Talent, purpose, and goal orientations: case studies of talented adolescents

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A key concern in research on talented adolescents is what adult achievements they will have. This paper examines the intentions of two (n=2) talented college students before they transition into adulthood. One of these adolescents is pursuing a goal primarily in order to impact the world, while the other is pursuing his goal for self-oriented reasons. This research explores the relation of these adolescents’ goals to their primary goal orientation and to the Houndstooth Model (Renzulli, Koehler, & Fogarty, 2006, Operation Houndstooth intervention theory: Social capital in today’s schools, Gifted Child Today, 29(1), 14–24) through case studies. Two goal orientations emerged from these case studies, one a contribution orientation, the other a challenge orientation. In addition, this analysis suggests that vision, a characteristic in the Houndstooth Model, is important in coordinating talented adolescents’ efforts and moral strengths. Implications and considerations for future research on the intentions of talented adolescents and goal orientations more generally are discussed.

Keywords: talent development; motivation; counseling; moral development; adolescence; goal orientation; purpose; positive youth development

One key aim of research on talents and extraordinary abilities is adult achievement. Research on adolescents’ talents is often focused on fostering their abilities. Yet little is known about what talented adolescents desire or intend to achieve as adults. The present study aims to help bridge this gap in the literature, between the goals of research to support adult achievement, and the intentions of talented adolescents to have such adult achievements. It seeks to do so through two primary questions examined through the lens of two case studies. First, why do talented adolescents decide to commit to and maintain their intentions? The second question is how these reasons relate to a model of talented youth’s talent development and social contribution (Renzulli, Koehler, & Fogarty, 2006).

Research on talented adolescents’ intentions focuses almost exclusively on their career and academic goals (Grant, Battle, & Heggoy, 2000; Willard-Holt, 2008). For instance, research has addressed the reasons talented adolescent girls give for pursuing careers in education (Willard-Holt, 2008). Other research has addressed talented adolescents major and career goals, noting the importance of family and extracurricular involvement in sustaining them (Grant, Battle, & Heggoy, 2000). In addition, as the case studies in this article demonstrate, talented adolescents have many intentions beyond career goals, which deserve consideration in their own right. This breadth is addressed indirectly by the literature on career counseling for the gifted and talented,

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words which will be used interchangeably to describe talents and the talented throughout this paper, through several recommendations including: considering serial or concurrent career paths, relating leisure activities to career choice, interventions to help talented adolescents make decisions guided by their values, peer support groups, and adult role models (Kerr & Erb, 1991; Rysiew, Shore, & Leeb, 1999). All of these suggestions are focused on guiding talented adolescents in deciding between the many alternatives their talents provide for them.

In order to consider more fully talented adolescents intentions, in their careers and in other domains of their lives, the construct of purpose will be used. Purpose is defined by Damon, Menon and Bronk (2003) as “a stable generalized intention to accomplish something at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (Damon, 2008). Purpose, through this focus on meaning and intention, is valuable in helping to understand talented adolescents’ intentions to contribute to the world in adult-like ways. Thus purposes are goals that involve both intention and action toward that intention. Intentions encompass all goals along with those desired outcomes that are not acted upon.

Purpose also bears some relation to research on positive development in general populations, such as Lerner and colleagues’ 5 Cs of Positive Development (2005), and Developmental Assets described by Benson (1997), which note several potentially beyond the self-outcomes, as important features of positive development. The 5 Cs are theorized to be important outcomes and predictors of general positive development (Lerner et al., 2005). In addition, and particularly important given the focus of this paper on purpose and goals more generally, is the value of the 5 Cs in predicting youth’s contributions to their communities. However, this research focuses largely on preadolescence and early adolescence, not on late adolescence, the focus of the present paper. Similarly, the 40 developmental assets are grouped into eight categories, four internal categories and four external categories. These assets, in turn, are related to a number of positive outcomes including school success, leadership in organized activities, helping others, maintaining physical health, delay of gratification, valuing diversity, and overcoming adversity (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Of these outcomes, leadership, helping others, and valuing diversity are all potentially related to beyond the self-outcomes and contribution. Both the 5 Cs and Developmental Assets, however, are inappropriate tools for the present analysis because they are focused primarily on the outcomes of development themselves, while remaining largely agnostic to the specific intentions which lead to such outcomes.

