

**Cornell
Human
Ecology**

A question of purpose



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AG EN DA

- i. The importance of purpose inquiry
- ii. Explaining purpose correlates
- iii. On cultivating purpose
- iv. Contents & contexts
- v. A challenge to maintaining purpose

“No treatment of the experience of [\[purpose in life\]](#) would be complete without considering death” (p. 574).

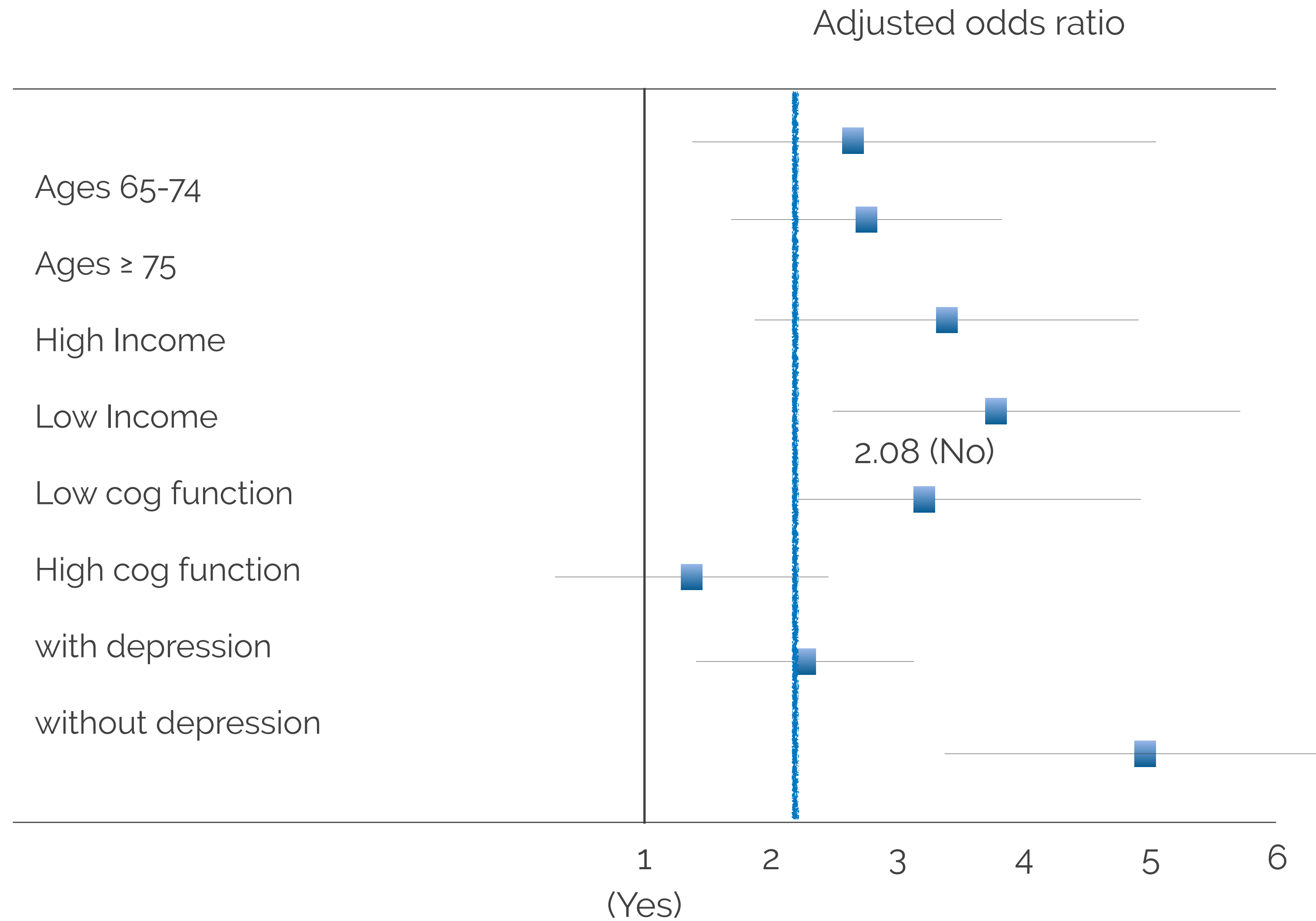


Nara Prefecture, Japan

Do you have a reason for living?

Tomioka, et al (2016). *Journal of Epidemiology*

Sense of Purpose & Mortality



Sense of Purpose & Mortality

6

Purpose in Life

Krause, N. (2009). Meaning in life and mortality. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 64B(4), 517–527. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbp047. Advance Access publication on June 10, 2009.

Meaning in Life and Mortality

Neal Krause

Department of Health Behavior and Health Education, School of Public Health and the Institute of Gerontology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Objectives. The purpose of this exploratory study was to see if meaning in life is associated with mortality in old age.

Methods. Interviews were conducted with a nationwide sample of older adults ($N = 1,361$). Data were collected on meaning in life, mortality, and select control measures.

Results. Three main findings emerged from this study. First, the data suggest that older people with a strong sense of meaning in life are less likely to die over the study follow-up period than those who do not have a strong sense of meaning. Second, the findings indicate that the effect of meaning on mortality can be attributed to the potentially important indirect effect that operates through health. Third, further analysis revealed that one dimension of meaning—having a strong sense of purpose in life—has a stronger relationship with mortality than other facets of meaning. The main study findings were observed after the effects of attendance at religious services and emotional support were controlled statistically.

Discussion. If the results from this study can be replicated, then interventions should be designed to help older people find a greater sense of purpose in life.

Key Words: Meaning in life—Mortality.

Purpose in Life as a Predictor of Mortality Across Adulthood

Patrick L. Hill¹ and Nicholas A. Turiano²

¹Department of Psychology, Carleton University, and ²Department of Psychiatry, University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester, New York

Psychological Science
2014, Vol. 25(7) 1482–1486
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DOI: 10.1177/0956797614531799
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JAMA Network | **Open**

Original Investigation | Public Health

Association Between Life Purpose and Mortality Among US Adults Older Than 50 Years

Aliya Alimujiang, MPH; Ashley Wiensch, MPH; Jonathan Boss, MS; Nancy L. Fleischer, PhD, MPH; Alison M. Mondul, PhD, MPH; Karen McLean, MD, PhD; Bhramar Mukherjee, PhD; Celeste Leigh Pearce, PhD, MPH

Purpose in Life Is Associated With Mortality Among Community-Dwelling Older Persons

Patricia A. Boyle, PhD, Lisa L. Barnes, PhD, Aron S. Buchman, MD, and David A. Bennett, MD

Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center (P.A.B., L.L.B., A.S.B., D.A.B.), and the Departments of Behavioral Sciences (P.A.B., L.L.B.) and Neurological Sciences (L.L.B., A.S.B., D.A.B.), Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois.

Original Article

Effect of Having a Sense of Purpose in Life on the Risk of Death from Cardiovascular Diseases

Megumi Koizumi,^{1,2} Hiroshi Ito,² Yoshihiro Kaneko,¹ and Yutaka Motohashi.¹

¹ Department of Public Health, Akita University School of Medicine.
² Department of Internal Medicine, Division of Cardiovascular Medicine, Akita University School of Medicine.

Received May 21, 2007; accepted January 16, 2008; released online August 28, 2008.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW/META-ANALYSIS

Purpose in Life and Its Relationship to All-Cause Mortality and Cardiovascular Events: A Meta-Analysis

Randy Cohen, MD, MS, Chirag Bavishi, MD, MPH, and Alan Rozanski, MD

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com
ScienceDirect
journal homepage: www.ajgp-online.org

ELSEVIER

GERIATRIC PSYCHIATRY

Regular Research Article

Purpose in Life May Delay Adverse Health Outcomes in Old Age

Patricia A. Boyle, Ph.D., Tianbao Wang, Ph.D., Lei Yu, Ph.D., Lisa L. Barnes, Ph.D., Robert S. Wilson, Ph.D., David A. Bennett, M.D.

