the mentoring relationships cultivated. In some cases it was expert to novice mentorships, and at other times peer mentors. Regardless of the type of mentorship, the participants recognized mentors as destiny shapers in their lives. James attributed the cultivation of his identity, especially as an African American male and where he is today within his career field as the fruit of his mentoring relationships. When he shared about his learning experiences he emphasized how imperative mentors were in his life, stating

> It's been very important for me just to get perspective and be able to get great consult… I had several mentors on campus, African American men to be specific that are in prominent positions at the University, so I think being able to be close to them and seeing some of the things they went through, some of the experiences from their past in how it meant to be a man of color in a university setting, has been very, very helpful… So mentoring is very, very important and I still stay in touch with my mentors, I stay in contact with them and check on them in their careers and life as well.

Miranda expressed how her masters' and doctoral advisors helped to launch her into her career,

> My masters advisor, she's pretty prominent in the field of Student Affairs and Leadership education, she's a mentor to me and I really look up to her because she is a strong woman in the field that I'm in and she has made a huge impact on me and on a lot of other individuals. Similarly, my advisor for my doctoral program is really wonderful. My masters advisor really pushed the scholar

professional development in me. She still does, I'm co-editing a book right now

and she is the series editor. She's always given a lot of feedback and I appreciate

that and she always wants to push us professionally. My doctoral advisor, she

really helped with my personal development, too, to help me with even my

identity or work is really important to me but there are these other aspects in my

life that are really important to me as well. So, I look up to both of them a lot.

Cindy recalls how mentors in her field played a critical role in helping her to successfully

start her career path,

When I first started I started with two physicians that were just amazing women.

They were the type of physicians and providers that I wanted to be, like the one

that you know cares for the person, one that was happy and content with the fact

that they were doing it and it was providing that comfortable lifestyle but you

could see that wasn't the reason why they were doing it. So I was blessed enough

to be put with two that were able to help and continue to train me in a way that I

wanted to be. I think it was on the job experience specifically with those two

doctors [that was helpful].

John also attributed mentorship as the launching pad into his field:

When I got into the field here, one of my co-workers, he's now retired from here

but he had to show me the ropes, kind of took me under his wing and from early

said you fit in here, this is where you belong. He gave me the motivation to

continue to stay in this field and to serve our end.

Similarly, Jessica saw her mentor as someone who opened the door of opportunity in her

career field of midwifery:

The midwife I work with was also my preceptor. When you do midwifery, you

have a clinical period with a teacher and not many students actually end up

working for their formal preceptor, but she and I had worked together for

something like six years. We worked well together. She's twice my age but we

have kind of different personalities but we also mesh very well... she is kind of

like the mom I never had as far as my relationship with my mom , but also

someone that I was just confident in, who understood midwifery and she was able

to be a sounding board when I had questions about life or business or continuing

education, because it was so hard. And then after I graduated she decided to hire

me on for her practice.

All of the aforementioned examples of mentorship revealed how the participants directly

correlated their mentorship experiences with successfully beginning their careers. Each

mentor facilitated the participants being able to step into greater levels of their purpose by

helping them gain access to opportunities and or modeling what to do in the workplace

while also giving the necessary encouragement to progress forward in the field. Beyond

mentorship serving as a launching pad into their career, it also served in the capacity of

honing one's abilities and helping to ignite passion. David saw one of his mentors as the

role model that helped to shape his views on being dedicated to his craft:

I played in a quartet where you're practicing two hours a day with those people and

then doing formal lessons with the professor an hour a week and then you have a

private lesson with the professor, there's a huge level of interaction. He [professor]

is just for me the ideal of committing yourself to your craft. When he got married

he tells us and I don't know if he actually said this or not, but he said when I got

married I told my wife I have two loves, the saxophone and you, you will always be second – right, but that was his level of commitment to music. As a result, he's phenomenal, he had an accident and couldn't play for a few years and is still one of the best professors, a phenomenal professor and coaching mentor. I don't even think he will remember me that well, I'm not among the most notable people that he will have coached over 30 years, but I think about what he taught me daily.

Levi also saw some of his mentors as spark plugs that helped to ignite passion in him. He shared the following story about his anatomy teacher:

My anatomy and physiology teacher in high school, she was first off just really dorky but she was totally 100% excited. She was so excited about what she taught about and you could see it, and that contagious excitement made me get excited that I thought about pursuing biology in college but then I realized it was a lot harder than I had thought and all the teachers weren't as good as she was. But her contagious excitement made me realize that's how I need to be when I teach. I need to be that passionate about subject matters where it makes others passionate about it as well.

One of the prominent places that mentoring showed up in was within places of faith. Levi attributed the reason to working in full time ministry at his current church to the mentorship of his pastor who inspires him by the way that he cares for others and encourages them to go after their goals. Jessica spoke about her community of faith as being a contributor to her success while completing midwifery school and Jackie attributes the mentorship that she received at her church as the changing point that caused her to even pursue an education beyond high school:

When I first joined my church, I was working at the shop. I want to say I joined the church first before I ever applied to my program, so that was kind of my turning point. I had seen success for the first time in my life [at my church]. I watched my pastors and I'm like, oh–I knew their story, so I knew that they had worked hard to get and build their house, I knew they had worked hard to get the nice vehicles they had, I knew it wasn't money coming from the church because I knew their story [before starting a church]…I think subconsciously that was kind of a push for me.

Peer mentorship. A more traditional view of mentorship tends to include someone older or more experienced as the mentor, and the younger or less experienced person as the mentee, yet in this study it was the multiplicity of mentorships working in harmony that seemed to help the participants. The role of peer mentorship also played a powerful role in the participant's lives, especially when it came to social and emotional support. John opened up about his peers being a constant support system,

My five roommates that we all lived together [in college] we have a group message that never ends every day, whether we're talking sports, what's going on. Every day we're kind of just messaging each other and keeping in touch that sort of thing – I think those are the things that now I'm the only one that's still lives in the state where we attended college. One's in the Midwest, one moved south, all over the place but it's still like we haven't left each other. I know I can tell them anything and keep them up to date with where I'm at and those sorts of things and that's extremely powerful for all of us.

Jessica mentioned her peers as playing a role in helping her to complete school,

I definitely had a good group in my graduating class. Like I said earlier, this job is really hard and so we kind of carried each other through. We talked all the time and we talked more than just about school and midwifery, we talked about what was going on in life, and then I had people from my church who were very supportive of what I was doing and me getting to a healthier lifestyle and what I wanted to do in life.

Dan shared, "For me I would not be where I am today without some mentors who took some extra time and extra attention into guiding me and giving me advice on stuff" and he also attributed much of his personal development to mentors (who he also calls friends) as individuals that were able to have difficult conversations with him and remind him about what it is to be a person of integrity.

Beyond traditional and peer mentorship, the participants also mentioned more indirect mentoring experiences that they viewed as playing important roles in their lives. Some of the examples that the participants mentioned were watching athletes, motivational speakers, and supplementing through self-directed learning by reading materials that have helped sculpt their learning experiences.

Family and Upbringing

The role of the participants' family and cultural upbringing also served as major influencers, affecting their learning experiences and how they navigated life. In particular the participants family and cultural upbringing was linked to the participants motivations. Jesenia helped to open up the idea of family as a motivator when she was sharing about the hardships her parents faced,

Both my parents were born and raised out of the country and due to a war were essentially kicked out of their country and they were forced to move to the United States, and because of their background they, both families, separately moving from each other were able to get political asylum in the States and be able to become citizens and start working, but they really started from nothing.

My upbringing really motivates me because my parents came from a really tough background, and growing up with them instilling values in you [that you] can really do anything because they came from nothing and were able to succeed and really instill that drive and passion and adventure side of me that anything is possible, that I can pick up and move across the country and be successful.

After college Jesenia moved across country and she directly attributes her motivation for being brave enough to take the risk of moving without initially having a job to how she was raised by her parents. Jessenia also spoke about how her sister helped to motivate her in her decision-making processes:

My older sister who is four years older than me, she's an assistant district attorney, she's really smart but she has taught me so much about life and respect and applying for jobs. Making sure I'm taking advantage of the right things and putting the proper values on others. Growing up, I'm a bit immature about certain things and she has always grounded me and always been take a step back, let's take a look at how you can learn from this. Really put things in perspective for me, I kind of have a second mom. Now she's more like a big sister but she's always been also that kind of mother figure as well, teaching me things that maybe my mom couldn't. Growing up in a different culture, it's just different and learning two different kind of things.

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Culturally especially she's taught me very traditional values, on so many different

things that I still take with me, and then my sister has been able to mold that also

into modern times about being very conscientious about who I am and what I'm

doing.

Similarly, Miranda shared how her upbringing was a motivating factor for going after her

dreams, as well as embracing her assertive nature,

My parents were like go after your dreams, work hard, do well, don't let people

hold you back. And so I think that some of that influenced me where I didn't – I

haven't struggled in the same way that I know a lot of women do around feeling

like they always have to be nice and they can't have people not like them.

My dad, who has been a big influence in my life, really wanted me to go do

something that would make me money right now, make me be successful. He

always really pushed me to be a strong independent woman or girl and be able to

take care of myself.

James attributes a mind-set that has motivated him and helped him get ahead to the way he

was raised,

I think the way that I was raised by my father and my mother-- that old-school

mentality of no one is going to give you anything, you have to work for what you're

going to get [has been a motivator].

When I asked James to expound, he emphasized the role of his father, voicing

He taught me that I don't have to ask anybody anything in terms of you get up you

make things happen for your family and that's something that's stuck with me in

terms of his work ethic and if he's called into work at 2:00 in the morning, 3:00 in

the morning he was there, and he made sure that my mom and I had everything that we needed. So, I hope to reciprocate that one day but just the mindset and being set up properly in life and knowing certain things.

Ben also shares how the role of his father played a significant role:

My dad was a big role model for me, he had quite a few moments where say I messed up or made a mistake he wouldn't really come down on me or really be aggressive with me about that. He approached it and kind of taught me how to do better and looking at the way he approached it and how he approached it with my brother who was "more wild" than I was. So, he approached it much different – my dad had a few moments where in terms of raising your kids, taking the individuals and teach them based on how their personality is and not just how you think it might be best to manage and teach them.

Ben found solace in the way his father exercised patience and discretion based on individual needs and it now serves as a motivator in how Ben exercises patience, discretion, and care as a physician assistant in a correctional facility. Dan also looks to his dad as a motivator, specifically for living a life of integrity. He reflected on his upbringing, stating:

I was also a little bit of a rebel, I had to grow and learn a lot, but my dad has always been an incredible man of integrity, values, you know he taught me all these things about how to be a man. In high school it's like I don't want to be anything like you, but now today if I can be half the man my dad is I would consider my life a success.

John attributes his mother and his upbringing as the motivator for wanting to serve others:

When I was growing up I was involved in youth groups. One of my youth group leaders was my mom and the other one was a friend of my mom, they kind of got us involved in service and taught the importance of serving others.

Similarly, David attributes the role of his mother as his motivator for conflict resolution,

I fought with my mother from the time I was 10 or 11 until I left for college, not necessarily about things most kids would fight about, like I want to go to Johnny's house and spend the night, but about gender roles and America and sexism and political issues and we just had different views, me being a teenage guy and her being a middle aged woman who lived through the Vietnam War and a hippie war protestor in a very rural area and having some terrible experiences, standing up for her convictions. She would never let me just run off and be done. If I slammed the door and stomped off into my room, two minutes later she'd open the door and she would say "we're not done, we're not going to end things like that, right". I think that created an appetite and a bias towards finding a resolution and working through a resolution.

In addition to parents, some of the participants also shared how their grandparents helped to shape their perspectives, Cindy mentioned "I learn all the time from my grandmother, one of my closes friends, she teaches, her wisdom known no ends". Cindy also mentioned how her grandmother is always encouraging even when she is chastising or correcting something that she has done. Moreover, David also took ques from a grandparent when shaping life perspectives,

There are people for me who are mentors and represent an ideal that I always am working towards, my grandfather is one of those. The man was up at 6:30 in the

morning, he was in his mid-80s chairing committees and groups in various peace

organizations and teaching classes … and he has always been such an incredible

caretaker of people, he was meticulous and observant so if something needs

something he would make sure that happens in a way that isn't looking for any

credit.

Levi emphasized how his grandparents have played a defining role in his life as his primary

guardians. Levi was in fifth grade when he found himself being separated from his mother

due to a drug addiction she was battling, thankfully his grandparents were able there to take

care of him and his sister. Levi recounts:

My grandfather, he literally saved me and my sister when my mother was a drug

addict. When I was like I need to get out of here when I was in fifth grade, and I

wondered what can I do, my grandparents took me in. So my granddad, first off

they were in their glory days, he was making bank and he could have gone off and

they could have gone on cruises and drinking coconut drinks but instead they chose

to raise my sister and I, put us in the finest schools and everything and make sure

that we had everything that we needed.

While many of the participants focused on positive aspects of their upbringing as the

motivations that sent them in the right direction, not all of the participants had positive

things to say about their family backgrounds. Nevertheless, interestingly having a

perceived negative upbringing was used as a spring board, ultimately helping to launch

them into their purpose. This phenomenon is also known as Post-traumatic growth (PTG),

which involves positive changes occurring as a result of the struggles of a traumatic event

(Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014). Participants that experienced challenging upbringings

seemed to have a shared experience of the PTG phenomenon. Levi opened up about his family background and how it has served as a learning experience and the way he relates to others,

> My father was an addict, he tried to kill my mother and my sister and me at some point. My mother was also a drug addict and when I was young I chose not to live with her…. I remember having to sleep outside of the house with a baseball bat because the guy she was married to at the time had a drug deal gone bad. I had to protect my sister and stuff like that, but what would a bat have done against a drug dealer with a gun, but you know 7-year old mind.
>
> She [mom] passed away when I was in eighth grade and I couldn't feel the pain, I couldn't feel the hurt of losing my mother because it was covered up by such an anger at her. I was so mad at her for choosing drugs over me, for choosing men over me that I couldn't feel the pain and then a year later I just started crying randomly. I was like what the heck, and God showed me later that was me releasing and feeling that pain for the first time. Formative times like that where I have even see my sister holds onto that hurt, she lets that hurt define her instead of how I do it by I just move on and I'm like okay what's next, what can I do next? I have dealt with that now what do we have to do next. Those formative times where I took charge, I raised my sister because no one else did. Was that difficult? Yes. Was that what a child should be going through? No. But that's also why I'm here [as a youth pastor] to make sure that these kids, if they are dealing with that, they have someone they can talk to, they have somebody who knows what they've been through and then also I can help their parents, help them through that and make sure they don't

experience what I went through, or if they are experiencing it make sure they don't go off the deep end but they use it to propel them further like I did.

When I asked Jessica about her family background, she quickly responded,

I would say very dysfunctional not healthy environment. My family is probably pretty close to the poverty line, they all grew up on welfare, lived on welfare, very abusive family and my faith helped play into not being, not staying in that type of lifestyle. I wanted my life to be modeled differently than my family's and I knew I wanted something bigger than what anyone in my family had ever strived for. I didn't want the status quo.

The way my family taught was that we we're supposed to live this poverty life as a part of their faith, but I do not accept that and as I learned more and more about who God was to me I learned that I could be successful and also still be a faith-filled person. That kind of freedom gave me permission to pursue.