Yet talented adolescents often have a number of specific characteristics that are likely to affect the value of these general models in understanding their behavior and development. In light of this, a model focused on talented adolescents will be used in this study. This model, the Houndstooth Model, identifies six features contributing to both talent development and social contribution; most important to the present analysis are courage, sensitivity to human concerns, and vision (Renzulli, 2002b; Renzulli et al., 2006). This sharper focus – emphasizing talents rather than general positive development – is also valuable in relating adolescents developing capacities to specific intentions and clusters of intentions. This model is based on the long-standing three-ring model of giftedness, emphasizing giftedness as related to above-average ability, above-average task commitment, and/or above-average creativity (Renzulli, 1978, 2002a). Of the Houndstooth characteristics, vision is particularly important given the focus on intentions and goal orientations in the present analysis. Vision also
relates to purpose, as a purposeful goal is a part of an individuals’ larger vision, encompassed by all of their intentions and related actions. Two of the Houndstooth characteristics are moral and particularly relevant to social contribution – courage, encompassing integrity and strength of character, and sensitivity to human concerns, shown through altruism and empathy. The remaining characteristics – optimism, romance with a topic or discipline, and energy – are important for motivation but secondary in this goal focused analysis.

The current paper aims to understand the intentions of talented adolescents in a way that reflects the importance of context to talent development and the development of intentions (Barab and Plucker, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 1991). A context-sensitive approach, while recognizing contextual factors, must also consider the unique abilities of talented adolescents. At the same time, as purpose entails an intention to impact the world, individuals may well seek to work around or change existing contexts, adding an additional level of complexity. Regardless, a key point to consider is the way in which contexts interact with development to sustain, generate, or change intentions. One example of environments that affect intentions can be found in work on learning ecologies (Barron, 2006). In this work, an attempt is made to understand how factors across developmental settings play into learner’s interests, specifically learning related to computer technologies. One facet of this, which is valuable to the present study, is that it considers the development of a commitment to learning or talent development. The present paper aims to extend this by also considering the intended non-learning outcomes of such intentions. Furthermore, the learning ecologies framework considers multiple contexts in understanding these commitments to learning, and how these contexts are related, providing insight into interactions between contexts. In the present paper, some understanding of these contexts is crucial, as well as an understanding of the interrelations of intentions beyond learning. Lastly, Barron (2006) notes that appraisal processes are important to interest development and that little is known about how such processes guide interest development. The present study seeks to make a start in this direction through examining goal orientations, which help to organize intentions and activity.

Previous research on goal orientations is directed largely toward achievement, especially academic achievement (Dweck, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Pintrich, 2000). These studies often address mastery and performance orientations, and have recently begun to differentiate between avoidance and approach orientations to performance as well. The present study seeks to use a broader interpretation of goal orientations, emphasizing reasoning relevant to goal selection, maintenance, and pursuit. At the same time, the general features of these orientations are relevant to the qualitatively distinct orientations described below. Mastery orientations generally involve the acceptance of difficulty in the pursuit of a learning or growth goal. Individuals trying to master a set of knowledge or skills are willing to persevere through setbacks and to adjust their actions in order to build knowledge and skills, independent of concern for their performance at any given point. Performance orientation, on the other hand, leads to a focus on being well evaluated, either by the self or by others. One primary distinction between the orientations drawn from the present analysis is the criteria by which performance is evaluated; one standard is largely comparative while the other is based on having a positive impact.

Given the above discussion, and the goals of this paper, a qualitative analysis is used. This analysis focuses on the intentions, activities, and reasoning of two talented adolescents. From this analysis, goal orientations are derived, and subsequently the
relation of these orientations, intentions, activities, and reasons to Houndstooth characteristics is considered.