Psychological Predictors of Mortality in Heart Transplanted Patients: A Prospective, 6-Year Follow-Up Study

Laura Sirri,^{1,3} Luciano Potena,² Marco Masetti,² Eliana Tossani,¹ Carlo Magelli,² and Silvana Grandi¹

Sense of Purpose in Life and Subsequent Physical, Behavioral, and Psychosocial Health: An Outcome-Wide Approach

Eric S. Kim, PhD^{1,2,3}, Ying Chen, ScD^{2,4}, Julia S. Nakamura, BS¹, Carol D. Ryff, PhD^{5,6}, and Tyler J. VanderWeele, PhD^{2,4,7}

American Journal of Health Promotion
2022, Vol. 36(1) 137–147
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DOI: 10.1177/08901171211038545
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International Journal of *Environmental Research and Public Health*

MDPI

Article

Self-Rated Health and Mortality: Moderation by Purpose in Life

Elliot M. Friedman * and Elizabeth Teas

American Journal of Preventive Medicine

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Associations Between Purpose in Life and Mortality by SES

Koichiro Shiba, PhD,^{1,2,3} Laura D. Kubzansky, PhD,^{1,4} David R. Williams, PhD,^{1,5} Tyler J. VanderWeele, PhD,^{2,3,6} Eric S. Kim, PhD^{1,3,4,7}

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com
ScienceDirect
journal homepage: www.ajgp-online.org

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Anthony L. Burrow

Sense of Purpose & Physical Health

**Lower risk of Alzheimer's
and cognitive decline**
Boyle et al (2009)

Lower risk of stroke
Kim et al (2013)

Better hearing quality (subjective & objective)
Sutin et al (2024)

Lower incidents of sleep disturbance
Kim et al (2015)

Lower risk of myocardial infarction
Kim et al (2009)

Enhanced recover after surgery
Zautra & Smith (2004)


**Lower health care utilization
Greater use of preventative services**
Musich et al (2018)

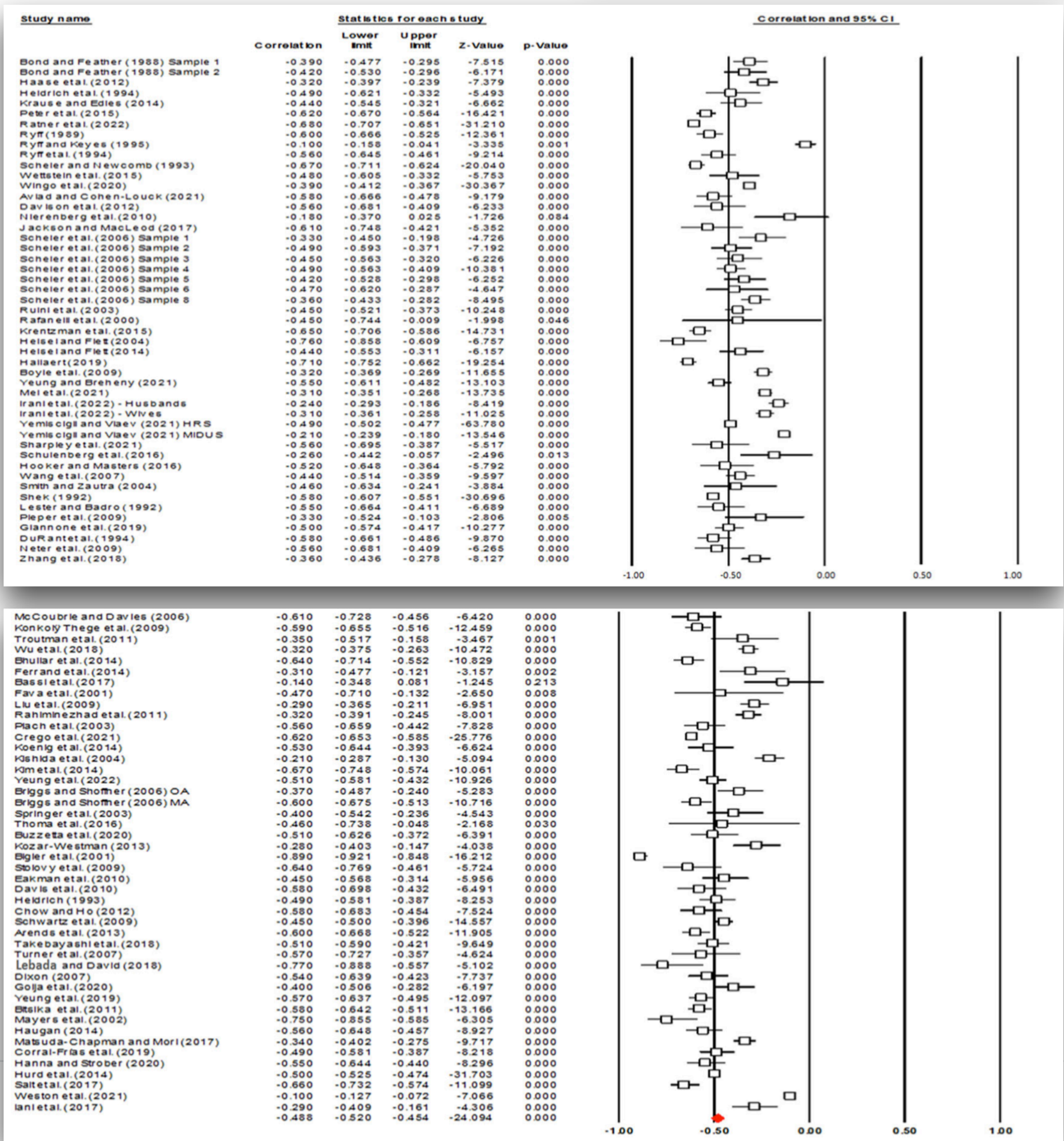
Fewer somatic symptoms
Ishida & Okada (2006)

Reduced impact of neurotoxicity
Wenzel et al (2002)

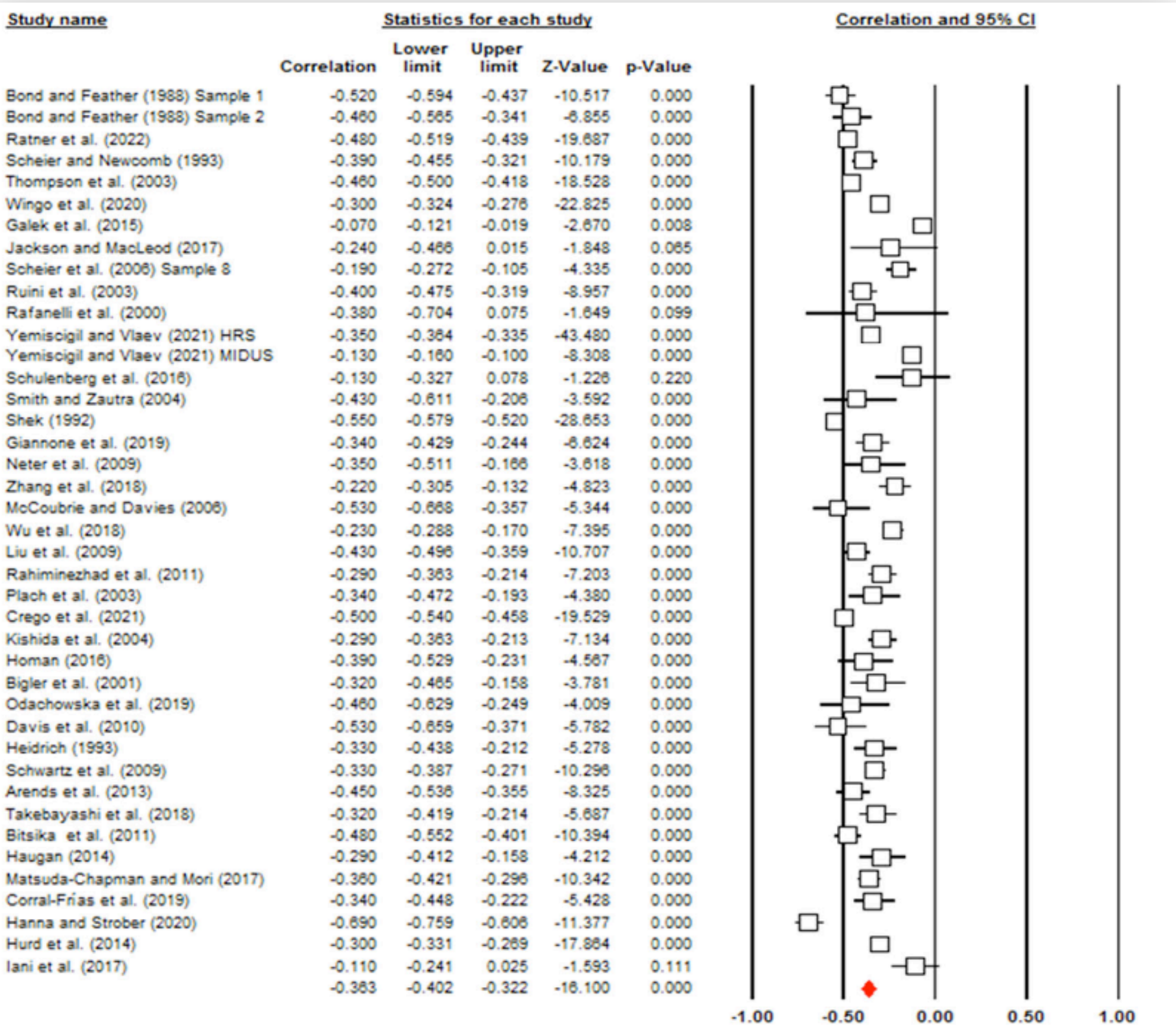


The relationship between purpose in life and depression and anxiety: A meta-analysis

Ian D. Boreham  | Nicola S. Schutte 



sense of purpose and depressive symptoms are correlated around -.49



sense of purpose and anxiety symptoms are correlated around -.36

A sense of purpose in life is worth having

Purpose is associated with:

- + Positive Affect and less Negative affect (Burrow & Hill, 2011)
- + Happiness (Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010)
- + Generativity & Contribution (Hill & Burrow, 2010)
- + Income and Net Worth (Hill, Turiano, Mroczek, & Burrow 2016)
- Impulsivity (Burrow & Spreng, 2016)
- + Hope / Agency (Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010)
- + Learning Engagement / performance (Burrow, Agans, & Rainone 2018)
- + Visual navigation (Burrow, Agans, & Hill, under review)
- + Health behavior & vaccination willingness (Hill, Burrow, & Strecher, 2021)
- Perceived disruption during pandemic (Ratner, Burrow, Mendle, & Hill, 2022)

A Question of Purpose

How should purpose be defined?