Jessica now actually draws from her past negative experiences:

Whatever I get fired up about, something that really speaks to my heart … I draw from my own past. I want to be the thing that I wish I had when I was younger and because I didn't have this person who could provide a safe place for me, that's what I want to be for other people. I could sit and wallow in my own story and the things I feel like I missed out on or I could use it as an opportunity to help the next person in line. And so that thought of being able to maybe change the story for someone else helps push me forward even on the days that I'm not quite sure where I'm headed.

Similarly, Jackie shared similar sentiments of her negative family background serving as a motivator,

> I think the underlying thing [for me] is even when I was little not wanting to end up like my parents ended up. I watched them go from job to job to no job to having two or three jobs and especially my mother, my mother raised me and my siblings pretty much as a single mom throughout her different marriages, divorces and different things. Watching her struggle and really not be able to be there when she wanted to, my siblings had to help raise me, my grandparents helped raise me, aunts and uncles and different things like that. She wasn't really able to be there and instill things that I feel are core things children need. I didn't have any one teaching me morals, I didn't have any one teaching me and pushing me for higher education, and different things like that because she was so busy trying to provide for us. So I overall was like you know what, whatever they did I'm doing the opposite of, so I made sure to push myself to always do better.
>
> I learned from other's mistakes, that's been my whole life model it seems like – and I kind of still do it to this day. Watching one of my siblings run the streets in a gang and another drop out of middle school…. It was like my goodness… I hate to say that they were ultimate failures, they weren't failures because I love them dearly but they weren't doing anything with their life and I watched my mom be overworked. I watched my dad being in complete depression…I was like I'm not doing that that was my push.

Olivia who also faced hardships after her grandmother who raised her passed away shared about her grandmother's passing,

> What it taught me in that moment was life doesn't stop after pain, you have to keep going. So, it made me want to continue to strive. I mean obviously you want to shine and make people proud and obviously they want you to go on after they're gone. I [also] think seeing others mistakes was like really aha, like you don't want to do that type thing so learning from other people's mistakes.

Regardless of the diverse lived experiences of the participants, all of the participants identified their families as motivators for their current success whether their family experiences were positive or negative.

Formal and Non-Formal Education

While Informal education was one of most prominent themes of this study, the role of formal education worked in accordance with informal education. In the way that support systems served as motivators towards their purpose, in many cases formal education served as a life trainer and helped the participants see from different perspectives and non-formal education served as a place of engaging and further exploring purpose

Education as a Life trainer. Many of the participants shared how their formal education served as a life trainer beyond what was being learned at home, or even in the actual classroom. The environment that formal education presented was an opportunity for the participants to be stretched out of their comfort zones, learn how to build relationships with new people, and face challenges that may not have been present in their homes. As John reflected on his educational experiences he shared, "for me the best thing that ever happened to me was going away to college". John further shared,

I talk about college and how it's sort of molded me [into] who I am. I think for me it was what I focused on, what I value today is acceptance and that's what I learned there. I grew up in a very small rural town, not much diversity at all, [when I] went to college [I] thought I knew what the world was like. And I'm sure you know, you've gone [to college], but from where I grew up it was very different. I had to learn about other people and not only that but through learning and activities I've been involved with it gets to my passion of let's stand up for each other, let's make a difference for each other. That's the one thing I look back on and what I learned and now that's molded me into my job and what I do now and what I love to do. I just look at that from an education standpoint being able to come here with an open mind, challenging my own beliefs and faith, and learning a lot about myself and what's really important not only to me but I think to other people. I just am so thankful that I did come to school and learn a lot about people and who they are, why things have always been the way they are and [why] we need to change that sort of stuff. It's kind of changed my beliefs entirely and things that I didn't even know that I believed because of where I grew up and those sorts of things. I look at education and it's huge, it's gotten me where I am and it's completely changed my belief system and I think I'm better because of it.

Similar to John, when Ben shared about education he stated, "Education has been a big part of my life and it's probably been one of the most influential things". Ben was able to articulate how education has helped to shape his identity,

Without education I probably wouldn't be where I'm at, I've always enjoyed school, learning, and that has given me the ability to do the things that I'm doing

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now. Without education I wouldn't have learned the skills that I've learned over time to be a physician assistant. I also think education has probably played a role in just my mindset and how I approach life, a problem or the things in life that occur whether it's politics, religion or the whether – education probably shapes how I look at things.

David also saw his college experience as crucial to his identity formation and shaping his worldviews,

Education has been a formative experience for me, crucial to my self-identity and my awareness of the world and I always loved school and not just school and going to school but learning. I have a thirst for knowledge that has served me really well in expanding my world view, helping me understand the world and how I fit into it in different ways large and small and I like that process. I like that academic exercise, so that has been really crucial.

Similarly, James shared how going away to school was an important part of his process in learning how to branch out on his own,

College is very, very important, it was very instrumental in my life to detach myself from my parents and come to a foreign place. I went to school two hours away from where I lived, but I was able to be away, be on my own, be responsible and tend to my own business. It was very important, my mom graduated, she finished her degree in business as an adult, but really I'm the first person to go to school at standard age after high school, get my degrees and then start a career, so it was very important for my family, my church family, [and] all those people that are rooting for me.

Levi also echoed the sentiments of school playing a role in providing him life experiences versus just the classroom setting,

> I went to college and I just went through a bunch of life experiences there, I can't really say the essays helped me learn, per se, but I can say that the experiences there were formative and helped me.

For Jesenia it was some of the non-formal education opportunities that were happening within her high school and college setting that really helped her find her role as a leader,

> In high school I was involved in student council where I was president, and always learning about leadership and how to balance school and work. I also had an internship so really getting to be part of the leadership organization and then followed that through college with student organizations. [I was] Constantly striving for leadership roles in which I could grow, whether leadership exercises where I was learning about myself and what personality color I was or how I lead and taking that into life and in school. When you work in a group project, even working with professors I needed to be self-aware about how I was coming across and where they were coming from. Those leadership organizations meant the world to me, I mean absolutely. They made my college and high school the greatest thing ever.

Education as Exploration. Another unique perspective on formal education that the participants shared throughout their interviews was the role that education played in exploring their purpose. When James spoke about discovering his purpose and honing his craft, he reflected on his college experience and how he discovered he was going to do something in communications,

I am in communications and marketing but when I went to college I was going to be a meteorologist, I wanted to be a weatherman. I wanted to tell the weather everyday just like some of the people on the major TV stations. I took my first science class – it was really me being like okay, does the meteorologist just go on weather.com and find the forecast and maybe change a couple numbers, it was so much science and all that so I altered it. but I knew it was going to be some type of communications so I ended up doing some straight journalism, a little PR with sports and the cool thing I can say is every job I've been in or every skill set I've learned in college I'm applying it to my job right now. I worked two years at one of the multicultural offices on campus, I'm using some of those same things in working with those same consumer segments in my current role, doing the media stuff, communications marketing. It's a full picture for me.

Comparable to James, Ian also changed his career choice as a result of his exploration process:

I took introduction to teaching class and they put you in a classroom. You have to be in a classroom on a couple of different levels. When I was in the middle school classroom is when–I don't want to say it was an anxiety attack but I realized I can't be in the classroom with kids. They're in control and I know it, they scare me.

It was after Ian had this experience that he began to shift gears and ultimately found himself working in leadership development with college students. John, who now works in the non-profit sector of sports also highlighted how education played an intricate role in exploring his purpose,

When I got to college and started looking into sports, I thought I wanted to work

professional sports, did a graduate assistantship with athletics and kind of worked

with marketing there. I think through those experiences and looking into those I

kind of found my passion towards something more service oriented or kind of the

nonprofit side of that.

Comparatively, while Jessica was being homeschooled, she had the opportunity to hear

about midwifery for the first time and learn more about women's health issues. It was the

opportunity to meet a midwife that sparked her interest to learn more about women's

health, and ultimately go to school to become a midwife. Moreover, Cindy was also able

to learn beyond the textbook and explore what is would really be like to be a physician

assistant while in graduate school, she shared:

During the clinical portion of my masters program, you're able to put what you've

been learning about in general during the course of your undergrad studies, and

then specifically when you're in graduate school you're able to put what you've

learned into practice and then also see how everything isn't always black letter the

way it was in the book, it's going to be different especially when you're dealing

with a field like medicine, people's bodies are so different. There's so much of us

that's the same but then there's so much that's different so really seeing how

different things you learned about play out in real life, you need to see that before

you're actually practicing so you know everything's not always going to be by the

book. I would have to say that was a big learning area for me was the clinical years.

The non-formal experiences of the participants were mainly supplementary to their formal

experiences through organizations, conferences, workshops, and internship opportunities.

Notably, a program called LeaderShape was mentioned by five of the participants as playing a pivotal role in their development. LeaderShape is an intensive week long program geared toward college students focused on leading with integrity and building and implementing a vision that will impact the world.   I found this to be particularly interesting since all of the participants came from different backgrounds, regions, and career fields.

Summary of Findings on Lifewide Learning Experiences

Humility was foundational to the participants learning experiences. As they discussed the importance of learning, ideas surrounding having an openness to learning and being willing to acknowledge their own shortcomings was mentioned as part of the participants' core. The breath of their lifewide learning experiences helped to form who the participants are today, with informal education being the most prominent form of education that the participants referred to when discussing their learning experiences. The informal learning experiences were situated within the participants' support systems, with mentorship and family upbringing serving as major influencers. Interestingly, it was the diversity of mentorship among the participants that played a key role, ranging from expert to novice mentoring, peer mentorship, and a collective community of mentors through organizations and communities of faith. Mentoring primarily served as a catalyst to learning, and was identified by participants as a way of sharpening their skills, opportunities to be launched into their career fields, as well as passion igniters based on the example of their mentors. In addition to mentoring, the participants' family members helped to shape their perspectives, with their parents and grandparents being mentioned most frequently. While most of the participants relayed how their families served as an influence in a positive way, participants who had a negative experience with their

families, also attributed them as influencers that helped to motivate them and navigate life issues based on the lessons they learned.

The formal experiences of the participants were attributed to identity formation as well as serving as life trainers. Many of the participants relayed how their perspectives were challenged as a result of their formal education. This especially held true when participants discussed branching out to college and being on their own for the first time. Intertwined throughout the formal learning experiences, non-formal learning served as supplementary to many of the more formal situations in the form of organizations or internships and assistantships. Non-formal learning was most notable for opportunities to further explore their purpose. Lastly, they also exemplified self-directed learning; reading and finding things to get involved with in order to grow as individuals was commonplace among the participants.

5. DISCUSSION & INTERPRETATION

Early Adulthood and Transition

"The moment in between what you once were, and who you are now becoming, is where

the dance of life really takes place." – Barbara De Angelis

In life we tend to celebrate the beginning of a thing and when victory occurs, the end of a thing. Yet arguably the most important part is what takes place in between the beginning and the ending of a matter. As such, in this study the process of transition was a primary focal point as I looked at the lifewide learning experiences that helped to spur success and a sense of purpose in early adulthood. In Levinson's adult development model he refers to the process of adulthood as a life structure (shaped by the social and physical environment), and early adulthood as one of the most pivotal periods of the life structure. In Levinson's model, early adulthood consists of ages 17-45, with five distinctive periods; the periods consist of: transitioning into early adulthood (17-22), grasping life structures for early adulthood (22-28), the transition into the 30s (28-33), settling into early adulthood (33-40), and transitioning into middle age (40-45) (Levinson, 1996). Levinson's theory is primarily focused on the process of constant change towards one's ideal life, referred to as "the dream" [1](Aktu & Iihan, 2017).

Juxtaposing Levison's theory, Gould's *transformations in adult development* theory highlights the social and emotional aspect of development and its impact on the decision-making process in early adulthood. In Gould's theory, individuals at ages 22-28 key in on developing independence and commitment to a career, with 29 to 34 typically

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[1] "The dream" is synonymous with ones view of what they would constitute as their ideal life.

being a period of questioning and vulnerability to career dissatisfaction, and 35-43 being a period of urgency to attain life goals (Gould, 1978). Both theories posit early adulthood as a time of change and those changes directly impact the vision that an individual has for their life. As I spoke with the participants in this study, I also recognized how it would be advantageous for me to pay close attention to the things that they shared directly pertaining to their aspirations and their decision-making process. For example, Ben knew that he wanted to help people and especially people that others may overlook, but initially he did not think it would be in a prison system. When Ben was presented with an opportunity to work for a state institution that would also allow for him to enter a special program to pay off his student loans, it fit in with his big picture of being debt free and providing the lifestyle that he desired for his family. Moreover, the position at the prison met his desire to help people that are often forgotten. Levinson would refer to Ben making adjustments along the way as part of the process towards reaching "the dream." Another participant, Jessica, grew up in a family where she was taught that she should not pursue an education beyond her homeschooling based on her religious background. Nevertheless, Jessica had high aspirations and desired to be able to help women on a larger scale than just within her home. Initially she did not feel prepared to pursue an education beyond her homeschooling, but when she learned about midwifery school she saw how it was an opportunity to continue her education in a more non-traditional way and still be able to help women. Gould would recognize this as the process of developing independence and committing to a career field. Overall, there were numerous examples where participants in this study exemplified forward thinking as they navigated their decision making process in order to take steps towards their life goals.

In addition to Levinson and Gould's theories, another prominent adult development theorist is Erikson (1966) who proposed an eight-stage psychosocial model of adult development. Erikson envisioned adolescence as the period prior to early adulthood, which is about discovering ones identity and asserting their independence as an adult by age 20. Consequently, in Erikson's theory it is expected that during early adulthood (20-39) an individual should be settled in their identity and seeking strong partnerships through love and friendships as they work out the conflict between intimacy and isolation (Erikson, 1998). However, economic woes, and societal changes have made settling into one's identity and transitioning into adult independence a difficult feat for many young adults, especially when it comes to securing employment that will enable stable independence. As a result, many would argue that what was previously considered the adolescent phase has been prolonged (Côté, 2005). According to Arnett (2016) this shift has caused a newer phrase of adult development to evolve, called *emerging adulthood* (ages 18-25), defined as "an exceptionally unsettled time" (p.1). Previously (depending on the model) the age range of 18-28 was historically considered as a time of settling into adulthood and family. However, in more recent years there has been a lot of attention given to this concept of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2016) suggests that marriage, procreation, career goals and dynamics associated with adulthood are being delayed as a result of economic factors, prolonged education, and societal changes. Essentially, emerging adulthood helps to address what could be considered a period situated between adolescence and early adulthood.

All of these different perspectives of early adulthood provide a contextual lens, as the participants' age range fell within all of the aforementioned models of early adulthood development theories (including a portion of emerging adulthood). Having participants that fell between the mid-20s to mid-30s allowed me to hear about early adulthood transitions in a fresh way. The mean age of the 14 participants in this study was 30, which according to many adult development theories can often be a turbulent time as it marks another major transition. During this study, I listened to participants share their hearts about their life transitions, ranging from discovering themselves, a hard break up, connecting with new people, finding their purpose, re-finding their purpose, testing the waters in a career field, and for some transitioning into marriage and parenthood. As to be expected, with multiple life transitions also came a multiplicity of challenges. Yet, all of the participants successfully navigated transitions associated with both emerging adulthood and early adulthood with success. As a result of the participants collectively identifying as being successful and having a sense of purpose in early adulthood, it was possible to key in on the lifewide learning experiences that helped make their transition prosperous.