**Methods**

**Data collection**

Two interviews were selected from the sample of 270 interviews collected as a part of a larger study on what is important to adolescents. Participants were invited from students at colleges, high schools, and middle schools across the United States, with the two case studies attending urban California universities, having grown up in suburbs. Interview participants were provided with a gift card as incentive for participating and most also completed online surveys. Interviews were conducted in convenient locations for college students. Prior to interviews and surveys consent was obtained from the participants.

The clinical interviews generally lasted from 40 minutes to an hour. Interviews were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol focusing on the values and important commitments in the participants’ lives. The interview is based upon the self-understanding interview developed by Damon and Hart (1988), providing the interviewer freedom to respond to and go into particular depth regarding the meaning of responses. The interview includes questions and probes such as “What is important to you?”, “What do you do that shows [something important to you] is important to you?” and “How does [something important to you] influence your life?” Six interviewers were trained for each of two rounds of interview collection. Interviews were subsequently recorded and transcribed with identifying information removed.

**Sample selection**

One set of criteria for choosing these case study interviews is that they are the clearest examples of talent using Three Ring Model criteria – task commitment, ability, and creativity (Renzulli, 1978, 2002a). The interviewees talk of strong task commitment and report substantial ability as well. The creativity criterion of the model is difficult to assess given the content of the interviews and as such is disregarded in case selection. One interview is used because the primary goal was purposeful, meaning that the interviewee discussed a primary goal with reasons that emphasized the beyond the self-implications for that goal, with current actions, past actions, and plans extended into the future. The other is a self-oriented primary goal; this is a goal with current actions, past actions, and plans, along with reasons that are not primarily focused on the world beyond the self. These judgments were made using the forms of purpose codebook, by paired coders (kappa=.7) (Malin et al., 2008). Within these criteria, consideration is given to choosing participants of similar age, in order to avoid any confounding influence of age.

**Sample**

The first participant, a 20-year-old male, completed the interview during the summer of 2008, prior to his second year of college. This interview was a follow-up using the same protocol as his first interview. The first interview occurred roughly 18 months prior during his senior year of high school. The second participant, a 21-year-old male,
completed the interview in spring of 2007, during his third year of college. This was the participant’s first experience of the interview protocol, though he too completed a follow-up interview. Both participants will be referred to by pseudonyms; the first will be called Jeremy, the second Kevin.

Analysis

The case studies, based on the participants’ interviews and transcripts, were prepared by the author, guided by the methods Eisenhardt (1989) describes. This method focuses on initially open-ended analysis of individual interviews. Following the open-ended analysis, themes are examined within cases, then contrasts between cases in divergent categories are examined. Following from this, cases are related to theory and used to clarify, extend, or challenge existing theory.

In this analysis, the author examined interviews individually with particular attention paid to goals, reasons for goals, actions, future plans, and reasons for action, guided by the forms of purpose codebook (Malin et al., 2008). Following this, successive readings focused on relations between participant’s goals and intentions and reasons for those goals and intentions. Next, comparisons and contrasts between the cases were considered and analyzed. Lastly, returning to theory, the relation of goals and emergent themes to Houndstooth characteristics (Renzulli et al., 2006), within and across interviews was examined. Most important of these characteristics to this analysis is vision, the desired outcome that helps to shape planning and direct current behavior. Two other most important characteristics are moral – courage, shown through integrity and strength of character, and sensitivity to human concerns, evidenced by altruism and empathy. The others, which are secondary to this analysis, are optimism (the hope and willingness to work hard), romance with a topic or discipline (shown through passionate engagement) and energy (intense investment in achieving a goal).

Results

Case study 1: Jeremy’s contribution orientation

Jeremy has focused his life around opportunities to help others, and through this manifests orientation toward contribution. Not only is this orientation apparent in his approach to his primary engagements, work and school, but also in his discussion of future plans and alternatives, such as music. It is also apparent in the breadth of areas in which Jeremy seeks to contribute, from homeless individuals met in the parking lot, the elderly, and disabled, to his family, his coworkers, company, and the environment.