How is purpose measured?

What is the theorized function of purpose?

How do we acquire purpose?

Can anyone develop a sense of purpose?

What does purpose content predict?

Does purpose vary intensively over time?

Is the purpose - health link causal?

What happens when we lose a sense of purpose?

How does environment shape purpose content?

Can purpose be a vulnerability factor?

Are identity and purpose reciprocal influences?

Do correlates of purpose change across age?

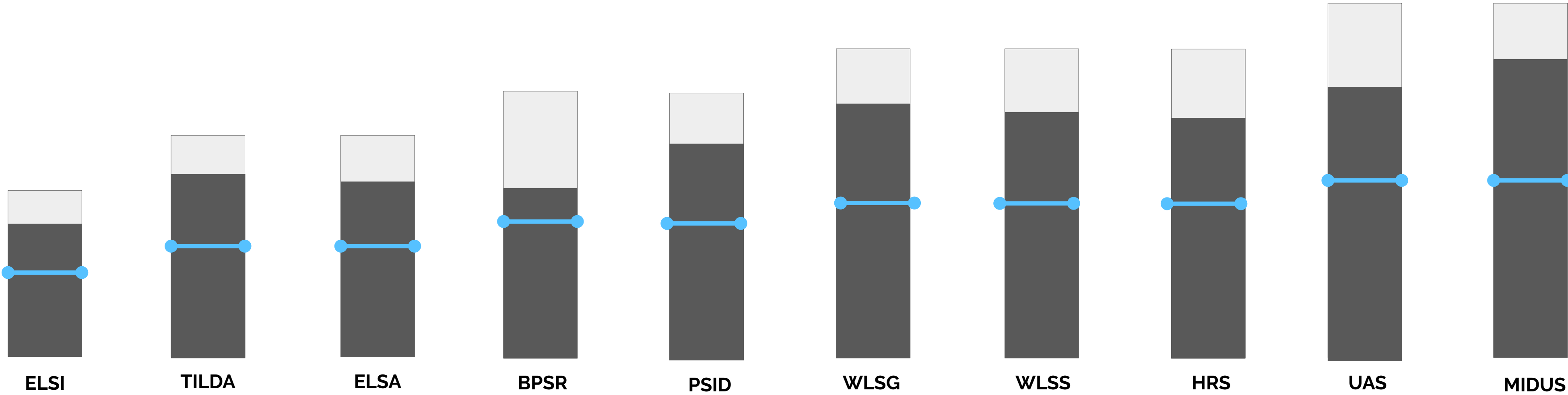
Can one experience purpose *and* languishing?

Can a sense of purpose actually be *found*?

Need purpose be self-transcendent to be beneficial?



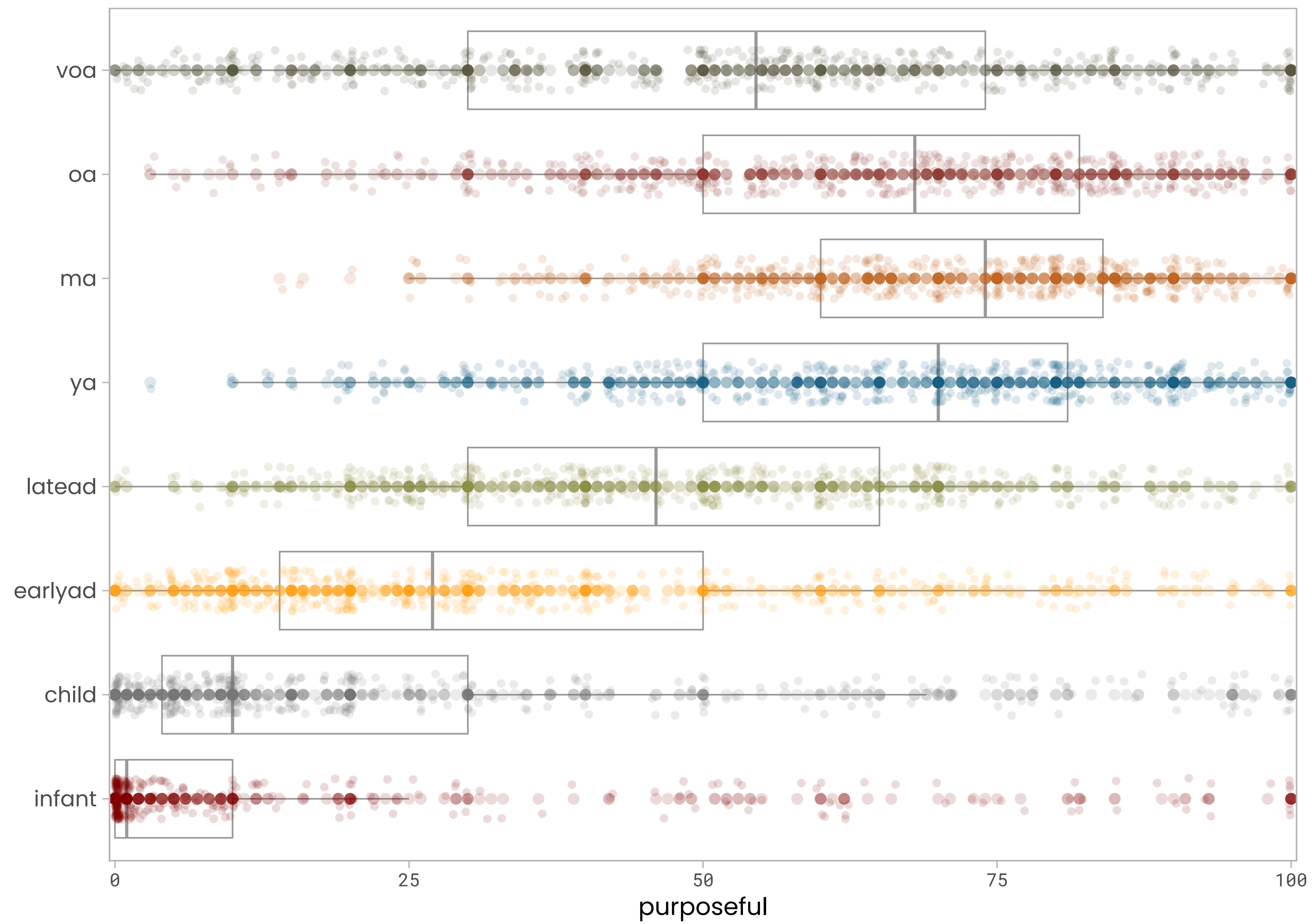
How prevalent is purpose?