The Role of Lifewide Learning

Lifewide learning, also known as the second dimension of lifelong learning—consisting of intentional (formal, self-directed, non-formal) and unintentional learning (informal, impromptu, teachable moments)—takes place in different settings across the lifespan (Reischmann, 2014). As the participants reflected on their vast lifewide learning experiences they saw them as investments towards their growth. The most prevalent way that their growth-mindset was manifested was through the high value they placed on

learning by expressing a humble, open disposition towards learning new things (as outlines in the findings section). One of the participants, Ian, said it best when he shared how he has learned to be "intentional and conscious about learning" recognizing that in every room that he enters he is both a "student of learning" from others as well as a "teacher for others" around him. Applying intentionality to lifewide learning experiences was a common thread among the participants. From a positive standpoint, the participants used exemplary role models as illustrations they could learn from, and experiential learning as ways to discover, strengthen, and build confidence in their own abilities. Moreover, no learning experience was considered wasted; as such, many of them attributed their mistakes as an opportunity for greater growth, with one of the participants calling it "failing forward." Even in instances when it was not based on the participants' direct experiences, the phrases "I learned by watching other's mistakes" or "I used it as an example of what not to do" was echoed by the majority of the participants. Though the participants' love for learning was evident, tackling the concept of lifewide learning itself was an immense undertaking, because no place went untouched. The concept of lifewide learning recognizes life itself as a place of learning, therefore every space, also known as a learning ecology is a space where learning takes place. When it came to gauging the breadth of lifewide learning experiences that took place in multiple settings, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model helped illustrate how different learning ecologies effect human development (Sacco, Falk, & Bell, 2016; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) as well as bring the broad concept of lifewide learning into focus. Bronfenbrenner's theory consists of the following layers: the individual, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. He believes that one's own biology is a factor and that the

other layers interact with the individual and impacting their development. The

microsystem consists of the immediate surroundings of an individual (family, friends,

teacher), the mesosystem pertains to connecting structures between the immediate

surroundings and the individual (home, school, neighborhoods, church), and zooming out

to a broader view, the exosystem accounts for social systems and how they have an

impact, while finally, the macrosystem looks at broad ideas that help to shape such

systems' impact on an individual (Berk, 2000).
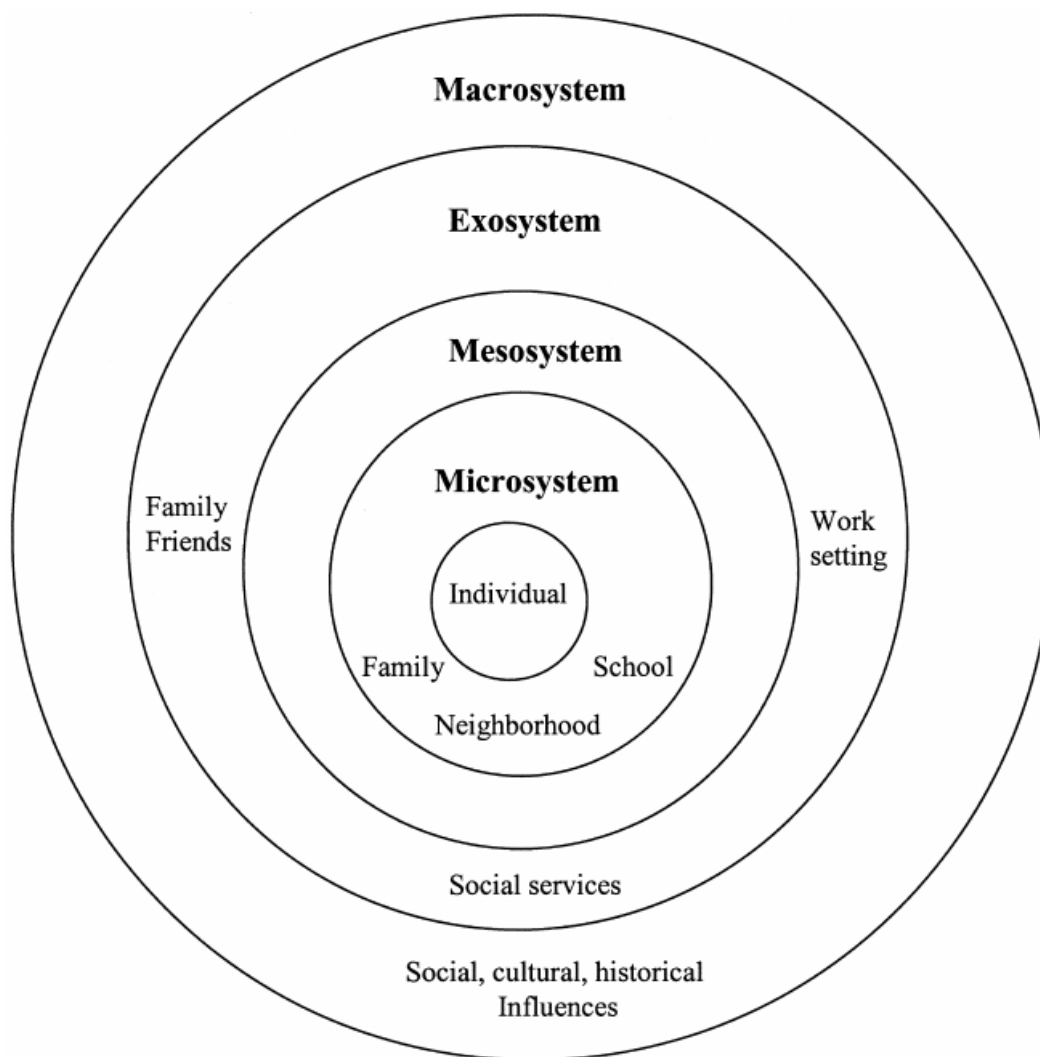
Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Sources: Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Spencer & Harpalani, 2003

Based on the findings of the study, the participants spoke most frequently about their lifewide learning perspectives through the lens of the microsystem (family, friends, mentors, professors, school settings, the workplace, organizations, church groups, etc.). However, there were opportunities to gauge the impact of the mesosystem and beyond when the participants discussed their purpose, touching on topics relating to the impact their cultural upbringings of on their mindset, as well as spirituality and overarching belief systems. Bronfenbrenner's model provided me with an opportunity to look at the impact of the different layers and discover where the participant's stories fell; however the task of identifying the different types of lifewide learning experiences within the categories would prove to be a meticulous feat.

Initially as I listened to the participant's stories, I thought it would be easy to separate their formal, non-formal, and informal learning experiences, but I quickly began to notice how much their lifewide learning experiences overlapped. One participant discussed a homework assignment given to him by his professor to do something out of the norm and keep record of the experience. In this case, the participant decided to get his ears pierced. When he shared about what he learned from the experience he mostly spoke about how his family reacted negatively to what he had done (unaware that it was part of an assignment). He recognized the learning experience as a pivotal moment that helped open his eyes to how quickly people can judge someone based on a surface change, even despite already knowing a person beyond a surface level. In this case the assignment was given in the classroom, but the bulk of the learning took place outside of the classroom. This was a common trend observed as participants shared about how formal education had impacted their learning. In some cases, the reverse would occur, where a participant

would learn about something as a result of their own self-education and then would meet to speak with a professor or mentor in their field, which later led to a more formal or non-formal experience. In other words, I began to notice based on the participants experiences that the concept of lifewide learning itself could not be segmented into categories, but rather, formal, non-formal, and informal settings were often simply starting points to learning experiences that eventually intertwined with one another. This discovery is closely relative to discussions by LaBelle (1982) who in in *Formal, Nonformal, and Informal Education: A Holistic Perspective on Lifelong Learning* looked at the relationship between all three modes of learning and concluded that individuals are constantly engaged in learning experiences whether planned, voluntary or unintended functioning all together, therefore formal, nonformal and informal learning are always interacting with one another.

In the same way that our lives cannot simply be segmented into neat boxes, because of intersections, our lifewide learning follows suit. Nevertheless, despite the overlapping, there were distinctions between what was gleaned by the participants from the different forms of learning based on their starting points. For instance, participants primarily recognized the starting point of formal education experiences as a *life trainer* that stretched them out of their comfort zones, and as an environment to further explore areas of interest. Conversely, when participants acknowledged informal learning as a starting point, it was chiefly identified as a catalyst for learning through the connections made with others and developing a strong support system. However, in some cases it is hard to recognize which starting point came first when they were both so closely intertwined. For example, when I asked the participants about their formal learning

experiences, they typically spoke about going away to college and echoed each other

when sharing about how it was the first time they were away from home, causing them to

become more independent, find where they fit, and learn life lessons along the way. In

fact, one of the main lessons the participants spoke about as it related to their school

settings was how it introduced them to diversity and becoming culturally competent as a

result of being in a space with people from all different backgrounds. Although the

experiences mentioned were within their school settings, they were actually more

informal in nature, yet if you removed the institution the likelihood of their experience

would also be removed. It was the environmental change itself that the participants

referred to the most as it related to their growth in formal settings, versus the teaching

taking place in the classroom itself (which is what I initially expected to hear). The

overlap also showed up as the participants relayed their non-formal learning experiences.

In some instances, the participants joined organizations chartered by their schools, or

attended leadership development programs that they were made privy to through faculty

members or co-workers.

As a result of the participants being introduced to new ideas in more formal or

non-formal settings, it in turn caused them to want to explore areas of interest through

self-education and come back and share with others. Bronfenbrenner's model

acknowledges the overlapping and interplay of multiple domains by showing how each

layer is continuously impacting the development of the individual, and vice versa and

refers to this as *bi-directional influences* (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). What I especially

found interesting as it relates to how learning experiences impacted the participants, was

their ability to see their experiences in pixel form, but then zoom out and apply the

lessons they learned from their experiences to progress towards their big picture goals. Such an ability lends itself to their learning intentionality. Maya Angelou once stated, "I come as one, but I stand as 10,000" speaking of standing where she was as a result of her ancestors. A similar concept can be applied to the participants, but as it relates to the synthesis of their learning experiences. It is the multitude of lifewide learning experiences that the participants were able to connect together that positioned them to thrive when the right opportunities presented themselves.

Connected Learning

The ability that the participants exerted in utilizing their learning experiences to progress towards a goal is strongly centered on the principles of *connected learning*, which includes being socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward opportunity. The participants were particularly skilled at connecting their informal learning experiences to their more non-formal and formal learning experiences in pursuit of their purpose. In *Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design*, the authors describe the realization of connected learning as "when a person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, as is in turn able to link learning and interest to academic achievement, career success or civic engagement" (Ito, Guiterrez, Livingstone, & Penuel, 2013, p. 4). The lifewide learning experiences of the participants were undergirded by strong support systems (friendships, mentors, family), digging deeper into areas of interest through self-education, and developmental opportunities through organizations, internships, conferences, and formal learning experiences. While lifewide learning looks at the breadth of learning that takes place, connected learning helps to connect intentionality to the learning experiences so

that the learner benefits at the highest levels from their lifewide learning experiences that relate to one another. Research suggests that a connected learning approach causes individuals to be more resilient, and able to adapt when provided with the right social support (Ito, at el,. 2013). Even though it may not have been through an intentional curriculum, their experiences indeed mirror connected learning. This helps to explain why the participants were able to transition successfully, as a result of strong connected learning experiences causing them to be more resilient and adapt as needed. Whereas literature on connected learning is typically tied to a curriculum and thought of as a process that an educator is using is to tie information together for their students, in this case it was evident as an ability that the participants exercised in their daily lives, through what I call *learning synthesis.* Perhaps the greatest link to the participants' ability to synthesize their learning is their self-directed learning abilities. Brookfield states, "the most complete form of self-directed learning occurs when process and reflection are married in the adult's pursuit of meaning" (Brookfield, p.38, 1986). When Miranda gave a simple example about personal development it confirmed how self-directed learning served as a link to connected learning,

> I would say a lot of my professional development connects to my personal development. [for example] Just like listening to interesting podcasts, I rarely just kind of sit and veg out. I do sometimes but normally if I do I do that in small doses, so I guess I'm always trying to do something that is somewhat enhancing to my life.

It is the mindset of connecting informal learning experiences, to formal or non-formal experiences that allows the participants to receive the highest return on their learning

investments. When the participants reflected on learning, they placed high esteem in its

role, and when I asked about the major contributing factors to developing their talents

and abilities they spoke of drawing from their everyday life experiences. Dan shared how

his life experiences helped his development,

> The major contributing factors that impact my talents and abilities [pause], I
>
> moved around a lot as a kid. So, with [my] dad getting a promotion every two and
>
> half years that would take us to a new city, sometimes a new state so I was always
>
> the new kid in the class but I never had like a weird awkward [phase]. I guess
>
> when you're the brand new kid and have to figure it out, I would just always try to
>
> be nice with everyone and I made friends quick and I played a lot of sports in all
>
> those different communities. So, I made friends there, but I think that goes a lot
>
> into kind of always being a new person and sometimes feeling a little bit out of
>
> place but being okay with that. I think that's probably one of the greatest things
>
> that has attributed to my people skills and flexibility and just having to put myself
>
> out there.

Dan is an example of using his life experience to learn a skill-set that has served him well

in connecting with others in the field of government relations. It would have been easy to

use being the new kid as an excuse to become more reclusive, however he used it as an

opportunity to learn how to connect with people in new environments. This trend was not

just observed in Dan's example, but similar sentiments were shared by others, Dave

shared:

> I think maybe the biggest contributing factor to who I am and my approach to life
>
> is the fact that I needed to be more self-reliant from a very early age, I had a

relatively unstable childhood in the sense that my folks, my mother in particular, were very loving but we were super poor so I got a job, I think I have Social Security record going back to when I was 10, but I got a job very early and was more or less an adult at a very early age and learned both in terms of day to day existence and personal relationships, how to be an adult really early so that gave me a head start on working on and improving a lot of the things that people may take for granted.

Mentoring. In order for connected learning to take place, a prominent piece is the support of caring adults, communities, friends, and family, which correlates with the strong theme of mentorship that was prominent in informal learning settings. In this study as well as others it has been shown that successful adults that were able to navigate and overcome challenges can also reflect back on key mentors that helped lead them in the right direction (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Rhodes, 2004; Spencer, 2007;). Spencer (2007) refers to this phenomena as *natural mentoring relationships* that span family members, friends, coaches, teachers, neighbors, community leaders, and spiritual leaders that are able to step in and have a positive impact on youth and emerging adults during pivotal times in their lives. In *natural mentoring relationships*, rather than it being a more formalized partnering together of mentor to mentee, it evolves out of everyday life situations. Furthermore, while natural mentoring has been shown to help navigate challenges, mentoring has also been shown to help early career professionals successfully transition. Gifted individuals in particular especially appreciate mentorship and its positive effects on their social well-being as well as encouragement professionally (Casey & Shore, 2000; Kaufmann, Harrel, Milam, Wooverton, & Miller, 1986).

Relational Learning

There was an emphasis on being surrounded by good people, having a positive impact on people, and an immense appreciation for the mentors and support groups in their lives. Subsequently the high value that is placed on people caused the participants to be relational learners. *Relational learning* subscribes to the idea that relationships are the core to learning, rather inside or outside of the classroom (Otero, 2016). While the thread of formal, non-formal, and informal learning was encompassed in the participants' stories, the experiences that the participants mentioned the most were their relational learning experiences that often fell under the category of informal learning. One of the participants gave a great example of how relational learning has been at the core of his process stating:

> Where I get most of my learning is through talks with my peers and challenging each other's view on different policy, political policy topics, and having my views challenged. I think that's where my growth and learning mostly comes from (Dan).

Likewise, Cindy shared how she has been impacted by people in her learning, the impact of relational learning was evident.