Jeremy mentions several goals throughout the interview. He wants “enough money to be able to start something that’s going to help people” and to send his brother to private school. His musical goals are to release a record, and possibly to have a successful band to “get the truth across to kids” and to donate the proceeds to charity. His career goals are to become general manager of a restaurant and “a joint venture partner” in the future. Outside of this, he also intends to be involved in environmental causes.

In his current job, as assistant manager of a restaurant franchise in a national chain, Jeremy is making progress toward several of these goals. He repeatedly mentions that he is likely to become general manager of his restaurant in the near future. This work also helps him to earn the money that he uses to attend college, and that he hopes to
use to send his younger brother to private school. Jeremy also hopes to use the money to “pay for that studio time”, allowing him to produce a record. Work is also one of the ways Jeremy acts on his concern for the environment. He says “I emailed … the CEO about some of the issues … Just to change the paper standard … use more recycled items … They’ve already done that.” Jeremy also considers “getting rid of [my] car and [starting to take] public transportation … [to] set an example … [for] a lot of my associates who are driving.”

Work also makes him more aware of the difficulties of others, and puts him in a position to help them, now and in the future. “I never talked to a bum before, but working in a restaurant, I just see all kinds of disabilities … they’re people too,” he says. Later he says, “We have elderly people that come in and I’m helping their food to their tables … I realize I’m very fortunate.” Another incident at work involved “a guy in the parking lot … eating out of the trash … So I bought him a sandwich.” While these may be considered rather small acts, they demonstrate Jeremy’s commitment to helping others, which he intends to engage on a larger scale in the future. This concern has begun to extend beyond work as well – Jeremy tells the story of encountering a homeless man in the city – “There was a homeless (sic) outside of the club asking for donations, and I was talking to him … I put a twenty in his cup … We chit-chatted about how he got there and everything … I literally go back a few weeks later and he remembers me … I was happy about that.” His future plans are to use his “status in the company … to help out less fortunate people.” One specific plan along these lines is “If I ever get my own franchises, each franchise selects a donation and every dollar that gets put in there, like a penny that my franchise matches. I’ll do the same.” Through these plans, and others shared throughout the interview, Jeremy shows vision, both in communicating future plans and through relating current actions to the outcomes he desires.

Jeremy’s work enables him to learn and to teach his coworkers as well, another benefit he finds meaningful. He says, “I just enjoy the teaching aspect of it, because in the café we have a saying that you’re always learning … I mean, every day I literally learn ten different things.” He also says that “I think that working at this café and learning how businesses run, is going to help me … in the future … if I ever want to start a business up.”

Jeremy also discussed the relationship of education to his commitments. Through college, Jeremy felt he had learned and been inspired to participate more in environmentalism, learned ways of communicating better about environmental issues, and learned about other causes as well. “I took some real interesting classes and I’ve learned to apply those and … where communications and [the environment overlap, so I can] be an environmentalist now.” Furthermore, he points out a specific teacher in his Human Environment class who had a profound impact on him. “It just made me realize that I’m lucky and that I have the abilities and that I definitely can help other people.”

Relating this to Houndstooth characteristics (Renzulli et al., 2006), Jeremy shows considerable empathy and altruism, a signs of sensitivity to human concerns, and places a high priority on acting on this empathy now, intending to do even more in the future. While this empathy is less clear in his other goals, his goals are generally focused on a view of the common good, and so likely have some component of empathy or altruism. Jeremy also shows courage regarding his goals and commitments, emailing and meeting the CEO of his company and going out of his way to help the elderly and the homeless. Throughout the interview, Jeremy also speaks of these
activities with passion in his voice, reflecting a romance with the topic, and mentions the long hours he willingly works and the sacrifices he makes to pursue his goals, showing optimism. These long hours also demonstrate the considerable energy he devotes to his goals. Lastly, Jeremy is intentional and has plans for all of these goals, is taking directed action now, and is considering carefully what he will do in the future, indicating long term vision.