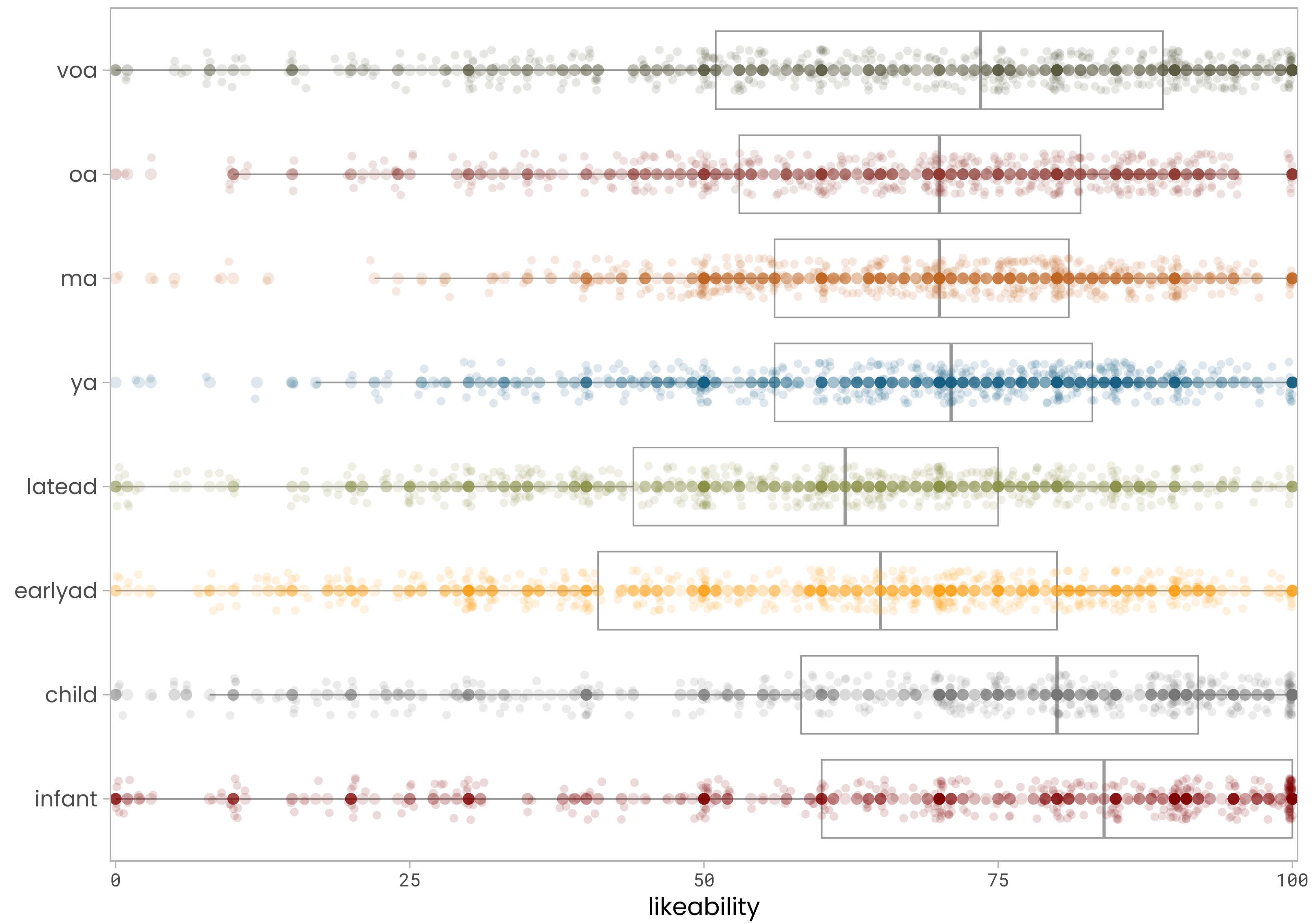


Are Youth Purposeful?



Ryan Hewitt



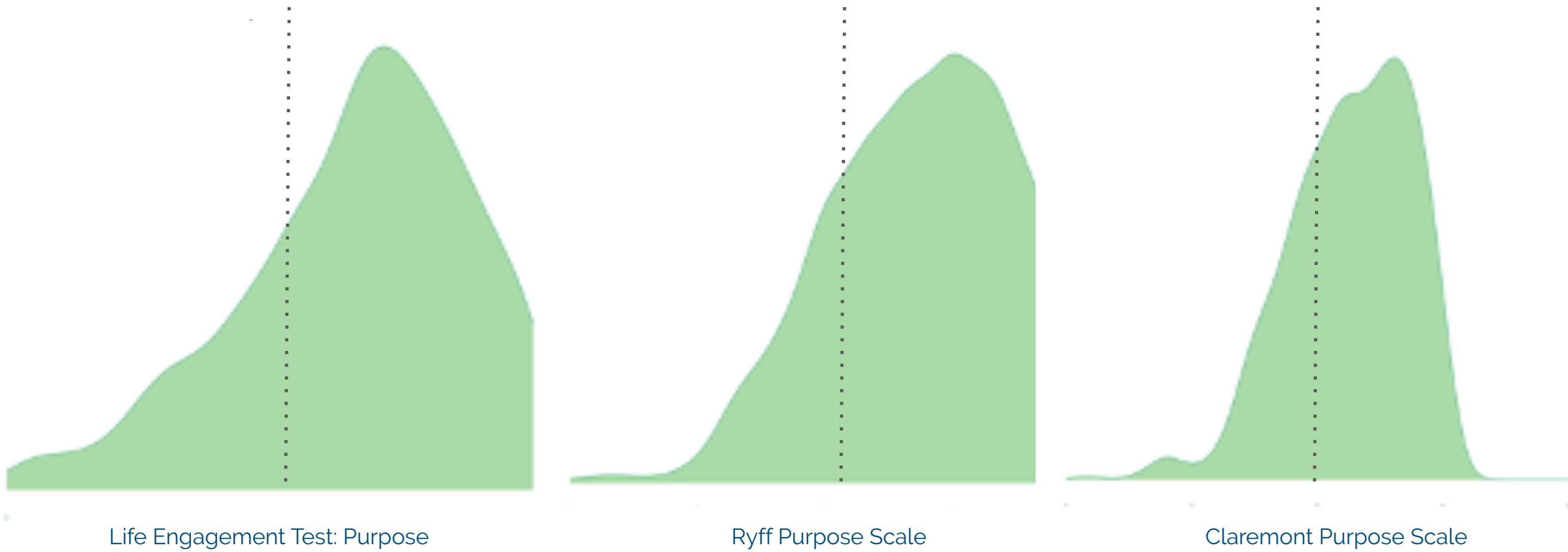
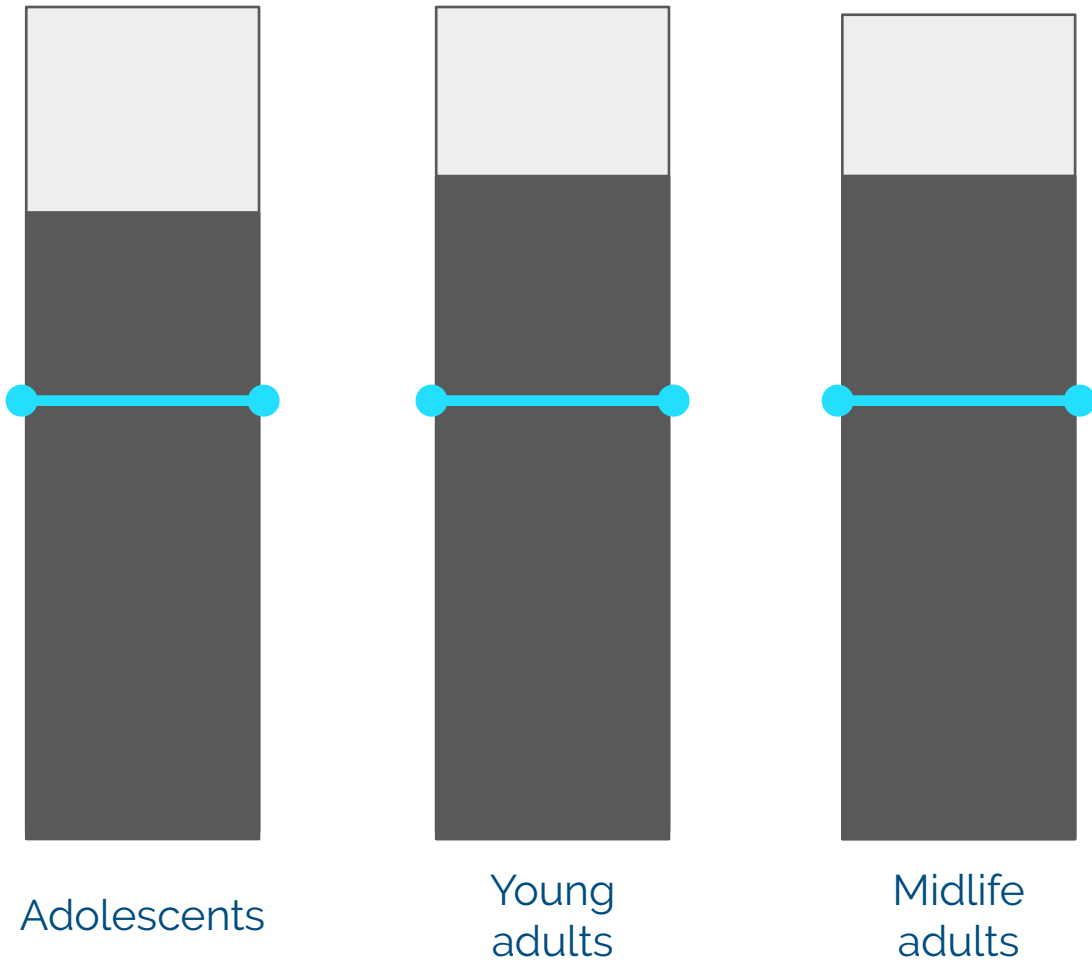


How prevalent is purpose *among adolescents*?