> Some of the early experiences I would say of learning would be learning what not to do by watching others, also social situations, and of course teachers definitely. I find myself very blessed to have most of time teachers especially in college that I always felt comfortable enough to go to them if I didn't feel I was grasping the material or something like that, I had the kind of professors I could go to and find out what I wasn't catching or had opportunities for PA's or sessions or things like

that I could take advantage of to be able to learn that way. Basically people who

were able to teach me things, are people who had a major impact. Also my pastor

and his wife, just the way that they interact with people and with each other, and

also being at my parents, the way they interact and they way they help each other

has helped me try to be a better wife. So also learning for relationships from other

people, some things I should do, some things I shouldn't do, to make my

relationship work.

Pat further highlighted how relational learning can take place through a spouse when

naming one of the major contributions to her learning.

One of the most important is my husband because he can challenge me, he can tell

me no, he knows what buttons to press and I mean this in a very good way of

making me be better at what I'm doing. I couldn't even tell you how it works out

but he and I have a great relationship to where he's one of the only people that

really call me to the mat on figuring out how something could work better. I love

that and appreciate that.

Their relational learning, combined with their ability to translate their lifewide learning

experiences into connected learning, positioned them to be successful when met with

career opportunities.

Intersections of Adult Development, Lifewide Learning, and Career Development

When looking at the vast lifewide learning experiences of the participants and

how they have navigated transitions in early adulthood, it is important to understand

some of the basic principles of being an adult learner. While pedagogy is focused on the

learning process of children, andragogy is concerned with the process of teaching adults

and how they learn. The term andragogy was first coined by a German high school teacher in 1833 (Reischmann, 2005), but was introduced in America almost a century later by Eduard Lindeman (1926) who introduced andragogy as a key method for teaching adults. Lindeman's concept of adult education steered away from teachers as the keeper of knowledge and the student as the receiver, and embraced an engaged way of learning that is collaborative and focused on living a purposeful life (Lindeman, 1926). Ultimately Lindeman saw life itself as the classroom by which adults learn, causing a paradigm shift from a more traditional pedagogical perspective. Perhaps one the most prominent voices and advocates for andragogy was Malcom Knowles, who developed the Theory of Andragogy. As part of the theory Knowles (1984) introduced six adult learning assumptions of andragogy.

1. Self-Concept- When we get older, our concept of who we are shifts from dependence towards independence and self-direction.

2. Adult Learner Experience- As we grow and experience more life, we accumulate knowledge based on this experience that then becomes a more valuable resource for future learning. By the time we are adults, we have an abundance of experience to draw upon across a variety of contexts.

3. Readiness to learn- Our readiness to learn becomes more oriented to the developmental tasks of our social and work related roles.

4. Orientation to Learning- As adults, our perspectives changes from one postponed application of knowledge to immediate application, and as such our orientation shifts from one of subject-centered to one of problem-centered.

5. Motivation to Learning- As we mature, the motivation to learn is internal

6. Adults need to know why they need to learn something. (p.12)

As high-potential adult learners, the push towards engaging in one's own learning process was heightened even more among participants. The core components that encompass being a high potential individual include having high abilities, a push and motivation towards high achievement, and a commitment to growth and reaching goals. The combination of self-directed learning and traits associated with high ability amplified how the participants utilized their learning experiences in their push towards growth.

Identity Capital

The participants' view of learning experiences as investments towards growth closely aligns with ideas surrounding identity capital. While *emerging adulthood* aims to address the societal changes that have contributed to prolonged entry into what was previously considered adulthood (age wise), James Cote and Charles Levine (2002) introduced a different perspective on transitions into adulthood that center around identity formation. The contextual aspects that underline Cote and Levine's theory of identity formation include:

1. social structure, which can include political and economic systems;

2. interaction, compromising patterns of behavior that characterize day-to-day contacts among people in socializing institutions like the family and schools;

3. personality which encompasses terms like character, self and psyche, including subcomponents like ego identity (Cote, p.1, 1996)

Rather than focus on age brackets to define adulthood, Cote builds on his concept of identity formation by introducing the *identity capital model*, focused on coping with challenges associated with transitioning from higher education into the workforce (Cote,

1997). Based on the findings of this study, participants' experienced strongly aligned with many of the aspects mentioned in the identity capital model, which asserts that certain resources (known as identity capital) are necessary in order to make a strong transition despite societal barriers. Broadly speaking, identity capital consists of both tangible (social class, parents, gender, organization memberships, etc.) and intangible (personality, advanced intellectual and social development) resources (Cote, 2002). Forms of identity capital include:

> advanced forms of personal development, making progress in one's life project, resolving adult-identity issues, securing community memberships that provide identity validation and social capital, and attaining an occupation that is personally and financially gratifying (Cote, 2002, p. 120).

Based on the list of things that constitute identity capital, most of them fall within the following three categories, (1) personal development, (2) progressive core traits, and (2) validating support systems. The prevailing themes in the findings of the study also closely align with the aforementioned categories. Traits associated with high potentiality align with advanced intellectual and social development, their push towards purpose intersects with personal development, and their meaningful lifewide learning experiences aligns with having validating support systems.

Table 4

Comparison of Components of Identity Capital and Study Findings

Identity Capital	Core Traits	Personal Development	Support Systems
Findings	• High Aspirations & Ability • Gifted • Forward Thinkers • Love and Openness Towards Learning • Purpose Driven • People Centric • Courteous • Self-Aware	• Self-Educators • Utilize Books • Continued Education Courses • Leadership Development • Spiritual Development • Professional Development • Mental Health Care	• Family • Expert to Novice Mentorship • Peer Mentors • Friendships • Organization Member • Assistantships/Internships

Dave exemplified the intersections between his traits associated with high potentiality, personal development, and support systems as part of his learning experience as he articulated,

> There are a few practices of personal development that I try to focus on. One is
>
> just looking for opportunities to find growth every day whether large or small,
>
> whether it's interactions with people that go particularly well or particularly not
>
> well, or situations where I think I could have done something different or better. I
>
> always try to stay very mindful and present in what's happening and then break
>
> those things down on a regular basis every day or week or couple weeks, and then
>
> I find talking to people who I respect, like mentors or coaches really helpful. I go
>
> to like a psychiatrist about things, just to check, like the mental tune up. (Dave)

In just a few sentences Dave's traits of being a forward thinker, having an open disposition towards learning, and the push towards high achievement that are associated with high potentiality shines through in how he approaches life. To that end, Dave is then focused on progressing forward based on what his lifewide learning experiences present and he understands the importance of pulling on the support systems around him (mentors, coaches, and psychiatrist). Each participant demonstrated a sense of identity, clearly articulating their skillsets, personality traits, and the value that they bring as an individual. In Valliant's model of adult development one of the concepts that he expounds on is *career consolidation*, describing it as "expanding one's personal identity to assume a social identity within the world of work" (Valliant, 2002, p.36). Interestingly participants did not separate being successful in life from their career; in fact, when I attempted to ask questions that separated the two the participants still did not make a distinction. As I noticed this trend of identity and career success aligning, I began directly asking the participants if they saw being successful in life and successful in their career as different. Participants predominately saw them as one and the same. This trend lends itself to the idea that the participants had merged their personal identity into the work that they were doing, which helped to give them a sense of purpose. Levinson's Life Structure theory speaks of an idea called "the dream"; essentially it is the idea that everyone has an ideal life that they are trying to achieve and as they go through transitions in life they modify as their perceptions of reality also adjust (Dean, 2007). The concepts of career consolidation and "the dream" in many aspects can be directly associated with purpose. Career consolidation speaks to the process of synching ones identity with the work they

do and the process of reaching the dream is all about the lifewide learning experiences that occur that contribute to the perception of reaching ones "dream."

Chapter Summary

In summary, the findings help to highlight the following key areas as beneficial to the successful transition into ones career field in early adulthood:

1. A breadth of lifewide learning experiences, comprised of connected learning.

    - Most notably underpinned by strong support systems.

2. Strong identity capital.

    - Most notably underpinned by the push towards personal and professional development.

3. Relational learning experiences that produces social capital.

    - Most notably underpinned by a love for learning and a high esteem of people.

4. Opportunities that allow an individual to merge their identity capital and social capital together, resulting in career consolidation.

    - Drives high levels of productivity by producing a sense of purpose in work.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Study Summary

Initially when developing the topic of this study, I was interested in looking at the learning experiences of successful *high potential individuals*. My mission was to be able to understand the factors that help an individual fulfill their desired career goals so that I could then create a coaching program that would help *high potential individuals* make a successful transition into adulthood, while also providing organizations with protocols that they could put in place that would be advantageous for both organizational growth and employee satisfaction. It quickly became apparent that looking at an individual's lived experiences had a broad reach and exploring the lifewide learning experiences of the participants, provided a lens to look at learning comprehensively, without segmenting it into formal, informal, and non-formal learning. By adapting a lifewide learning lens it enabled me to begin structuring a study that incorporated looking at lifewide learnings' role in transitioning into a career field.

Process of the Study

Subsequent to determining the core of the study, I considered a few different angles as it related to the type of participants that I wanted to enroll. Initially I knew I wanted to include participants that fell within early adulthood (20s, 30s) however I was not sure if I wanted to look at individuals that were in crisis situations or just a particular gender, etc. Ultimately I went back to my research purpose of wanting to understand the factors that helped an individual fulfill their desired career goals in order to be able to help high potential individuals' transition well into their field. Based on this purpose, I decided to enlist participants near their mid-20s to late 30s of all backgrounds that

screened as *high potential individuals* having both a sense of purpose and career success. As I navigated how to approach undertaking the large concept of lifewide learning, I chose a constructivist approach to grounded theory. A constructivist approach allowed me to look at both the how and why constructs of the participants lifewide experiences. Additionally, grounded theory was most ideal because the study covered two subject matters for which there is a minimal amount of research (lifewide learning and high potential individuals in early adulthood) and would allow for me to generate a theory that helps to explain why the participants were successful in their early adulthood transition.

Fourteen participants were recruited for the study, seven of whom were women and seven men. The make-up of the participants included racially/ethnically diverse individuals from different social-economic backgrounds, differing regions across the US, and various career fields. The commonalities of the participants included their high-potentiality, age range within early adulthood (23–39) and having both success and a sense of purpose in their career fields. The participants were gathered through multiple domains, including: distinguished alumni programs, employer/employee referrals, higher education leadership staff referrals, and personal referrals from individuals that knew potential participants. Prior to being included as a participant of the study, potential participants completed a screening process to ensure they met the required participant profile. After the preliminary screening, all of the participants were required to complete a consent form before officially enlisting. After completing the screening the participants took part in two interviews; the first interview was in person and the follow-up interview was completed via the phone (with the exception of one participant who I was only able

to interview via phone for both interviews). The primary research question framing the study was:

1. What lifewide learning experiences thus far have helped high potential (gifted) adults reach success and a sense of meaning in their careers during early adulthood?

The following additional questions helped to look at different angles of the primary question:

D. What forms of learning (formal, informal or non-formal) have had an impact on helping high potential adults develop their talent?

E. What beliefs, motivations, and factors have spurred productivity in high potential adults?

F. What are high potential adults' ideas of success and what causes them to have a sense of purpose?

Results of the Study

Based on the findings, there were two distinctive categories that emerged from the data; one that focused on lifewide learning and the second solely focused on purpose.

Key findings on lifewide learning. Based on the findings of the study that addressed the lifewide learning experiences of the participants, their formal, informal, and non-formal experiences overlapped heavily. However, there were distinctions to the roles that they played which are highlighted in the chart on the following page.

Table 5

Lifewide Learning Key Findings

Lifewide Learning	Main Role	Key Elements	Notable Trend
Formal Learning	Learning that serves as a place of exploration and life trainer	K-12 School Settings, Higher Education Institution, Teachers, Professors	Most notable for being an environment that helped participants see from a different perspective
Non-Formal Learning	Supplemental and experiential learning	Organizations, Church Setting, Conferences, Seminars/workshops, Internships/Assistantships, Continued Education	Most notable for helping to further explore purpose
Informal Learning	Catalyst for learning through support systems and self- education	Mentorships, Family, Friends, Books	Most notable for developing talents and abilities and providing "aha moments"

The following key concepts of *connected learning*, *relational learning*, and *identity capital* underpinned the participants' lifewide learning experiences. The strong support systems of the participants closely related to relational learning, empowering them to have connected learning experiences, which then led to strong identity capital.

Table 6

Concepts Underpinning Lifewide Learning Experiences

Concept	Definition
Connected Learning	"Connected learning is realized when the learner is able to pursue personal interest or passion with the support of friends, caring adults, and/or expert communities and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success, or civic engagement." (Kumpulainen & Sefton-Green, 2014, p.10)
Relational Learning	"Learning through collaboration and relationships with others." (Wang, 2012, p.25)
Identity Capital	"Identity capital is the currency we use to metaphorically purchase jobs and relationships… [it] is our collection of personal assets. It is the repertoire of individual resources that we assemble over time." (Jay, 2013)

Key findings on purpose. The results of the study indicated that having a sense of

purpose was of high importance for each of the participants as it related to feeling

fulfilled in both their lives and career field. Furthermore, as the participants reflected on

their own purpose, they were able to trace it back to early childhood. Although the

participants may not have known what they wanted to be, there was a recognition of a

sense of innate purpose that was already present, but grew over time. This trend of an

innate purpose was seen as I listened to participants reflect on things they enjoyed when

they were younger and then I compared it to their current roles and what they identify as

their purpose. It became evident that it was not so much that the participants were

choosing a new purpose as they got older, but a picture of their purpose was evolving.

Beyond innate purpose the most prominent finding related to the participants having a

sense of fulfillment was the importance of making an impact. With over 150 statements about making an impact, it was a prominent language of the participants (i.e. "I just want to make a difference", "we're making history", "I want to instill passion and change", "make an impact", etc.). The fuel that helped to shape their purpose was their people centric focus as well as the notion of believing in something greater than oneself. The following chart highlights the most prominent findings on how participants identified spirituality (believing in something greater than self) as helping to fuel their purpose:

Table 7

Findings Related to Spirituality

Spirituality as a Purpose Shaping Factor	Function
Faith	Serving as a guide in their life and decision-making process.
Interconnectedness	A universal view of being interconnected as a human race.
Seeing Virtue in Others	A philosophy that is focused on seeing virtue in everyone.

Innate purpose and spirituality helped to show the development and fuel behind the purpose of the participants; however, to understand what causes the participants to have a sense of fulfillment, I spent time listening for statements that the participants made that directly correlated to their sense of fulfillment. The following table highlights the findings regarding what participants saw as providing a sense of success in their endeavors:

Table 8

Findings Related to Sense of Fulfillment

Core Perspectives Causing a Sense of Fulfillment	Function
Contentment	Served the desire to be happy and satisfied with the work that they were doing.
Positively impacting others	Aligned with their core of being people centric and desire to impact others
Achieving goals	Aligned with traits associated with high potentiality of high ability, commitment, and desire to achieve at high levels.

It was through the breadth of lifewide learning experiences of the participants that they experienced connected learning, relational learning, and experiences that provided them identity capital to step into their desired career roles. The participants matched their breadth of learning, with intentionality by practically applying their experiences to work they deemed purposeful, leading to career consolidation (the merging of ones identity into the work that they do).