Case study 2: Kevin’s challenge orientation

Throughout the interview Kevin, whose primary goal is to win a bowling national title, focuses on the opportunities to confront challenge in his life. This challenge comes in many forms, for instance his peers, about whom he says “I find it hard to find equals … in the engineering department. It’s challenging to find people who are equally as smart and can challenge me academically … most of my friends are able to compete with me on any sort of [sports] field and academically, which I like.” Kevin also discusses a prior interest in Magic, a card game, and Magic competitions, which helped him to earn a scholarship for college. He says “In the world of Magic, when I was playing, I was in the top 100 in the state.” He goes on to say, “When I get into something I have to get very good at it, or I quit. There are very few things I can do for fun … I really cannot do something unless I’m going to be competitive at it.” This indicates that a challenge orientation is important to Kevin, with only one exception he is aware of, playing ultimate Frisbee.

Kevin also values contribution saying that the third-most important thing in his life is “knowing that I’m helping the world or having some sort of positive impact.” He says that “the moments in my life that are most important to me, they all involve number three [, having a positive impact].” He describes one of these occurrences more explicitly, “I hope I taught them to be a little more aggressive” referring to children at a camp he works at. He told these children “it’s important to lie to your parents about certain things” to get to their parents to pay for college, despite the fact that “as an advisor you’re supposed to say be honest.” He justifies this advice to be dishonest with the moral stance “sometimes you have to get away from all that.” This moral stance is indicative of Kevin’s courage, at once risking integrity, one component of courage, in violating social norms, and showing strength of character, the other component, in deciding that the stance is worth taking. Yet, unlike Jeremy, Kevin is generally unintentional about seeking opportunities for such contribution, instead taking them as they come in his activities.

Kevin is not focused on his academic commitments. In fact, he says that “I study maybe an hour or two a week and normally set the curve in most of my engineering classes” and that “I want to do decent in school, but I don’t really find school challenging at all.” Kevin is, however, interested in engineering, his major, and is considering pursuing an engineering career, “[I want to work] for the fun of it … that’s why I went into engineering”. Kevin also makes it clear that he would be choosing to work, as his family would be able to support him regardless. “My mom’s got plenty of money, and my grandpa’s got plenty of money. If I never work a day in my life, I could probably do okay.”

Kevin is deeply focused on bowling, in particular on the possibility of winning a national championship the next year, his last year of eligibility in college. In fact, he chose to attend the school because of this interest. “I came to school [here] primarily due to the fact they had a good bowling team.” Kevin also says that “The main reason
I’m here is to try to get a national title … It’s going to be a lot of hard work, but I plan on practicing five times a week.”

In discussing the importance of his friends, the “distant” second-most important thing in his life, Kevin points out that friends are often a part of bowling. “I spend a lot of time [with them], it’s like family. We do almost everything together … I’ve known everyone [on the team] for at least three … years.” As to the role these friends play Kevin says they “keep me balanced. If I didn’t have them around then all I would do is bowl. After doing that for too long, I’d be a hermit. It’s kind of useful.” He also notes that most of his friends “are doing work that effects change”, which he values.

Though Kevin has considered what will be next for him, he can’t be sure. He shows some awareness of this when he says “At any point in my life, I’ve been focused on getting good at one thing. When I was in high school getting to Pro Tour for Magic was the number one priority. Everything else was a distant number two. Now, in college, bowling is the number one priority.” This is also shown through his projection of what his life will be like at 40 – “I may or may not still be bowling … I’d also want to be doing something good in the world.”

Viewed through the Houndstooth Model, Kevin demonstrates a great amount of energy, in committing a large amount of time and effort to bowling, and a clear short-term vision, with plans for how he will train for the next year. Kevin shows optimism as well in this passion for bowling, willingly working intensely in the hopes of winning a national championship. This commitment, however, is largely divorced from the moral Houndstooth traits. He discusses his sensitivity to human concerns as he talks about wanting to have a “positive impact”, and to a lesser extent through valuing his friends work toward change. Lastly, in taking a moral stance toward paying for college, he shows courage in this desire to have a positive impact, yet this courage may not be strong, as in encouraging dishonesty he risks his integrity. There is little if any evidence that his bowling goals arise out of sensitivity to human concerns or are particularly related to such concerns.