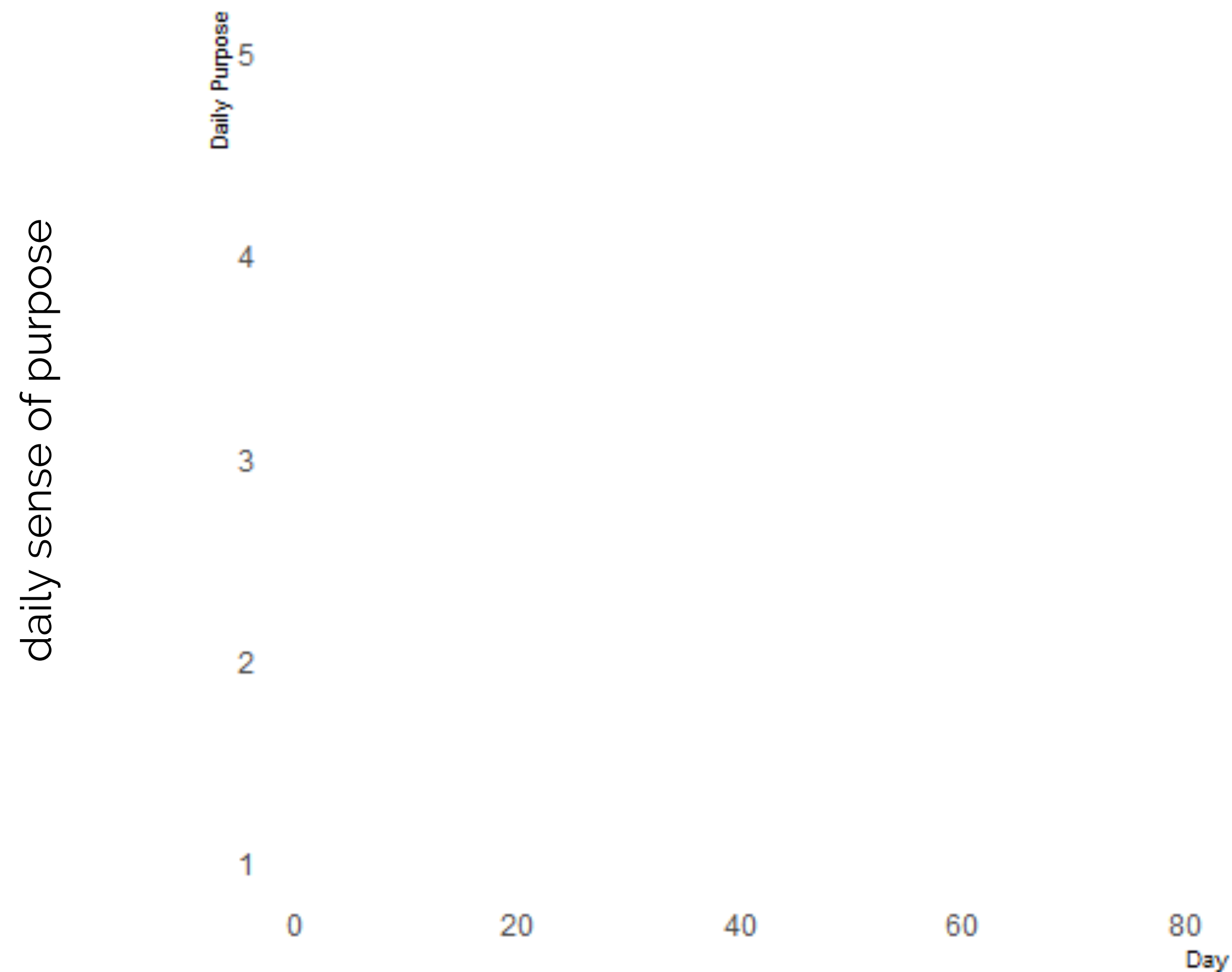
Purpose in Life



Anthony L. Burrow



Purpose in the Context of Daily Life



What is purpose?



What is purpose?

A central, self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning.

McKnight & Kashdan (2009)

A generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.

Damon, Menon, & Bronk (2003)

Sense of Purpose: How is it measured?

Item	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
There is not enough purpose in my life (r)					
To me, the things I do are all worthwhile					
Most of what I do seems trivial and unimportant (r)					
I value my activities a lot					
I don't care very much about the things I do (r)					
I have lots of reasons for living					

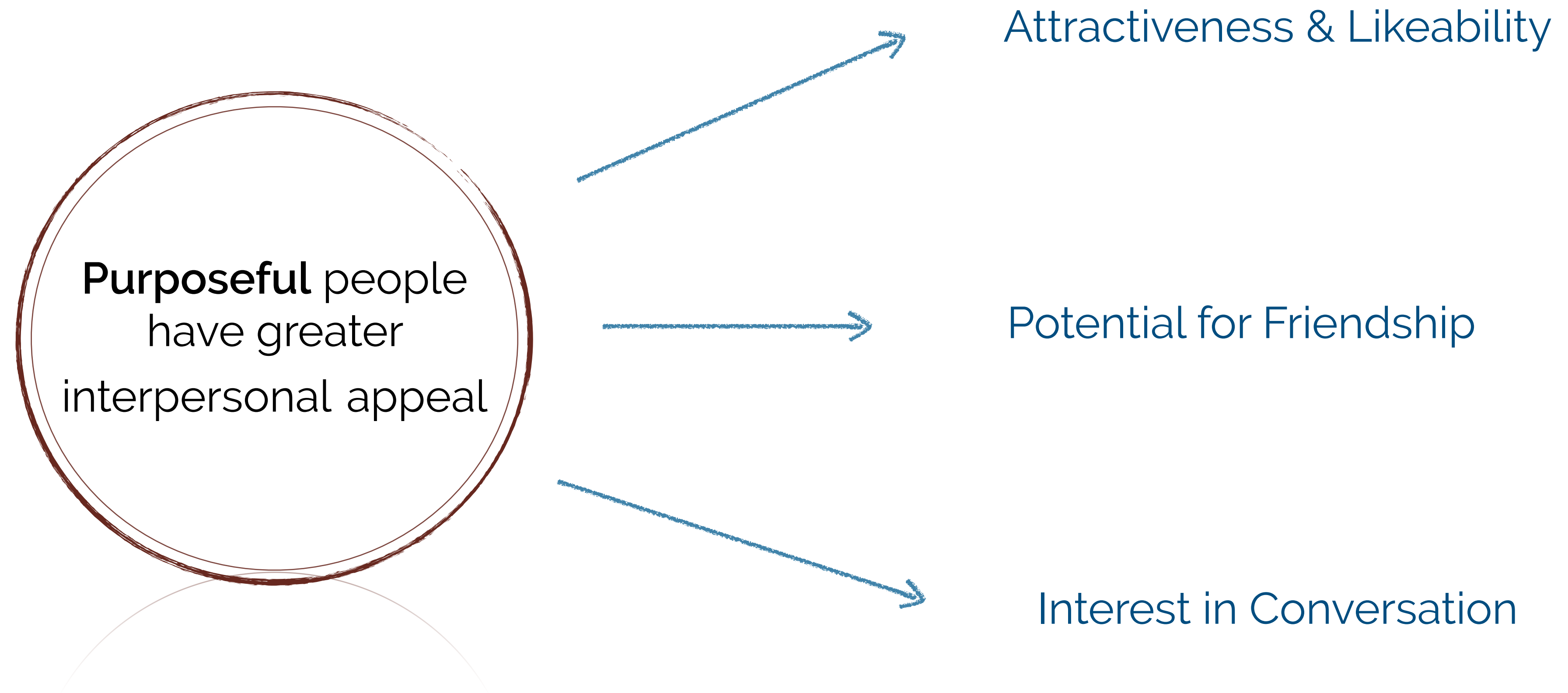


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Sense of Purpose

Sense of Purpose & Interpersonal Appeal



What is the primary function of purpose?