Theory of Purpose Development

Intelligence is consciousness in action— behavior with a purpose. The person who is

vividly aware of his activity as well as the goal toward which the activity is directed

becomes conscious of both his powers and limitations. – Eduard Lindeman

Through the constant comparative method, memos, coding, re-reading transcripts

and asking clarifying questions of the participants, the data that emerged began to paint a

beautiful tapestry of evolving purpose. In order to take part in this study, all of the

participants expressed having a sense of purpose in early adulthood. Yet, what may be an

even more powerful statement (as outlined in the findings section) is how the participants

already showed signs of innate purpose from childhood. Initially when starting this study,

I thought that the primary focus would be to develop a talent development theory.

However, as the data began to emerge, keeping in alignment with grounded theory it

became obvious that this was a study of lifewide learning's effect on purpose

development more than talent itself. Other studies have highlighted innate talents, such as

Gallup's StrengthQuest or StrengthFinder which is hinged on individuals having unique

strengths that are innate to who they are or Core Values Assessment which speaks to

values that drive an individual (Clifton & Anderson , 2002). Overall, an abundance of

studies look at components of talents and abilities, but the data in this study look at the

essence of who a person is and the process of purpose going from being concealed to a

place of open expression. Furthermore, the participants in this study were also high

potential individuals, thus talents, abilities, high drive and the desire to achieve were

commonalities for them all. Whereas previous studies may have attributed talents,

motivation, high aspirations and ability itself as the basis for being successful, this study

zooms out and looks at purpose from a more holistic standpoint, rather than just compartmentalizing traits associated with high ability. If being a high potential individual itself was enough to merit success there would not be issues of underachievement among gifted young adults (Grobman, 2006; Jacobson, 1999; Streznewski, 1999). This theory primarily keys in on factors that supported high potential individuals' ability to reach success and have a sense of fulfillment, while also acknowledging their common underlying perspectives and experiences. It will also explain the development of innate purpose, the implications of such development and its role in success.

The interpretation of this theory of purpose development consists of both an evolving mode as well as a breakthrough mode that flow into each other. The evolving mode consists of (1) the discovery phase, (2) the development phase, and (3) the demonstration phase; and the breakthrough mode consists of (a) purpose cultivators, (b) destiny shifters, and (c) success factors. To provide clarification I have provided definitions on how I am defining the evolving and breakthrough modes below:

- Evolving- The evolving mode represents the germination process of purpose being expressed. It showcases how purpose is present yet actively growing. Rather than the participants seeing purpose as something they achieved, it was viewed more similarly to a snowball effect. As time went on the understanding of their purpose grew, hence it being expressed at a greater level over time.

- Breakthrough- The breakthrough mode represent experiences that do not necessarily take place in an evolutionary manner, but are components that help to direct purpose. The breakthrough mode is fluid and takes place within the evolving mode as transitions.

First I will provide a general overview of the process of purpose, and then to provide greater

understanding I will review how the different components integrate in greater detail.

The Process of Purpose

As I listened to the participants' stories there was a clear evolving process of

purpose development. First the participants talked about the early signs of their purpose[2]

coming to the surface, learning experiences that helped them to develop their purpose,

and opportunities that presented themselves that allowed for them to put the essence of

who they are to work. I would like to emphasize that each phase has a continuous flow

into each other, rather than operating as linear building block. As the participants

reflected on their lifewide learning experiences in the context of purpose the following

phases emerged:

- Discovering purpose, often underpinned by *purpose cultivators*.

    o Purpose cultivators- Experiences that take place that help nurture purpose.

- Developing purpose, often underpinned by *destiny shifters*.

    o Destiny shifters- Events that occur that help guide in the direction of

    purpose.

- Demonstrating purpose, often underpinned by *success factors and perspectives*.

    o Success factors and perspectives- The application of learning experiences

    and perspectives that yield success.

The processes of discovery, development and demonstration happen on a continuous basis

and ultimately gives greater expression to purpose every time the process occurs. *Purpose*

cultivators, *destiny shifters*, and *success perspectives* sometimes underpin certain phases,

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[2] Purpose- The drive towards fulfilling something of meaning that directly connects with the essence of a
person.

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however they are fluid and can insert themselves in any phase of the process. For example, *destiny shifters*, which showed up more prominently during the phase of developing purpose can also show up in the discovery phase as an event that introduces purpose. Levi's example of sensing that he was being called into the ministry is as example of a destiny shift taking place in the discovery phase. Most of the participants experienced *destiny shifters* in the development phase, helping them to gain clarity concerning their purpose. Below I have included a chart that highlights the participants' identified purpose and complementary core as well as prominent *purpose cultivators* and *destiny shifters* that appeared within the evolving process of purpose for each participant:

Table 9

Overview of Participant Purpose Development

Name	Core	Purpose	Career Field	Purpose Cultivators	Destiny Shifters
Ben	Driven, compassionate, dependable, hard worker, reserved, observant, family oriented, spiritual	To love people from all backgrounds, especially those deemed "unlovable"	Physician Assistant/ Corrections	Human Growth Development course, family upbringing (especially father's influence), clinical rotations	Shift from medical school to PA school
Cindy	Caring, giving, assertive, enjoys challenges, values humor, family oriented, Spiritual	To touch people's lives by making them feel loved in your presence	Physician Assistant	Grandmother's influence as a mentor, family upbringing, professional mentors	Learning about what it means to be a PA in high school class, clinical rotations experience

Table 9. Continued

Name	Core	Purpose	Career Field	Purpose Cultivators	Destiny Shifters
Dan	Social, energetic, charismatic, funny, explorer	To make things better than when you found them, with an emphasis on connecting things (people, organizations) together	Government Relations	Influence of his fraternity, mentors, lessons through sports, family upbringing (especially father), student organizations	Leadership programs, LeaderSha-pe, overcomin g season of loneliness in college
Dave	Outgoing, energetic, people-oriented, hard worker, idealist	To be supportive of the people in my life and provide meaningful experiences to society	Social Enterprise/ Recycling Industry	Mother's Influence, Music professor, education, extracurricula r activities	English teacher not willing to work with you because of work ethic
Ian	Big picture thinker, introvert, skilled facilitator, loyal, inclusive. values: integrity, commitment, and leadership.	To help other people fulfill their purpose	Leadership Development in Higher Education	Strong education background, family upbringing, friendships	Lesson from 4th grade teacher, LeaderSha-pe
Jackie	Task oriented, go getter, spiritual, soft-hearted, empathetic, assertive, perfectionistic in nature, fixer	To help people, especially by looking at ways to improve things	Physical Therapy	Professional & personal development programs, friends, church family, internship	Learning from others mistakes, Joining a new church, deciding to continue school post high school

Table 9. Continued

Name	Core	Purpose	Career Field	Purpose Cultivators	Destiny Shifters
James	Passionate, hard worker, solution-oriented, energetic, assertive, fun-loving, family-oriented, values highly: transparency, integrity, humility, relationship building (friendships), spiritual, and knowledge	To be an example of what God can do through your life, with an emphasis on being an example to Black men	Marketing & Diversity Initiatives	Mentors and strong support system, family upbringing, education, internship and assistantship	Deciding to strive to reach beyond the limitations the high school counselor set for him
Jesenia	Driven, passionate, enthusiastic, adventurous, optimistic, communicative, visual learner, spiritual	To motivate people, especially through motivational speaking	Marketing & Beauty Industry	Family upbringing, student organizations, internships	Moving across the country
Jessica	Passionate, driven, transparent, self-motivated, cautious planner, analytical thinker, confident in beliefs, spiritual, loves education, learning & writing	To help women, especially abused women	Midwifery	Mentorship by preceptor, church family, clinical rotations	Learning about the existence of midwifery, Leaving behind a poverty mindset taught by family.

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Table 9. Continued

Name	Core	Purpose	Career Field	Purpose Cultivators	Destiny Shifters
John	Outgoing (yet laid back), values leadership, integrity, acceptance, inclusiveness, civic responsibility, and advocacy, loves sports	To help people through sports	Non-profit sports sector	Family upbringing (specially mother), sports involvement, friendships, work mentor	Diagnosis of a heart condition Volunteer opportunity in the non-profit sector Lesson from a talented disabled basketball player (as a child)
Levi	Resilient, non-conformist, mission-minded, out of the box thinker/creative, spiritual, enjoys humor	To bring belief to Christ	Ministry	Grandparents, church family, Pastor, volunteer experiences	Becoming a Christian
Miranda	Passionate, hard working, values driven, highly esteems individualization, achievement oriented, assertive, compassionate	To help students understand and love who they are, with an emphasis on helping students see how they can make a positive difference	Higher Education	Family upbringing, education, mentors	Gifted Camp, moving, LeaderSha-pe, attending career fair

Table 9. Continued

Name	Core	Purpose	Career Field	Purpose Cultivators	Destiny Shifters
Olivia	Patient, generous, kind, driven, motivated, trustworthy, passionate, places high value on integrity and faith	To reach people by being an example of God's love, with an emphasis on giving to those that are less fortunate	Primary- Real Estate Secondary- Ministry	Professional mentors, grandparents, church family	Meeting owners of realty company
Pat	Driven, task oriented, friendly, respectful, perfectionistic in nature, family-oriented, spiritual	To figure out people and their motives	Government Relations	Family, workplace mentors, Gifted program	Learning client lesson that shifted perspective

All of the participants shared the same *success factors and perspectives* of (1) being impact driven, (2) people centric, (3) being courteous to others, and (4) having an open disposition towards learning. The figure below helps to show a picture of how purpose development is a cyclical process that evolves and how purpose cultivators, destiny shifters, and success factors and perspectives flow throughout the entire process.
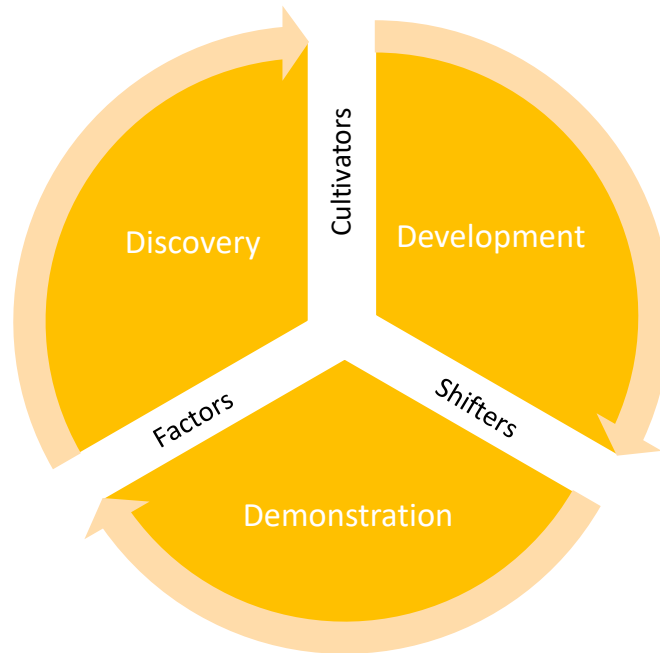
Figure 3. The Cyclical Process of Purpose Development.

The discovery phase. Purpose tends to be viewed as an abstract concept, nevertheless traces of it were identifiable in the early stages of the participants' lives. How purpose is experienced is as unique as the individual itself, juxtaposing the shared process of the realization of purpose. One of the primary traits of high potential individuals is their distinctive pull towards wanting to make an impact (as outlined in the findings section). During the discovery phase the high potential traits of high drive and aspirations are met with an opportunity that brings greater clarity to honing their purpose. Jesenia, who identifies her purpose as motivating others recounts one of her moments of clarity,

> I was highly involved in student council and with that team came the ability to go
> view people [and] attend presentations from motivational speakers and I remember
> just viewing those people up there and knowing that's what I wanted to do. Like
> one day I'm going to be on stage, I knew that at like 15 and seeing a motivational
> speaker talk about their stories and how they've overcome so much was inspiring.

I thought to myself that I don't know what my story is yet, I don't know how I'm going to tell it or what I'm going to say but I wanted to be up there, I wanted to be able to have that ability to inspire and to motivate, and to leave you thinking "wow".

Purpose cultivators. When I spoke to the participants about events that helped them to discover their purpose, many of the participants shared stories that were often underpinned by purpose cultivators that served as a chain of multiple experiences rather than one event. Purpose cultivators are the experiences that take place in different learning spaces that help nurture purpose that is already present in the participants. Examples of *purpose cultivators* include the general impact of lifewide learning, and opportunities that were presented to the participants that provided greater awareness to their purpose. James painted a picture of how he has come to have a greater understanding of his purpose through cultivators,

I put it as an analogy like this, I fly a lot for work and it's like an airplane and I have to test it. You know when you get that turbulence and you're shaking and you're dropping and then you come back up. The pilot comes on and tells you why the plane is shaking. I think that's how I have been, working for an NBA franchise and being part of a sale and acquisition of a new company and leaders, and watching hundreds of people get fired. Then before, working in an office where it was understaffed where I had to take on more as a graduate assistant and then being promoted into the position. So, every role I've been in I've had to do more than the average person and I think that prepared me for later on. But I think for me from a purpose perspective, that's what drives it.

James' analogy helps to show how his experiences were helping to cultivate and fine tune his purpose. Similarly, Dave also shared how his experiences helped hone his passion of making an impact socially,

When I went to college I had planned to major in music, I didn't [end up] majoring in music and then planned to be a music teacher, but being involved in social causes had always been my other passion, and so I felt halfway through college like I wasn't going to be able to do enough social work being a music teacher. And so when I changed my major I added a history minor and changed my course and had a chance at doing a PhD in Poly Science. But because my coursework was pretty heavily on music I wasn't going to be able to get into the PhD programs I wanted and so decided to do an MA in Poly Science, [and] I became the graduate assistant at the volunteer center. The volunteer center really was an opportunity to put initiatives in place with some of the values and work that I always have been passionate about. And through the course of the MA I discovered social enterprise through the business that is focused on more than just driving a profit. So, the fellowship was the starting block for me.

The development phase. Purpose cultivators are often the place where discovery and development meet. As the participants begin to learn about their purpose at a greater level through purpose cultivators, the pursuit of greater development begins to take place. The development phase can occur in professional settings or can include personal development activities. The primary focus of the development phase is purpose being actively engaged by participants placing themselves in environments where they can learn and begin to practice activities that they deem purposeful. As discovery is taking place and purpose is being cultivated, development becomes inevitable. During the phase of discovery Jessica was introduced to the field of midwifery and after deciding to pursue it, she experienced purpose cultivators that launched her into her development phase in midwifery school,

> For this type of midwifery license you are required [to go through clinicals], there's a diagnostic portion so a lot of coursework and then about halfway through that process you're required to have an apprenticeship…So you find a preceptor with a practice near you that has an opening and after finding one I followed her to every single clinical that she had whether that was an appointment or a follow up visit, or a labor or a birth. I shadowed the entire time learning and growing and seeing how midwives work, what the protocols are and then the last year and a half of your training you start taking on your own clients under the supervision of your preceptor. So, you're acting as if you are the primary midwife, so that gives you a chance to grow in your skills and to kind of show off your skills while still having that safety net of someone licensed and more responsible with you to help guide you throughout the process.

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Ben found that rotations also helped him develop his skills,

> In school we did a whole year and a half of medical rotation, so I would go to work directly with a peer doctor providing patient care, you can call it an internship. I actually worked and paid so that's really what prepared me the most for the current job that I have and then this self-learning literature and books and that kind of stuff kept my skills and everything up to date.