Discussion

These cases are valuable in helping to understand the reasons talented adolescents give for their intentions. First, two primary goal orientations emerging in these case studies are contribution orientation and challenge orientation. Both involve patterns of perceiving opportunities in one’s environment. Second, there is preliminary evidence of a connection between purpose and Houndstooth characteristics, with vision as a centerpiece.

Contribution orientation can be seen through a focus on intentions with contextually supported beyond the self-outcomes and through attempts to enter or create contexts in which desired beyond the self-outcomes can be brought about. It is not always related to current activity related to a goal, as shown through Kevin’s desire to make a difference without any clear current or future plans to do so. It is, however, generally focused on activities with long-term consequences. While the selection criteria of purpose lends itself strongly to a contribution orientation, given the centrality of reasons to goal orientations a purposeful goal may be related to other
orientations as well, such as committing to cancer research in order to ensure that as few people die from cancer as possible. In Jeremy’s case, not only is contribution a major focus of his primary goal, to help others, but it is also central to his goals at work, in school, in music, and in his family. Furthermore, it is a primary consideration in Jeremy’s attributions of goal selection, for instance helping him to decide between continuing at his current job or changing jobs. Still Jeremy considers more than contribution in selecting goals; he also considers what is interesting to him and what he wants to do, such as running a restaurant or playing music.

Challenge orientation, in contrast, leads to a focus on seeking out difficult goals in one’s context and selecting or creating contexts in which to pursue difficult goals, with little if any concern for the broader impact of these goals. Kevin is in many ways exemplary of such an orientation. It underlies not only his commitment to bowling, but also his selection of friends. The relation of Kevin’s challenge orientation to another clearly stated goal, to have a positive impact, is less clear. Instead, by its very nature, the goal of having a positive impact seems to reflect a contribution orientation, like many of Jeremy’s goals. Kevin is also less clear about how to select future goals, considering both his current interests, in engineering, bowling, and having an impact, but without a clear picture of what he will do and why he will do it. This is a potential result of his challenge orientation, especially given Kevin’s hesitance to engage in domains in which he does not have considerable skill. Seeking challenge may start to seem inconsequential when one looks past the immediate challenge. At the same time, given the intensity of the challenge Kevin has set before himself, any distraction from that challenge may make it less likely that he is ready to meet it.

Relating these goal orientations to the mastery and performance orientations discussed earlier, two points are worth considering. Both Jeremy and Kevin seem to have a strong mastery orientation toward their intentions, working hard and attempting to improve. However, Jeremy and Kevin value performance for different reasons. Jeremy’s contribution orientation is primarily focused on performance in terms of lasting and personally meaningful ends. Kevin, on the other hand focuses on performance largely in terms of a single meaningful but momentary end point.

It is also worth noting that while Jeremy is primarily oriented toward contribution in his goal selection and maintenance, other considerations, such as enjoyment, interest, and fit with other goals play a part. Similarly, while Kevin’s primary goal is closely related to his challenge seeking, this is not his only concern. Maintaining an awareness of these primary orientations, along with other lower level priorities in goal selection and maintenance is likely valuable, not only in understanding current goals more fully, but in understanding how priorities and orientations change over time. For example, imagine if Kevin were injured, perhaps he would reassess his goals and shift them more toward having a positive impact, which he finds more meaningful than bowling (this is in fact what Kevin relates in his follow-up interview).