The role of purpose in the stress process: A homeostatic account

Anthony L. Burrow^{a,*}, Patrick L. Hill^b, Maclen Stanley^c, Rachel Sumner^a

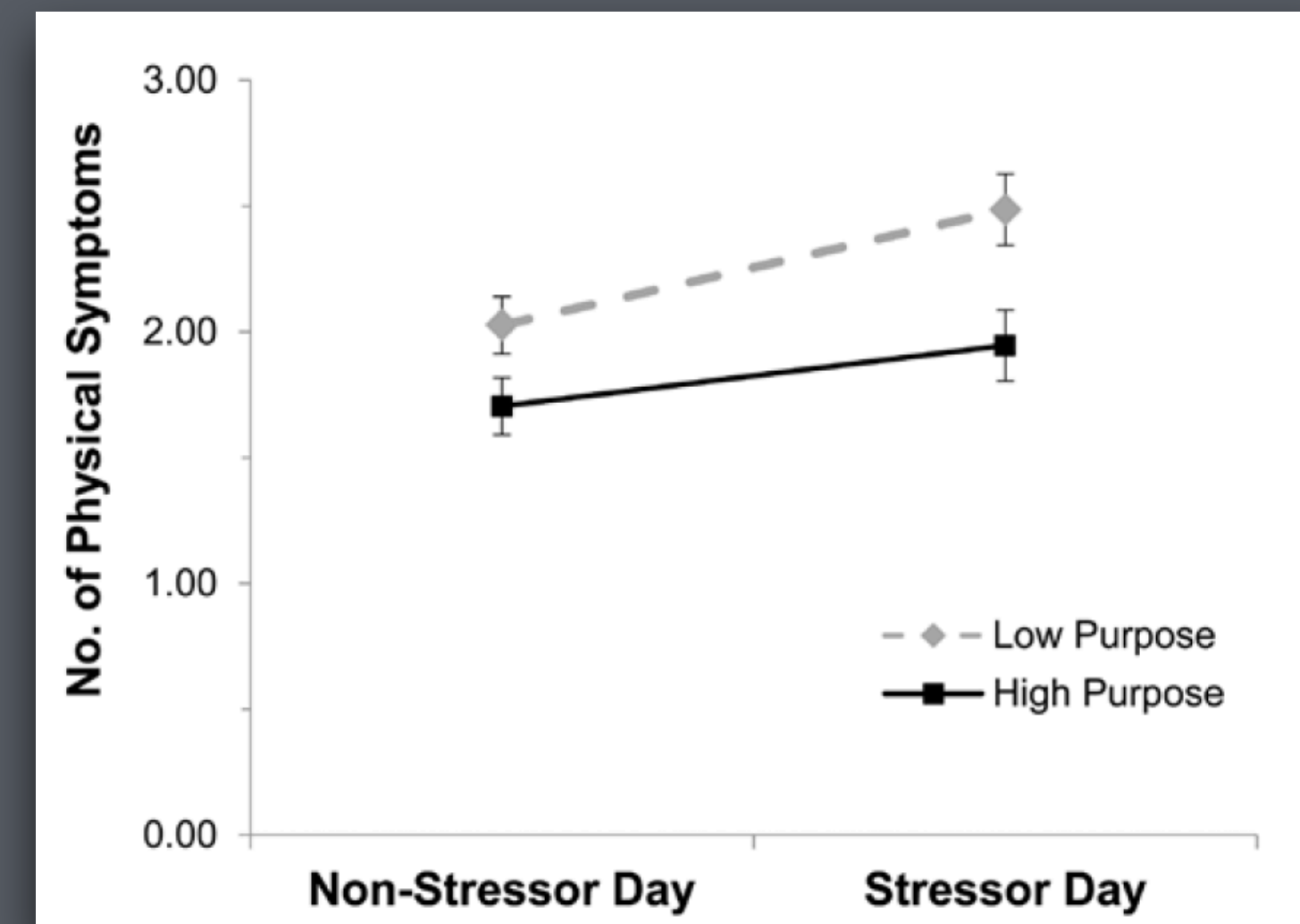
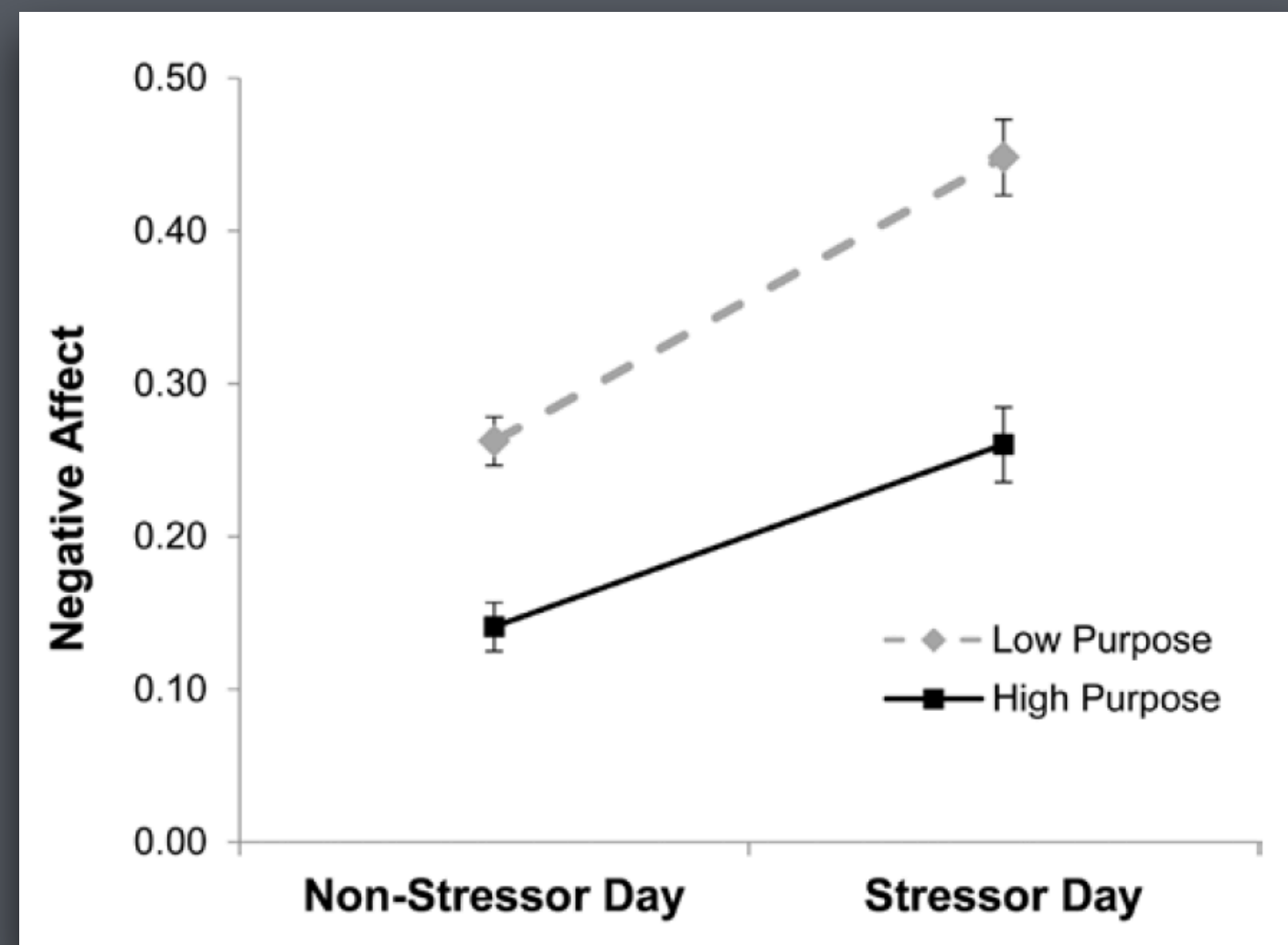
^a Cornell University, Department of Psychology, USA

^b Washington University in St. Louis, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, USA

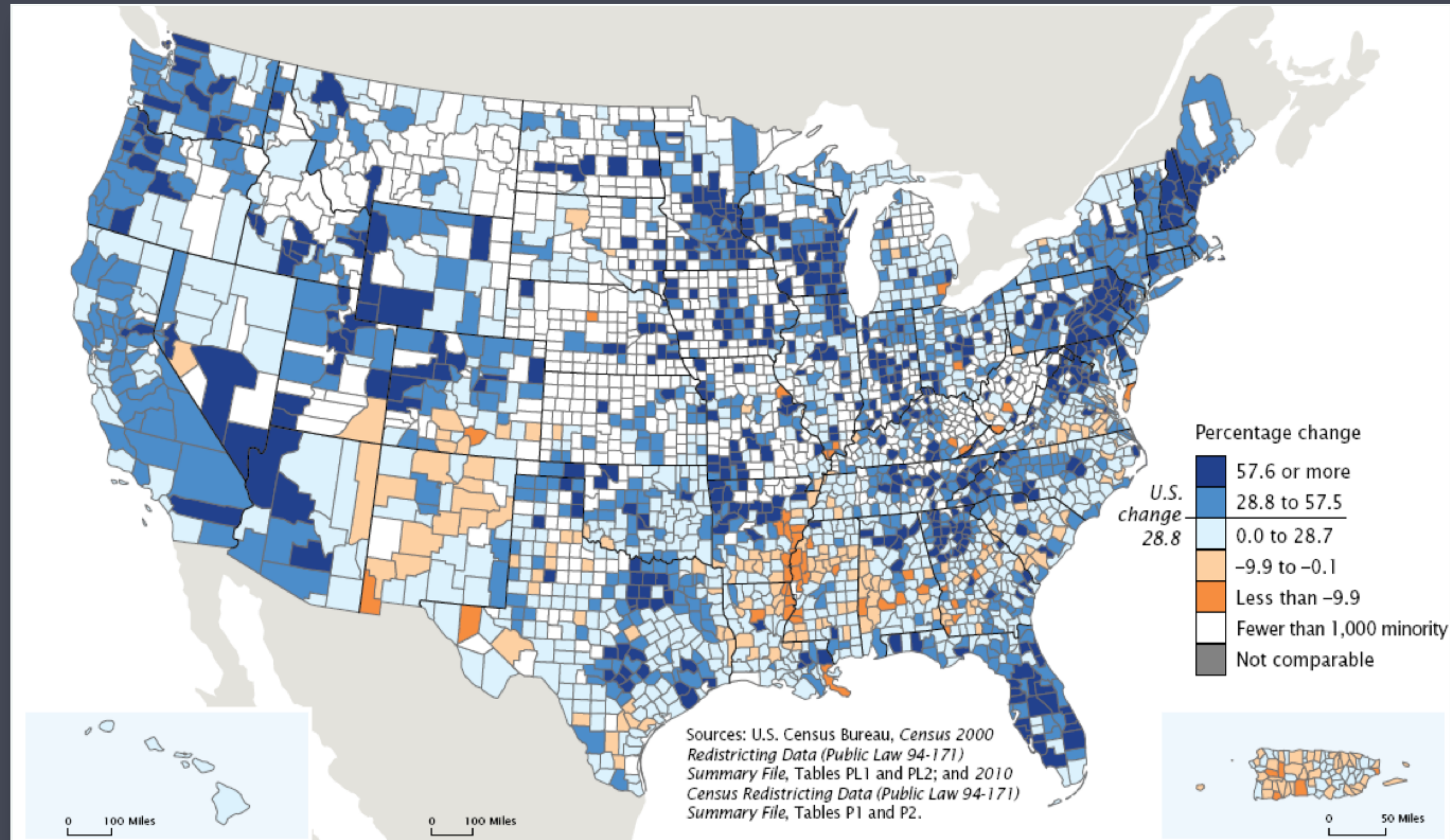
^c Harvard University, Human Development and Psychology, USA

ABSTRACT

The accumulation of evidence that having a sense of purpose contributes to greater health and well-being has vastly outpaced investigations into why this is so. Here, we offer a novel functional account for the demonstrated benefits of purpose by characterizing it as a resource that maintains psychological homeostasis. We posit that a sense of purpose recenters conscious attention toward prospective and overarching aims, thereby limiting the magnitude of disruption to well-being caused by the proximal stimuli. By attenuating reactivity to proximal events both stressful and uplifting, a sense of purpose facilitates greater stability in health and functioning over time. We leverage this mechanistic account with specific examples found across areas of psychological science and outline questions to guide future research.