Pat's work environment has also served as a place of cultivation and development both professionally and personally,

> Our firm is very good about helping us figure out what path we want to go down outside of just government relations. They gave me a business development coach at one point which I think was a huge help on my career. He followed me for six to nine months, checked in once a month and he gave me great comments and pointers. It was nice having some affirmation from some unbiased third party or at least guidance, not even affirmation for that matter. So, business development definitely is part of my professional growth, and then just kind of figuring out where I want to go and how I want to be part of the firm. I was part of a strategic planning to figure out where I want to go and how I want to be part of the firm. I was part of a strategic planning to figure out the future of the firm last year, so I think that helped me grow professionally because I had never been part of an executive team trying to map out a $35-million company's strategy for going forward.

Destiny shifters. While purpose cultivators had more of a gradual impact on participants, *destiny shifters* act as either turning points or jolts that helped to accelerate the participants along their path of purpose. An essential part of the purpose process for the participants took place through *destiny shifters*. Destiny shifters are critical event(s) that take place that direct or help shape the trajectory of an individual's life towards their purpose. Destiny shifters take place through the form of transformational experiences (both positive and negative) and pivotal moments. The primary ingredients of destiny shifters consist of:

- Challenging norms and or previous perspective(s)

- Acceptance of a new way of being and or perspective(s)

- Application of new knowledge (typically leading to a directional change)

An example of a purpose cultivator flowing into a destiny shifter includes Cindy's clinical rotation process,

> I think that going through rotation for me, the biggest thing was seeing what I hadn't learned… there were some opportunities that I really wanted to explore, [and] it made me think my focus wasn't limited. On the outset I think I was focused on children and once I got into my clinical then I was able to get more experience. In doing medicine I found that although I did still enjoy working with children, I really loved working with women and young women. Women's health became an interest of mine, so I think for me just the clinical showed more of how I could tailor what I'm going to be doing after I have graduated.

Cindy's experience with her clinical rotations served as a place of discovery with purpose cultivators and a time of development with a destiny shifter that ultimately turned her

focus to working with women. Initially Cindy's perspective concerning wanting to work primarily with children was challenged when she was introduced to experiences where she worked with women through her clinical rotations. Consequently, Cindy embraced working with women, especially young women. Destiny shifters can occur at any phase of the process of purpose, but tend to be most prominent where the place of development and demonstration meet. Essentially, if destiny shifters were removed from the participants lives it would have either altered their direction significantly, delayed the process of walking in greater fulfillment of their purpose or possibly prevented them from the path of their purpose period.

The demonstration phase. When lessons learned from the development process are applied within one's sphere of influence, the place of demonstration commences. A career within itself is not synonymous with purpose, but merely the place where purpose often finds its greatest expression in adulthood. This realization brings into focus the power of alignment. It was not enough for the participants to just find a job that they were talented at in order to have a sense of fulfillment, but rather, the almost magnetic connection between a career field and purpose that came together when participants identified being fulfilled. Jesenia moved across the country in what she initially thought would be a dream job, and though she was talented and was able to do the job it was not fulfilling. Jesenia contrasts her current position which allows her to fulfill the purpose of motivating others versus her previous position,

> I enjoy speaking in front of a crowd and saying this is why I love this brand, because it means this, this and this. It's like getting to lift their spirits up. I think, wow, I do

work for a cool brand! Versus my previous job, it was PR and marketing but it was

for a very niche finance market and they were very much about bottom line. They

didn't see the creative role in that industry, they were very much what you're doing

needs to create sales and that really wasn't the way my mind worked.

Jesenia provides a good example of how her current position gave her the opportunity to

motivate others versus her previous position that she was able to do, but it drained her

because it was not people-centric. The job itself is not the end, but just the means by which

purpose is able to be demonstrated. Yet, interestingly the participants did not delineate

between being successful in life and in their career, but saw it as one in the same.[3] This

further solidifies that being in alignment with one's purpose whether in a formal or

informal setting provides a sense of fulfillment as long as an environment is provided that

allows the demonstration of purpose.

Success factors and perspectives. Purpose cultivators and destiny shifters are based on

how experiences affect the participants; however, *success factors* are based on

participants' application of what they learn which ultimately leads to their

accomplishments. Success factors can take shape in multiple ways, ranging from

applying lessons learned from pivotal moments, to actively seeking out careers that align

with their purpose. The application of the lessons are closely aligned with the mindset of

the participants. A subset of success factors is the role of *perspectives*, which are shared

perspectives of the participants that have contributed to their success. Common

perspectives (as highlighted in the findings section) that all of the participants shared

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[3] There was one exception where a participant felt progress career-wise, but not in life
due to a difficult relationship break up.

were being people centric, being impact driven, courteousness, dedication to their own

development, and an open disposition and willingness to learning new things.

Additionally, all of the participants also demonstrated keen self-awareness. When I asked

the participants to share about their personalities, strengths, and areas of growth these

were quickly identified and applied to how it affects the things they are able to

accomplish.

Intersection of Discovery, Development, and Demonstration

Again, it is important to note that this is a cyclical process versus a linear process

that occurs once. All of the participants identified as having purpose and being able to

articulate their purpose to a degree, while simultaneously acknowledging that there is still

more that they are learning about their purpose. Jessica helped to articulate this when she

shared,

I think it's [purpose] something that's evolving, which at first scared me because

like I said earlier I'm a very Type A person, so I want this set goal that I can strive

for, and to reach it and be done. And I thought that's what my purpose was. So great

I'm a midwife, I've been working three years, [and] I don't feel done. So even

though I don't think I have a specific answer of what that looks like I know that this

is just a stepping stone. And yet I'm successful in it and I could keep growing to

the top of the profession but I really feel like it's bigger than that and that my

purpose ultimately would be in some way to work with women, specifically my

target is abused women, women that come from the same background that I have…

it has made me an advocate for specific women's issues and things like that, so I

think it's all a stepping stone but my life purpose is just in growing and evolving.

And I have given myself permission for that to be ok, it's something that doesn't

have to be set in stone at 25.

Jessica acknowledged that she felt helping women was her purpose, but she also acknowledged that how that manifests in different capacities is still evolving. While purpose originally seemed like a destination, she came to terms with purpose coming into greater expression as she honed in on different niche areas. Similarly, Ben helps to show how the process of discovery, development and demonstration are intertwined. He acknowledged before that he felt his purpose was to show people love no matter their background, but he found that his purpose really flourished in the right environment:

Starting to work in a correctional environment, that's really been the biggest kind

of eye opener for me in terms of meeting goals and really learning about my

purpose. Seeing and interacting with people that not only have done some horrible

things in their life and most of society has kind of thrown off to the side and

discarded, just that whole experience helped me really identify purpose.

Working in the correctional facility helped Ben identify his purpose to a greater degree and provided him the opportunity to hone his ability to help others, and practically apply his purpose in the workplace. This same pattern of discovering, developing, implementing, and demonstrating can be seen through Dave's experience,

One powerful memory I have is protesting at Disney World. I was 13 years old and

was protesting— like literally holding a sign up on the freeway to Disney World

because of Disney's practice of underpaying Haitian workers to make their

products.

This was a memory that Dave recalled as one of his earlier memories of when he felt he was discovering his purpose in the sphere of social enterprise. It gave him the opportunity to think about his beliefs, prepare for the protest, and participate in a demonstration. After Dave shared about his memory he further expounded on the impact of the protest,

> That drove a lot of my interest in kind of fighting a variety of social causes, and what really cemented my interest in social enterprise, because I discovered how powerful a tool business can be in changing the world.

Dave's purpose connected to making an impact socially was present in the early stages of his life, but his different experiences that he encountered of discovering, developing, and demonstrating led to his purpose being expressed at a greater level through social enterprise. The pattern of discovery, development, and demonstration can also be seen through Ian recognizing his purpose in developing leaders. Ian highlighted his LeaderShape experience,

> I was a new professional and I was able to facilitate a national session of the LeaderShape Institute, so I had a group of 12 students from all over the country… it was one of the neatest groups I have ever been part of. [It was a] space where we had a free exchange of ideas that we were genuinely interested in seeing other people learn and to spend six days giving people a chance to really think about what they care about.

> I went from having someone do that for me [previously in LeaderShape] to being able to create that space for others at LeaderShape. It was certainly instrumental for me to realize that that's what my purpose is.

The Power of Alignment

Ultimately in order for the evolution of purpose to continue to grow in expression, demonstration must take place. As previously outlined, demonstration is directly related to environments were purpose can thrive. In short, the key to a sense of fulfillment and having the greatest impact can be found in the alignment of purpose and the proper environment. To the degree that purpose matches the environment by which it is placed, the greater the expression. Ben desired to fulfill his purpose by demonstrating love to people of all backgrounds, especially those considered unlovable and he currently works as a physician assistant for prison inmates. All of the participants identified purpose matched their work environments.

Table 10

Aligning Purpose

Name	Identified Purpose	Career Field
Jessica	To help women, especially abused women	Midwifery
Ben	To love people from all backgrounds, especially those deemed "unlovable"	Physician Assistant/ Corrections
Dave	To be supportive of the people in my life and provide meaningful experiences to society	Social Enterprise/ Recycling Industry
Cindy	To touch people's lives by making them feel loved in your presence	Physician Assistant
Dan	To make things better than when you found them, with an emphasis on connecting things (people, organizations) together	Government Relations
Ian	To help other people fulfill their purpose	Leadership Development
Jackie	To help people, especially by looking at ways to improve things	Physical Therapy
James	To be an example of what God can do through your life, with an emphasis on being an example to black men	Marketing and Diversity Initiatives
Pat	To figure out people and their motives	Government Relations
Jesenia	To instill confidence and motivate people, especially through motivational speaking	Marketing/Beauty Industry

Table 10. Continued

Name	Identified Purpose	Career Field
Miranda	To help students understand and love who they are, with an emphasis on helping students see how they can make a positive difference	Higher Education
Levi	To bring belief in Christ	Ministry
John	To help people through sports	Non-profit sports sector
Olivia	To reach people by being an example of God's love, with an emphasis on providing opportunities for those that are less fortunate	Primary- Real Estate Secondary- Ministry

The career field that each participant chose is not necessarily the only place that their purpose could be demonstrated, but their expressed fulfillment is indicative of alignment. For example, Jesenia is fulfilling her purpose of motivating others by serving as corporate trainer for a world-renowned brand focused on helping others feel good about themselves. Though, it is possible that Jesenia could also find fulfillment by motivating others through fitness. The environment itself does not give purpose, but rather gives expression to purpose.

Aligns with High Potential Core. The process of evolving purpose that all of the participants experienced, simultaneously touches the core traits of high potential individuals. This gives insight into why the participants were able to transition into their career fields successfully.
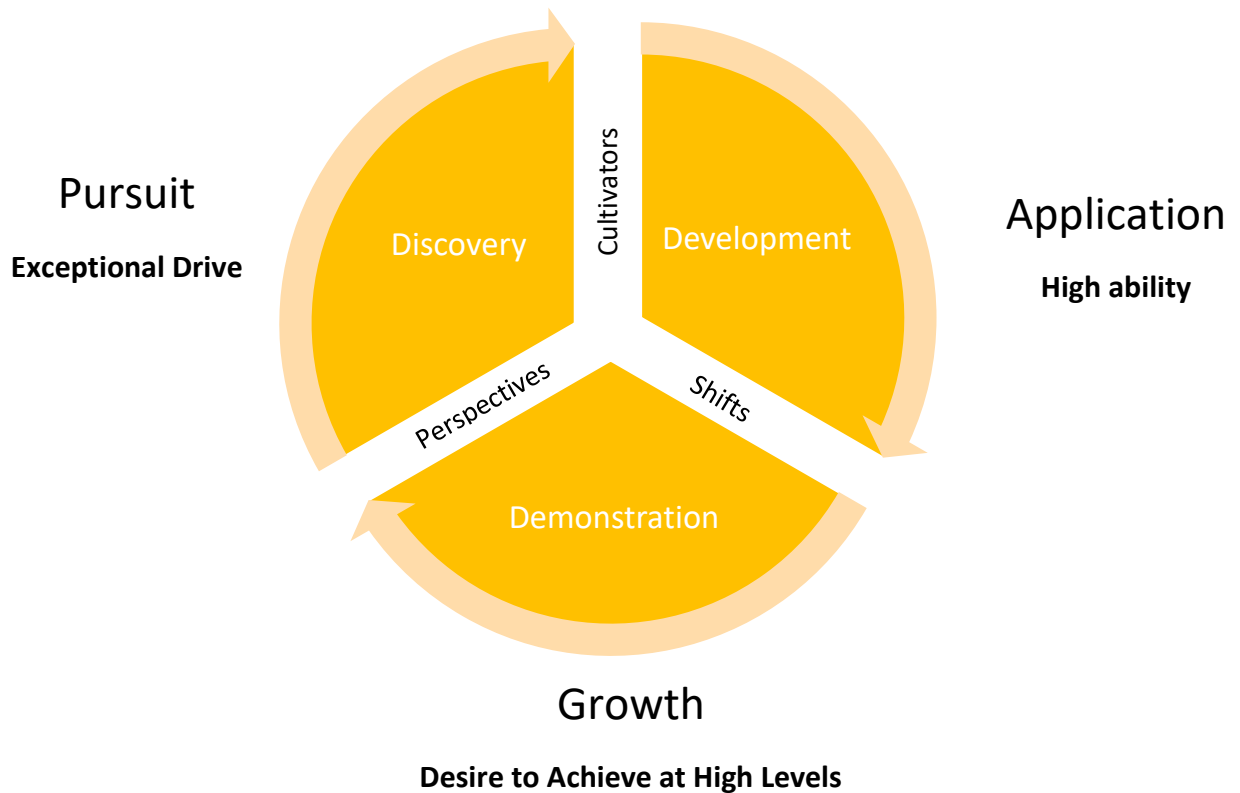
Figure 4. The Cyclical Process of Purpose and High Potential Traits

The core of a high potential individual consists of high aspirations and exceptional drive, high ability, and a desire to achieve at the highest levels. Having an exceptional drive and high aspirations causes high potential individuals to pursue a greater understanding of their purpose. The drive for a greater understanding of purpose fuels the discovery to the development phase, and capabilities associated with high ability are applied during the development phase which flows into the demonstration phase. Lastly, during the demonstration phase growth is manifested through achievement meeting the desire to achieve and reach goals.

Implications for the Future

This study has caused me to reflect on the purpose of education. After listening to many of the participants share about the bulk of their learning experiences and life lessons being gained from informal settings, I reflected on the gap between what is taught in the classroom and everyday life-skills. Lifelong learning is a concept that became prevalent and accepted within the arena of education, however lifewide learning has been slower in gaining steam. Looking at learning from a linear perspective is easier to measure, but when it comes to measuring lifewide learning it can be difficult to find where it begins or ends. The difficulty in measuring lifewide learning may explain why it has not been researched in a similar way to other concepts of learning. Nevertheless the most comprehensive form of learning is lifewide learning, and the most pressing concerns for young adults are the issues of life. Theories surrounding emerging adulthood and early adulthood situated within the 21st century echo each other as it relates to how permeable of a period it can be, from finding ones identify to making major life decision that will launch their life trajectory. And while new theories have emerged concerning adulthood, the education system has remained relatively stable in how it educates an individual irrespective of the vast economic and social differences.[4]

Implications for Higher Education

The results of this study shine a light on an opportunity for student affairs and academic affairs to provide connected learning experiences for students in a powerful way through the lens of lifewide learning. Currently the divisions parallel one another, rather than directly intersecting with one another. Student Affairs predominately

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[4] The exception being the vast development and progression of technology usage in education.

understands its role as helping to retain students by providing a safe environment for students to learn, find where they fit, connect, and engage with others. Academic Affairs is mainly concerned with providing intellectual stimulation, greater knowledge, and practical application. At the most basic level, student affairs is mostly focused on taking care of the heart and academic affairs is primarily focused on the mind. There are some niche programs such as residential colleges that may try to provide a slight overlap, but overall the divisions parallel one another, or at best supplement one another, rather than infiltrating one another. The participants were able to use their learning at the greatest level as a result of connected learning and often times informal learning being the core. If the greatest amount of learning is taking place through informal learning, it begs the question, how are formal and non-formal settings helping to connect the learning process together? I believe that this study suggests an opportunity for higher education administrators to re-evaluate how they are incorporating educating the whole person in a collaborative manner, rather than mainly depending on student affairs to explore subject matters not covered in the classroom. Connected learning was a key factor in the success of the participants, accordingly faculty and staff members should be working together to ensure that learning experiences are streamlined. Approaching education from this perspective would suggest professors should be trained on subject matters broader than the content of what they are teaching—in order to incorporate a curriculum that is lifewide. Furthermore, student affairs professionals should be brought to the table of academic affairs' conversations so that they can best facilitate connected learning collaboratively.