Turning to Houndstooth Theory, two profiles emerge from the case studies (Renzulli et al., 2006). Jeremy presents an integrated profile of Houndstooth characteristics, integrating his courage and sensitivity to human concerns with his energy, romance for his ideas, and optimism through his vision for his life. This may allow him to develop his talents and to provide social contributions concurrently. Kevin’s vision, with its separation of moral characteristics from other characteristics, creates a discontinuity, manifested in his perception that his talent development in bowling is separate from having a positive impact. In further examining the Houndstooth Model, future research would do well to further explore the connection between vision, the
moral characteristics – sensitivity to human concerns and courage – and the other three characteristics, optimism, romance, and energy. In these cases it seems that vision, in the form of goal orientation, serves to align the energy, optimism, and romance of Jeremy with his morals and values, and conversely that Kevin’s vision is less integrated with his morals.

Methodologically, a caveat is needed in making sense of these results, as both case studies are based on self-report. Jeremy may not be developing or contributing in the ways he describes. Similarly, while Kevin does not speak of his involvement with bowling as having a positive impact in and of itself, it may, and the activities in which he has a positive impact may in fact help him to develop his talents as well. Lastly, many youth with purposeful primary goals may have profiles like Kevin’s, their contributions separate from their developing talents and interests. All of this highlights the potential value of the counseling recommendations for gifted and talented youth discussed earlier regarding career paths, leisure activities, guidance in applying values to decision-making, peer-support groups, and adult role models (Rysiew et al., 1999). In counseling, two directions present themselves for consideration. First, it suggests that considering adolescents goals and intentions might be helpful in career counseling. Second, understanding the goal orientation of adolescents has potential value in other forms of counseling for such adolescents as well.

On a broader level, this research has potential implications both for work on positive youth development. In positive youth development, it is worth considering the value of the Houndstooth Model (Renzulli et al., 2006) for adolescents who are not currently talented or gifted, particularly as a way of encouraging the development of talents. It also suggests that greater specificity, such as considering reasons and goals may add to other models addressing contribution (e.g. Benson, 1997; Lerner et al., 2005).

The present research faces several limitations, which should be addressed by future studies. For one, single interviews are relied upon, in part because goal orientations were not stable between interviews; as such future research examining the stability of goal orientations would be valuable. Furthermore, using only two interviews is not indicative of the breadth of possible goals or goal orientations among talented adolescents, and additional interviews with talented adolescents would be valuable in examining this variety. Using these two cases, several features stand out as particularly important. Learning and growth goals, either on their own or as related to higher-level goals, like winning a national title, are important, particularly when considering talent development. The meaningfulness or impact of the goal is also important, as for both Kevin and Jeremy having a positive impact is meaningful, while bowling is less clearly meaningful. Also important is the time over which the goal is expected to be pursued; short-term goals may be more likely to result in a challenge orientation, in order to meet the high performance demands these goals entail. Other goal orientations may exist and should be studied. One promising direction for this is learning or growth orientations, which may be used by those who intend to improve or expand their abilities, but not with any clear goals for using this learning. Such goals could be identified through recognizing ongoing growth as the primary intended outcome of a goal. Hints of such orientations exist in these cases and in Barron’s (2006) work, but are only part of the goal orientations of Jeremy and Kevin. Similarly, a challenge orientation like Kevin’s may be seen as a part of the broader contribution orientation of Jeremy, which includes present challenges but extends the timescale of goals and the desired impact of the outcome further.
Lastly, while the present analysis provides some hints into the contexts that helped to form such goal orientations and into their consequences, future studies should evaluate various contexts seek to determine if there are cohort, cultural, or developmental differences in such goal orientations. Additionally, longitudinal studies might help to better understand the circumstances that lead to the adoption of various goal orientations. Such studies would also be valuable in understanding the consequences of goal orientations, both for the individual and for the impact they have on their context.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the present study indicates that there are at least two goal orientations that shape the goal setting of talented adolescents. Contribution and challenge orientations are not mutually exclusive. Rather talented adolescents may focus on particular orientations with particular goals, and may rely on multiple orientations across and within their various goals and commitments. Furthermore, Houndstooth characteristics are worthy of consideration in understanding goal pursuit and talent development, with an eye toward how these characteristics, particularly vision, align an individual’s goals with their moral concerns.

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