An Increasingly Diverse Nation



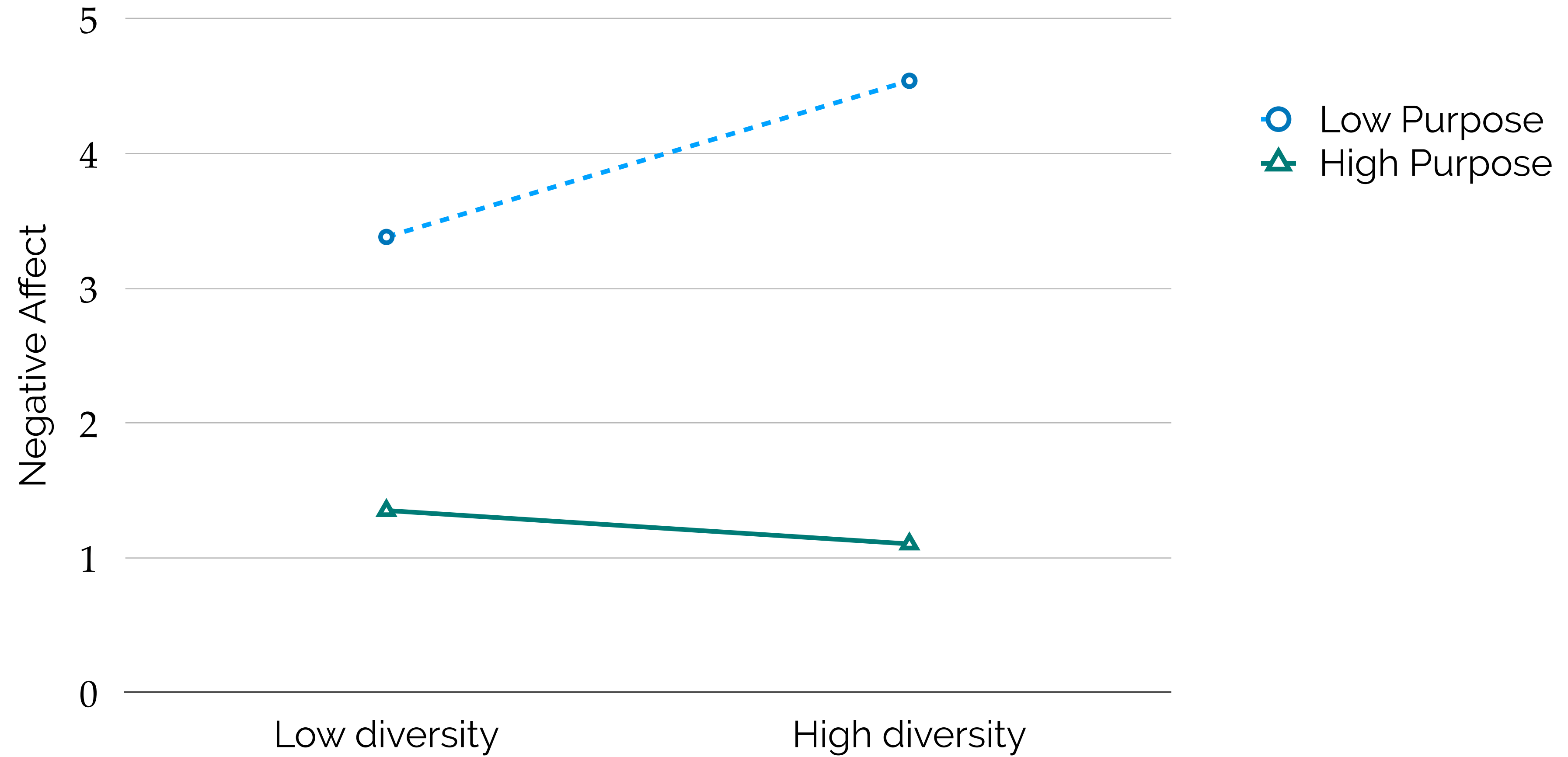


Train Study: Data Collection

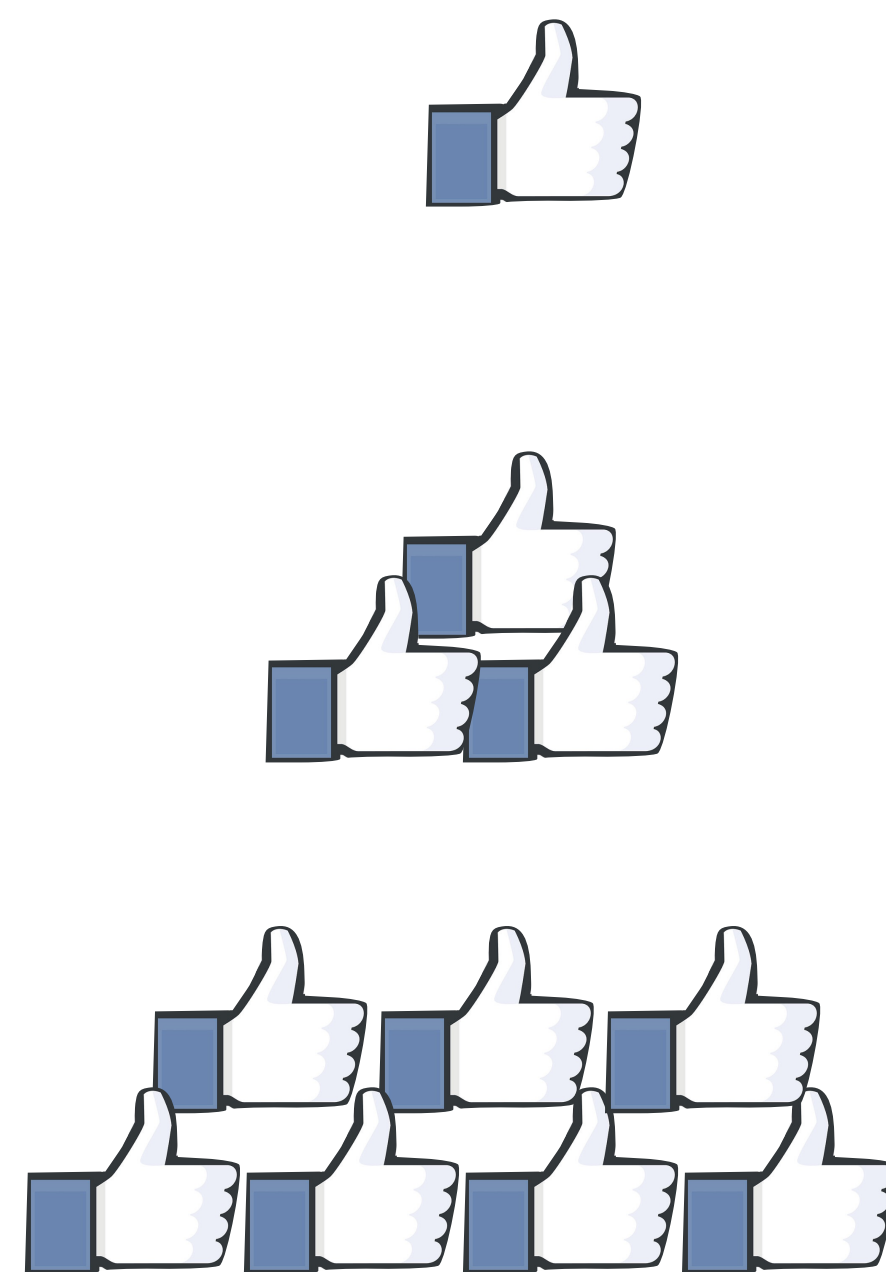


<u>Stop</u>	<i>WM</i>	<i>WF</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>LM</i>	<i>LF</i>	<i>BM</i>	<i>BF</i>
Addison	8	6	1	2	3	2	5	4

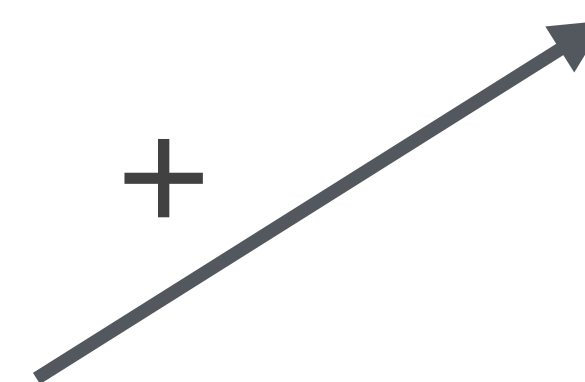
Train Study: Results



Sense of Purpose: How many *Likes* did I get?