The role of purpose in higher education. Beyond the need for a more collaborative approach to educating young adults, an appeal that I would like to make to all higher education professionals is to re-evaluate what role they currently play as it relates to life purpose. Based on the findings of this study, purpose played a major role in the participants' lives, especially relating to their desire to make an impact. It was purpose that was fueling them to reach success and through the participants' lifewide learning experiences their purpose was able to evolve. As *high-potential*[5] individuals their high motivation, and drive to make an impact was constant, yet after reviewing mission statements of universities, and goals of higher education professional groups, objectives that focused on developing a student's purpose were rare. Ironically, identity and reflecting on the meaning of life and one's purpose are some of the hallmarks of coming of age and topics discovered during emerging adulthood, yet it is a subject matter that is neglected in higher education, unless it is a course specific to subject matters associated with a major (i.e. existentialism, human development, etc.). However, higher education is the perfect place for faculty and staff alike to collaborate together by incorporating curriculum (inclusive of formal and informal) to help students begin honing in on their purpose. Furthermore, Imperative (2017) conducted a study entitled *Purpose in Higher Education* that included the University of Michigan, Grinnell College, and Seattle Pacific University between fall of 2015 and spring 2016. The study showed a trend of generation Z being one of the most purpose-oriented groups of students. Interestingly, a third of the students identified a preference of wanting to declare a "purpose" rather than a major (Imperative, 2016). The purpose-oriented nature of high-potential individuals, combined

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[5] High-potential- An individual with high aspirations, ability, and matched drive to achieve at high levels.

with the trend of the upcoming generations' disposition towards purpose, further confirms the need for higher education to give a greater level of credence to the role of purpose.

One of the roles of higher education is to prepare people to be good citizens. Part of our role as citizens is to give back to our communities by being active members and in turn helping to strengthen our economy. The results of this study further confirmed that work that matches a person's purpose causes to be fulfilled in the work that they do, while also having a positive impact in the organization or company they work for, ultimately impacting people. Another purpose of education is to prepare students to enter the workforce. Major specific programs are focused on providing skill-sets for life beyond college, and career development components are primarily put on the shoulders of career services offices. This is another example of divisions supplementing one another rather than directly collaborating with one another. Part of the core of curriculum should include consolidating to ensure that students are prepared to do their life's work. In an attempt to stay ahead of the curve, Stanford University has begun future casting on what they expect their University to look like in 2025. One of the concepts that they incorporate is called "purpose learning" which moves from having students declare a major with a set of core requirements, to having students declare a mission coupled with disciplines that help fuel their purpose (Stanford 2025, 2017).

Recommendations for Future Research on Purpose in Higher Education.

- Conduct a pilot study on a lifewide learning residential college (not major specific), primarily focused on ensuring the students have a connected learning experience. Additionally, include a follow-up study on graduates from the lifewide learning residential college to see its effects on their career trajectory.

- Conduct a pilot study that incorporates academic advisors that are trained as connected learning facilitators, which includes a comparative analysis of the students that complete the Universities standard academic advising versus the students that received connected learning academic advising.

- Conduct a one year follow-up study comparing the satisfaction of students that graduated from Stanford who declared a mission versus a major to see if there is a difference in career satisfaction.

Implications for the Career Sector

While higher education is preparing students to enter the workforce, organizations and companies are on the search for the brightest and the best. Many companies have developed high-potential programs within their organization, with hopes of developing leaders that will help to propel their organizations to higher levels of success. The programs are focused on retaining and developing the talent they currently have in place. There are primarily two streams of identifying high potential employees. One group strictly focuses on measuring the potentiality of employees by looking at their learning agility, capability, and commitment and drive, and the second group primarily looks at achievements that have already occurred. However, when researching high potential programs, there is not an equal amount of attention given to the process of identifying

high potential individuals prior to them working at the company. Since high-potential

programs steer away from a more short-sighted way of recruiting to looking at the

possibility of a promising trajectory of an employee within their organization

(Finklestein, Costanza, Goodwin, 2017), this study can help to give a framework on how

to best speak the language of high potential individuals. Based on the result, participants

had the following common core of being impact driven, people centric, open to learning,

and courteous. Having this knowledge provides companies with the opportunity to draw

high potential employees by speaking the language of high impact that positively effects

people in an open learning environment. For example, organizations should be skilled at

communicating: (a) how the company is positively impacting people (b) why they believe

in an open disposition towards learning, (c) objectives they have in place to ensure that

learning and ideation is esteemed highly, and (d) the high value they place on their

employees and a culture that encourages a level of mutual respect that empowers

everyone to do their life's work.

In some instances, gifted individuals fail to show their talents in the workplace

and may even appear to perform below the average (DeLong & DeLong, 2011). A study

that looked at Mensa members found that gifted individuals experience more stress on the

job and chronic worrying (Bodzin, 2014.) Additionally, gifted workers are not likely to

speak about their giftedness to employers because many managers may not be aware of

giftedness (Nauta, 2017). Organizations that are able to communicate a high impact

language, with an openness to learning will directly speak to the core of high potential

individuals. Creating a working culture around the common core of high potential

individuals, not only will help to recruit high potential individuals, but will create a

working environment that will help retain high potential individuals as well as empower them to do their best work.

Recommendations for Future Research on Career-Focused High-Potential Programs

- Conduct a qualitative study that focuses solely on high-potential individuals that have had difficulty navigating career success in early adulthood and compare and contrast the results with this study (providing an even more holistic picture of the gifted adult experience).

- Conduct a longitudinal study that follows high-potential individuals in the workplace from early adulthood to retirement to better understand transitions beyond just early adulthood.

- A comprehensive study that looks at high-potential programs that have a high retention to observe the recruitment materials and the environment that is being cultivated.

Career and life coach practitioners. In the 1950s the shift from vocation, seen as job specific, to career, recognizing that it was more than a job, but one's personal path that develops across the lifespan was embraced (Anderson & Vandehey, 2012). As such they assert, there is no career coaching without also exercising life coaching, and no true life coach can be active without also exercising career coaching practices. This study especially helps to serve coaching practitioners because it focuses on lifewide learning experiences in context of life purpose and helps to give insight into the big picture of how to best help clients. Aaron Hurst (2016), speaks about a shift from an information economy to a purpose economy. Hurst believes, "the emergence of purpose as the new

organizing principle in our economy is a product of our current moment in time" (Hurst, p.22, 2016). Hurst (2016) speaks to three different types of purpose as making up the purpose economy, including: personal purpose (focused on growth as an individual), social purpose (focused on relationships with others), and societal purpose (focused on making an impact). The three different types of purpose that Husrt outlined were also encompassed in the results for the participants that showed a commitment to their own personal growth, showed a consistent interest in the well-being of others, and were driven by their ability to make a positive impact. This study also revealed how participants were able to best capitalize on their lifewide learning experiences as a result of them being underpinned by connected and relational learning. One of the major components of connected learning is that individuals have caring individuals around them that can help them in their endeavors to succeed (academically, civically, or career wise). Coaching practitioners create an opportunity for relational learning for their clients, but a grasp of how connected learning works allows them to incorporate methods that help their clients learn how to synthesize their lifewide learning experiences through connected learning. This combination particularly is a shining opportunity for coaches to help high-potential individuals by placing a strong emphasis on aligning with career fields that align with their purpose as well as speaks to their common core. Moreover, the study suggests a way to help clients map out a plan that will help to facilitate change in the areas that are most desirable. If clients are faltering in areas where they are needing a stronger support system, it gives the coach an opportunity to help build a plan with the client that focuses on informal learning opportunities (based on the findings of the study showing informal learning as an aid to building strong support systems). Likewise if clients are looking for

opportunities to explore their purpose or further explore purpose, formal and non-formal methods could be included in a plan, or rather opportunities to reflect on previous formal and non-formal learning (based on the findings showcasing the role that formal and non-formal learning plays). In the broadest scope, this study is a reminder to coaching practitioners to help their clients to be intentional about learning, to reflect on the learning that has taken place, and to actively apply what they are learning to areas that they deem purposeful.

Recommendation for Future Research on Coaching

- Create a comparative study that incorporates a lifewide curriculum focused on developing purpose into standard life coaching and view the final results contrast.

- Conduct a follow-up study on *high potential individuals* that were coached during emerging adulthood utilizing data from the theory of purpose development. Review the findings to see how they have transitioned into their career field in early adulthood.

Researcher Reflection and Opportunities in Adult Education

As a higher education professional, and life coach for both emerging and young adults, I have found the reoccurring theme of being unsettled about adulthood is prominent. Thankfully I have seen students transition out of college and soar within their careers; conversely, I have seen students of equally high ability struggle as they navigate transitioning into their career field. The common factor among both groups of students, in addition to them being high ability is often the apprehension that they face upon graduating from college. Inevitably when I speak to students there is an excitement about completing school and an equal dread of what they call "adulting." In some respects the

very thing that many students came to school for, which was to prepare them with the knowledge they need for life beyond school, is the very area that they sometimes feel least prepared to tackle. I strongly believe that part of my purpose is connected to helping others live out what they are designed to do. Accordingly, I am committed to increase my capacity to help students better navigate one of the most important transitions they will face in life—into adulthood. Similarly, as a life coach (with a special focus on career coaching), I have primarily worked with clients in emerging adulthood and early adulthood and the most prominent reoccurring factors that come up are basic needs of being able to take care of oneself, education, career goals, and relationships with others. Essentially life coaching is about providing the life skills necessary to be successful, as well as helping connect clients to the appropriate resources, while also being a voice of accountability, assuring they reach their desired goals. My role in higher education combined with my life coaching experience for the same population of young adults has highlighted the need for a more comprehensive way of learning in preparation for adulthood. At the most foundational level, the question of what is the purpose of education often comes to mind. In *The Meaning of Adult Education*, Lindeman (1926) was making a plea for a change in the way education is implemented, desiring for education that is centered on preparing a person for the issues of life. Now decades later a prominent voice of today, Sir Ken Robinson (2015) echoes similar sentiments where he reintroduces the idea of a personalized education to the individual, versus a standardized education; I join them in their plea in taking a new approach to education and evaluating what the purpose is and how we are best preparing people to succeed in life. As an educator I believe that the way that I can make the strongest impact is through my

commitment to lifewide learning. Although I have focused on higher education and the career sector as it relates to making changes to incorporate lifewide learning, there lies a special opportunity for adult and community education professionals to lead the way in developing and implementing a lifewide education framework. Those in the field of adult education have the opportunity to be an exemplar to educational institutions of all forms on how to holistically prepare people for all areas of life. However, one of the first steps must be to reclaim adult education in its totality. The field of adult education is broad, consequently definitions being subscribed to adult education are diverse, ranging from primarily being focused on GED programs or ESL, to community college, continued education, and more foundational views associated with developing good citizens. All of the aforementioned areas make up adult education, but they do not define adult education within itself. One of the oldest definitions of adult education can be found in the words of Eduard Lindeman (1926) who envisioned education as synonymous with life; some of his most notable statements include, " Education is life – not a mere preparation for an unknown kind of future living (p.6), and "If education is life, then life is also education" (p.9). In *Definitions of Adult Education: Clearing some Misconceptions*, Uche (2011) provides 10 different definitions of adult education shining a light on the various viewpoints and though they vary in style to a degree, they all place an importance on educating adults across a broad spectrum. Okediran & Sarumi (2001) sentiments help to shine a light on the reach of adult education, suggesting "emphasis [of adult education] should be in the cultivation of the total man whose educational need goes beyond cognitive knowledge, but to other areas of human endeavor (p.47)." Re-introducing adult education as a comprehensive education sets the tone for it to lead as a prototype for

holistic learning. In *What is Adult Education: UNESCO Answers* (1997) The United

Nations defined the concept of education as follows,

> Education is adult education: forming adults. Education is to become mature. This
>
> principle is valid in any stage of one's life. Education is the education of children,
>
> youth, adults, and seniors with endless aim of forming a responsible being. Even
>
> though levels of responsibility may vary, what does not change is that the
>
> response must always be convincing and conveniently committed (p.5).

Essentially all of the foundational definitions of adult education give a picture of an

education that is life situated, rather than segmented into just niche areas.

Embracing lifewide learning. After reclaiming a holistic definition of adult education,

rebranding a life-encompassing version of adult education is eminent (that includes all

ages, recognizing that preparation for adulthood and life is a continuous process).

Lifelong learning has been a prominent term and it is time for its counterpart of lifewide

learning to be brought to the forefront to help build the body of knowledge that

incorporates all of life's learning ecologies. Tackling the concept of lifewide learning in

this study was a substantial undertaking, because its width almost seemed boundless. The

concept of lifelong learning from the cradle to the grave can be viewed linearly, however

the second dimension of lifelong learning, lifewide learning, encompasses every learning

space across the lifespan and operates in a fluid manner regardless of time. Lifewide

learning encompasses all three elements of formal, informal, and non-formal learning. In

essence, every learning experience that an individual will ever have makes up their

lifewide learning. While there are components of lifewide learning that can be evaluated,

it is impossible to comprehensively capture every single lifewide learning experience in a

measurable way. Nevertheless, the impact of lifewide learning is not cheapened as a result of not being able to holistically measure its scope. As Lindeman (1926) mentioned in the *Meaning of Adult Education*, "Educative experience spans the whole of life. And experience proceeds from any situation to which adjustment is made with accompanying mental release (p.110)." Based on this knowledge, I recognize that lifewide learning should be viewed as organic and approached as a living experience. Recognizing learning as organic places an emphasis on overall growth, rather than metrics. The core of something being alive is that it is always changing and with change comes growth, causing a ripple effect. Each person's lived experience is as unique as they are and recognizing that lifewide learning is organic helps to eliminate the need to stamp a beginning and ending on every learning experience.

From the lens of seeing lifewide learning as organic, one of the major eye-openers of this study for me was how crucial lifewide learning was in developing the participants' purpose. Having a sense of fulfillment coincided with the participants engaging in activities that aligned with their purpose. The outcome of doing purposeful work produced high achievement, but what I found to be even more important is the process that learning had on the evolution of their purpose. It was the processes of exploration, development and application that the myriad of lifewide experiences presented, that helped the participants hone their purpose. Grasping a better understanding of purpose and its relationship with learning has caused me to value an individuals' purpose as central when facilitating learning. To ignore an individuals' purpose in learning, rather it be through curriculum development or facilitated conversations is to neglect an opportunity to help an individual grow in a direction that will cause them to find work

that brings fulfillment as well as positively impacting people, organizations, and communities around them through their work. Furthermore, I understand that the majority of learning experiences take place in spaces outside of the classroom. Therefore, to make the biggest impact in the realm of education, I must regard all learning ecologies (rather than just formal institutions of learning) as opportunities to actively create and or facilitate connected learning experiences. True learning must be connected to a person's life in order for learning to go from attaining information, to practical application.