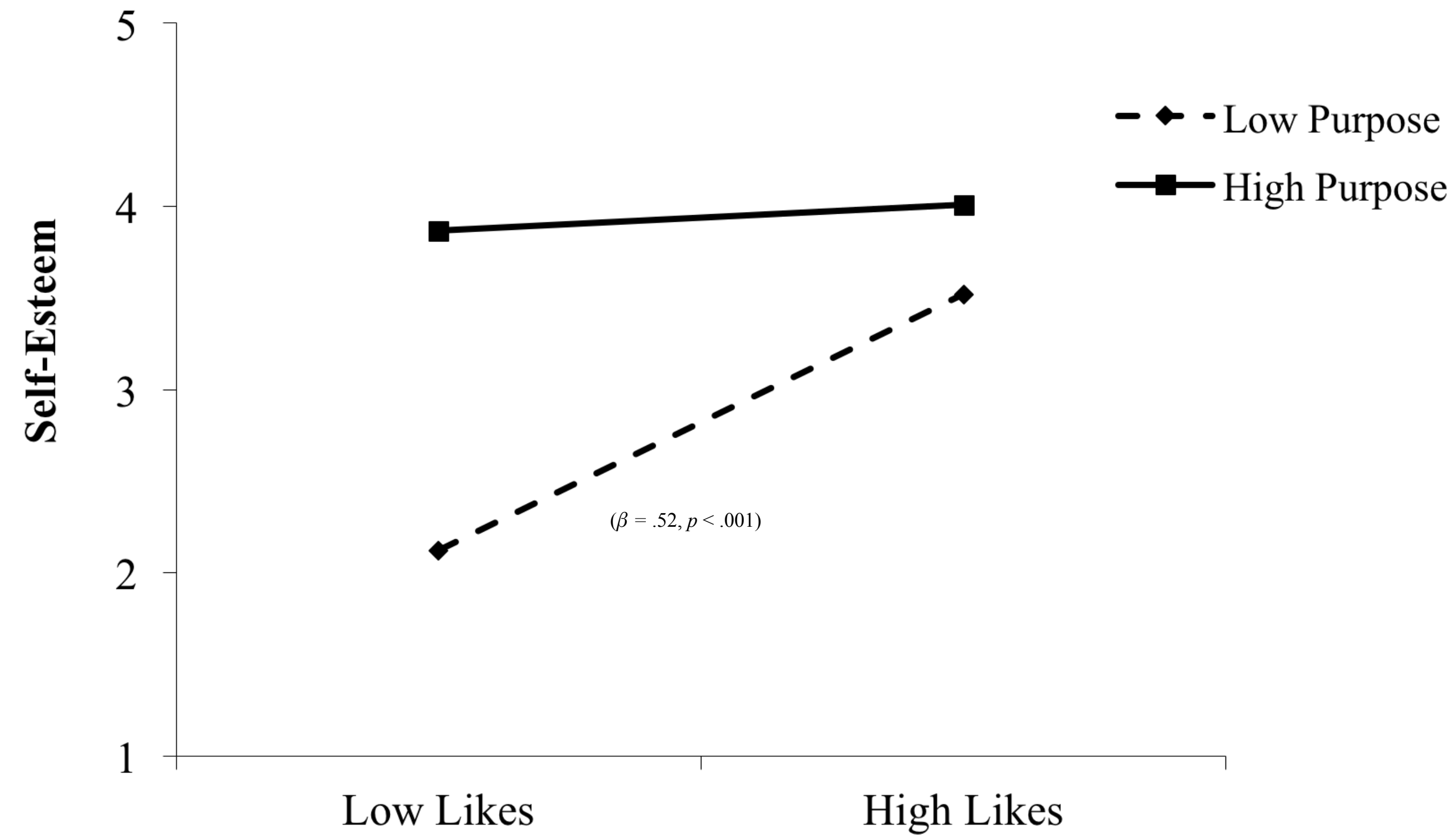


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Self-Esteem

Sense of Purpose: How many *Likes* did I get?

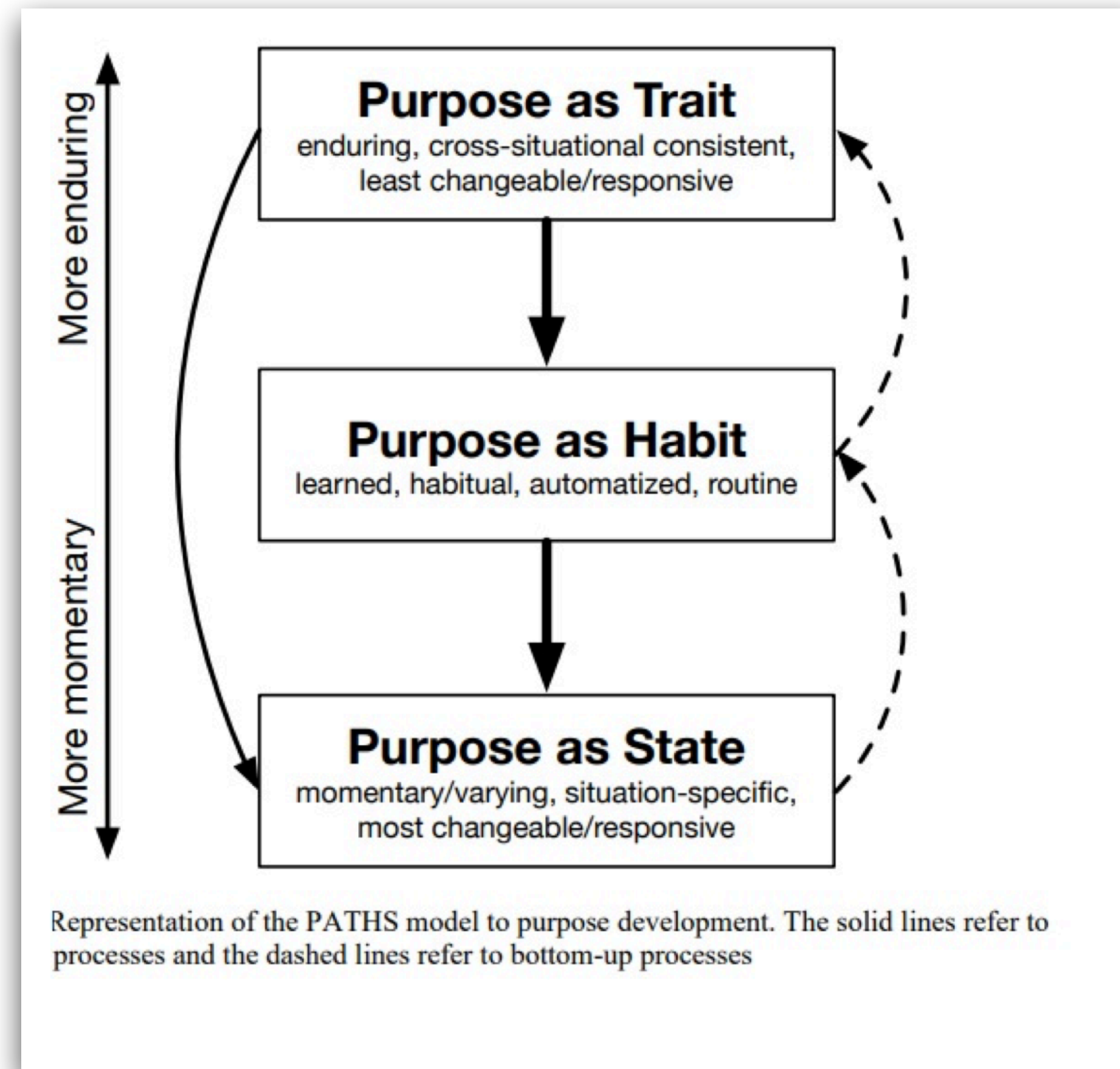


How is purpose acquired?

Pathways to purpose

- **Proactive cultivation:** Sustained, gradual, and effortful cultivation
- **Reactive:** Transformative life events
- **Social Learning:** Observing others engage in meaningful activity

How can we cultivate a stronger sense of purpose?





purpose & identity processes lab

THANK YOU!

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Patrick L. Hill; Kaylin Ratner; Anthony D. Ong; Jane Mendle; Thomas Fuller-Rowell; Gaoxia Zhu; Qingyi Li; Gabrielle Pfund; Rachel Sumner; Felix Thoemmes; Tracy De Hart; Marissa Rice; Nancy Sin; Marlen Stanley; Daniel Rosenfeld; Hanna Hamilton; Vic Strecher; Esther Kim; Kristen Elmore; Christopher Davis; Aaron King; Betül Urgancy