Today I would like to also extend an open invitation to you (as a lifelong learner) to join me in this endeavor of coming up with innovative ways to create connected learning experiences that,

- recognizes lifewide learning is not always measureable, but always organic,

- esteems purpose as part of the learning process,

- recognizes that true learning must be connected to life circumstances, otherwise it is simply information acquisition, and

- acknowledges that education occurs more frequently out of the classroom, therefore highly regarding all learning ecologies.

The reach of lifewide learning is ever expanding, posing a greater need for an all-inclusive form of adult education that comes full circle and prepares people for life, which is the essence of what Eduard Lindeman proposed when introducing *The Meaning of Adult Education* to North America. To that aim, we must keep praxis in mind, recognizing "The purpose of adult education is to give meaning to categories of experiences, not classifications of knowledge (p.123)."

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Overview

Principal Investigator (Researcher): Joslyn Johnson

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jovita Ross-Gordon

Short Description:

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of lifewide learning experiences on careers of individuals during early adulthood (23-39). This qualitative grounded study will be used to create a substantive talent development theory that can be used to help high potential individuals reach success as young adults.

This study [insert IRB Reference Number or Exemption Number] was approved by the Texas State IRB on [Insert IRB approval date or date of Exemption]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser 512-245-3413 (lasser@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB administrator 512-245-2334 (meg201@txstate.edu).

Survey Introduction

Thank you for your interest in this study. Before moving forward with the study, it would be helpful to see if you are likely to qualify to participate. In order to do this, I would like to ask you some eligibility questions, which will include questions about your career experiences, views regarding life purpose, and traits associated with your personality. The entire survey should take between 10-20 minutes. This study involves no more than minimum risk to participants, which means that risk is no greater than ordinary daily activities. Please note, your participation in this screening is voluntary and your answers will be confidential. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer or are uncomfortable answering. You may also stop taking the survey at any time without penalty. This study is strictly confidential. So your name and contact information will be separated from your other responses and any information you provide will be kept in a secure place. If you do not qualify for the study, I will destroy any information that I have collected.

Please if you have any questions about participating, contact me at 940-257-4680 or email me at jsj23@txstate.edu. My dissertation mentor is Dr. Jovita Ross-Gordon, and she may be reached at _____. Your participation and responses are greatly appreciated.

☐ Click Here to Proceed

Demographics

Before proceeding to the main survey, please provide the following demographic information

1. Are you currently employed?

○ Yes   **Continue**

○ No   **Thank & Terminate After Completing Section**

2. What is your age?

○ 23 to 25   **Continue**

○ 26 to 29   **Continue**

○ 30 to 35   **Continue**

○ 36 to 39   **Continue**

○ Younger than 23 **Thank & Terminate S.**

○ Older than 39 **Thank & Terminate S.**

3. What is your gender?

○ Female   **Continue**

○ Male   **Continue**

○ Prefer not to specify   **Continue**

○ Other (please specify) [   ] **Continue**

4. What is your ethnicity? (Please select all that apply.)

☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native **Continue**

☐ Asian or Pacific Islander   **Continue**

☐ Black or African American   **Continue**

☐ Hispanic or Latino   **Continue**

☐ White / Caucasian   **Continue**

☐ Prefer not to answer   **Continue**

☐ Other (please specify)   **Continue**

[   ]

Note: Everyone that does not meet the qualifications based on employment and age will be sent to a screen upon completing the demographic section thanking them and informing them that the study requires participants to be between 23-39 and employed.

Questionnaire

1. Please select all of the statements below that you currently identify with in your career:
   - ☐ I do not enjoy my current job. **Thank & Terminate Upon Submission of Entire Question (T&T)**
   - ☐ I like my current job. **Continue (C)**
   - ☐ I feel as though I am a good fit for my current position. **C**
   - ☐ Right now I feel as though I am progressing in the right direction career wise. **C**
   - ☐ I feel stuck career wise. **T&T**
   - ☐ I have a strong desire to take on challenges that will bring about high achievement in my career choice. **C**
   - ☐ Most people think that I am doing well career wise. **C**
   - ☐ I have been able to consistently meet the desired goals of my place of employment. **C**
   - ☐ I have struggled to meet the desired goals of my place of employment. **T&T**
   - ☐ I have been successful in my career endeavors and believe I will continue to be successful moving forward. **C**
   - ☐ I enjoy working with my co-workers. **C**
   - ☐ I have taken on more responsibility throughout my career and increased my level of influence. **C**
   - ☐ I feel valued in the workplace. **C**
   - ☐ I am currently making my desired compensation. **C**
   - ☐ I am on track to reach my desired compensation. **C**
   - ☐ I am happy with my current compensation, but expect to reach much higher levels of compensations. **C**
   - ☐ I am having difficulty finding opportunities for growth within my career field. **T&T**
   - ☐ I am not happy with my current compensation and feel as though I am stuck. **T&T**
   - ☐ I do not feel valued in the workplace. **T&T**
   - ☐ I really enjoy and love my current job. **C**
   - ☐ I have a sense of security in my field. **C**
   - ☐ I am very enthusiastic about my current workplace. **C**
   - ☐ I go to work because it is a job, not because I am enthusiastic about where I currently work. **T&T**
   - ☐ I believe I have the skill-sets and ability needed to excel in my career. **C**
   - ☐ I do not feel like I am progressing in my career. **T&T**
   - ☐ I am doing well at my job, but feel as though I made the wrong career (field) choice. **T&T**
   - ☐ I have a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in my current career. **C**
   - ☐ I have been able to achieve some of my desired career goals. **C**
   - ☐ Overall I am not sure if I am satisfied with the direction of my career trajectory. **T&T**
   - ☐ Overall I am very unsatisfied with where I am in my career. **T&T**
   - ☐ Overall I am satisfied with where I am career wise. C
   - ☐ Overall I am very satisfied with where I am career wise and expect to continue making further progress. **C**
   - ☐ (Optional) What are some of your career accomplishments that you are most proud of?

Comment Box

2. Which response concerning life purpose do you most closely identify with?

◯ I am currently still searching for my purpose. **T&T**

◯ I know my purpose and can clearly articulate it. **C**

◯ I know my purpose to a degree, but still hoping for greater understanding. **C**

◯ I don't know my purpose; it is not something I have given much thought. **T&T**

◯ I don't believe my life has a purpose, but rather things just happen. **T&T**

3. Which response most closely aligns with your thoughts concerning your purpose?

◯ I believe that I am currently living out my life purpose. **C**

◯ I believe that I am currently living out part of my life purpose. **C**

◯ I know my life purpose, but currently am doing something that does not align with my purpose at all.

T&T

◯ I know my life purpose, but don't feel that I am living out my life purpose right now. **T&T**

◯ I am not sure about my life purpose, but I think I am on the right path towards my purpose. **T&T**

4. What characteristic(s) below do you most identify with? You can check multiple if needed...

- ☐ I enjoy high levels of responsibility and challenges.
- ☐ I consider myself to have keen observation skills.
- ☐ I prefer working in a relaxed environment versus a rigorous environment.
- ☐ I am very creative.
- ☐ I am big on setting goals, but follow through can be difficult.
- ☐ When I set a goal, I am motivated to see it through until fruition.
- ☐ Sometimes people think that my aspirations are too high.
- ☐ I have been told that I need to dream bigger.
- ☐ I consider myself a perfectionist.
- ☐ I am gifted.
- ☐ Sometimes people tell me that I am very sensitive.
- ☐ Sometimes I fall into cycles of apathy.
- ☐ Social justice issues are very important to me.
- ☐ It takes me awhile to learn new things.
- ☐ I am known for my strong moral convictions.
- ☐ I am known for my sense of humor.
- ☐ I tend to notice things that other people don't.
- ☐ I am not big on planning and live by "what will be will be".
- ☐ I learn quickly (if I am interested).
- ☐ I do not strongly identify with any of the statements mentioned above **T&T**
- ☐ Would you like to share any characteristic(s) that are not mentioned above that you strongly identify with?

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│ Comment Box                                                       │
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5. Please **briefly** share what your career field is, why you chose it and the impact you currently are making and or hope to make in your field?

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│ Comment Box                                                       │
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☐ Click here to officially submit your survey.

Final Page (For Qualifying Participants):

This concludes the end of the survey. Completing this survey does not mean that you will automatically be enrolled as a participant in this study. However, if you are selected for this study, the following contact information will help us to best reach you. (Your privacy is important and all information provided will be kept confidential and separate from responses)

Name _____

State _____

Email Address _____

Phone Number _____

Should you be selected as a potential participant, you will be contacted via the contact information that you provided above. At the time of being contacted, you are free to accept or decline participation without penalty.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or if you wish to voice any problems or concerns you may have about the study to someone other than the researcher (Joslyn), please call the Texas State IRB Chair, Dr. Jon Lasser at 512-245-3413 or Monica Gonzales at 512-245-2334.

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this survey. If you know of anyone else that you think would be a good candidate for this study, please feel free to refer them to this survey using the following link: [Include Survey Monkey Link Here]

Termination Page:

Thank you for taking the time out to complete this survey. At this time it appears as though you do not meet the criteria to take part in this study. If you have any questions, Joslyn can be contacted directly at 940-257-4680 or jsj23@txstate.edu.

APPENDIX B: LIFEWIDE LEARNING PARTICIPANT RUBRIC

Each participant was given a score according to priority of best fit (please see below).

Each participant scored a 3 or better in every category to be considered for this study.

Score 4= Yes

Score 3= Yes (This would only be denied if there is an overabundance of individuals with

a score of a 4)

Score 2= No (missing a key element- although they fit in another area

Score 1 = No

Score Levels	Objective Career Success	Subjective Career Success	High Potential/High Ability	Purpose
4	Evident tangible accomplishments in career field (This will vary depending on the field; examples include: successful projects, promotions, bonuses, increased partnerships/funding, etc). Progressive influence and greater responsibility during career trajectory. Compensation allows for them to live according to (minimum) desired lifestyle. Consistently meeting goals and objectives of organization within field. An outside party would be able to objectively observe individual as doing well within their field.	Has the "experience of achieving goals that are personally meaningful to the individual" within their career. Has high job satisfaction and believes that they are in a job that "fits" them. Has a sense that they are progressing and on the right path within their career. Enjoys the relationships that they have with co-workers and others within the field that their career provides (social capital). Has a sense of security within their field and belief that they have something to contribute.	Aspiration: "The desire for responsibilities, challenges and rewards" that bring about high achievement. Engagement: "Emotional and rational commitment as well as discretionary effort and intent" to stay committed to goals and standards. Ability: "Combination of innate characteristics and learned skills. Characteristics associated with high ability in adults, such as: complex problem solving skills, strong foresight, perfectionistic, high sensitivity, strong observation skills, compassion for others and concern for justice, high creativity and more (refer to adult gifted characteristic assessment for complete list). Identified as gifted	Can clearly articulate their life purpose. Sees their life as having great meaning. Believes that they are living out their life purpose. Reaching and aiming toward aspirations that are in synch with their purpose.
3	Evident tangible accomplishments in career field (This will vary depending on the field; examples include: promotions, bonuses, increased partnerships/funding, etc.). Progressive sphere of influence within career field (This could be supervisory, impact, expanded network, etc.).	Has the "experience of achieving goals that are personally meaningful to the individual" within their career. Is satisfied with their current career choice. Has a sense that they are progressing and on the right path within their career. Feels valued by fellow co-workers.	Aspiration: "The desire for the responsibilities, challenges and rewards" that bring about high achievement. Engagement: "Emotional and rational commitment as well as discretionary effort and intent" to stay committed to goals and standards.	Sees their life as having great meaning. Believes that they are living out their life purpose. Has laid out goals that are in synch with their purpose.

	On track to reaching desired compensation. Consistently meeting goals and objectives of organization within field. An outside party would be able to objectively observe individuals success.	Has a sense of security within their field and belief that they have something to contribute.	Ability: "Combination of innate characteristics and learned skills. Has many of the characteristics associated with high ability in adults.	
2	New to a field or still waiting for opportunities to reach greater levels of achievement. Not meeting Desired Income. On track to grow within their career field. Often meets the desired goals and objectives of the organization.	Is moderately satisfied with where they currently are in their career. Has a sense that they are progressing and on the right path within their career. Has a sense of security within their field and belief that they have something to contribute.	Aspiration: "The desire for the responsibilities, challenges and rewards" that bring about high achievement. Ability: "Combination of innate characteristics and learned skills. Lacking engagement/commitment to see desired outcomes come to fruition.	Sees their life as having meaning, but still searching for their purpose/niche.
1	Having difficulty finding opportunities for growth within the career field. Struggling to meet the desired goals and objectives within their career field. An outsider would not necessarily be able to objectively observe the individual as being successful in their field. Difficult to find tangible achievements within individual's field.	Currently not happy with where they are on their career path. Does not enjoy or find a sense of fulfillment within their current career choice. Overall unsatisfied with where they are in their career path.	Lacking characteristics associated with high ability, And or, Lacking motivation and or ability to achieve desired goals (if goals have been set).	Lacking purpose identity. Feels as though they are not making an impact. Has a sense of aimlessness.

The following tables was used as a guide for possible interview questions.

Supplemental Research Question	Possible Open Ended Interview Questions
What beliefs, motivations and factors have spurred productivity and influence in high potential adults?	**Interview 1** • How would you describe yourself (personality, traits, etc.)? • What drives (motivates) you in life? • When are you your most productive self? Why? • Do you have any belief systems that help guide your life? If so, how? **Interview 2** • What have you been doing (or have you done) to contribute to your own personal development? • Do you have any sayings or quotes that you live by? • Do you have any major role models? What about them inspires you?
Supplemental Research Question	**Possible Open Ended Interview Questions**

What are high potential adults' ideas of success and what causes them to have a sense of purpose?	**Interview 1**
	• How do you define success? In what ways have you seen yourself as successful in life? In what ways have you been successful in your career?
	  o Follow-up with questions that gauge both objective and subjective achievements, such as "What are some of the achievements that you have accomplished during your career?"
	• What do you believe your purpose is?
	  o How are you currently living out your purpose?
	Interview 2
	• Was there an event that took place that helped you discover your purpose?

Primary Research Question	Possible Open-Ended Interview Questions
	- If you were able to do your ultimate job with no strings attached, what would it be? Why?

How have different forms of life-wide learning (formal, informal, non-formal) had an impact on helping high potential adults develop their talent and abilities?	**Interview 1**
	- How has education impacted your life?
	   o Follow-up with questions that explore different learning experiences.
	   o Follow-up with questions about K-12 Experiences
	   o Follow-up with questions about Higher Ed Experience (if they went to college)
	- Can you think of any "aha moments" or teachable moments that left an impact of your life? If so, please share.
	   o Follow-up with questions that explore "aha moments"/teachable moments that were mentioned.
	Interview 2
	- If you had to list off the major contributing factors (in general) to developing your talents and abilities, what would they be?
	   o Follow-up with questions that explore all of the contributing factors mentioned.
	- In what ways have people impacted your learning?
	   o Follow-up
	- What ways can you identify that you have learned as an adult, beyond the kinds of education and professional development programs already discussed?
	   o Follow-up

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