Religious Beliefs and Purpose in Life

Purpose in life as a function of specific religious beliefs in a Christian population

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Abstract

This thesis presents a cross-sectional study of psychological meaning making processes involving religious beliefs and the construction of a sense of purpose in life. Previous research has studied the connection between religiosity and purpose in life, but has failed to adequately represent the multidimensionality of meaning and religion, resulting in a lack of understanding of the psychological processes involved in the construction of a sense of purpose in life.

The purpose of this study was to research the connection between specific religious beliefs and a sense of purpose in life in individuals aged 25-40, by testing one hypothesis: There is a significant, positive correlation between the strength of religious belief and purpose in life, and answering two research questions: 1. What specific religious beliefs show a significant correlation to purpose in life?, and 2. How are religious beliefs used in a meaning system for the construction of purpose in life? The study employed a two-phase, mixed methods sequential exploratory design, and a meaning system theory framework, complemented by additional theoretical perspectives in phase 2. The weighting of the data was on the first, qualitative phase of the study and the data were mixed in the final, joint analysis of both types of data.

Phase 1 consisted of a survey, measuring the strength of religious beliefs (measured by the BVS scale) and sense of purpose in life (measured by the LAP-R and one item of the WHOQOL-BRIEF). The survey was completed by 40 respondents who self-identified as Christian and were members of various Christian congregations in the city of Stockholm and surrounding areas.

The results of phase 1 of the study firstly showed a significant, moderate, positive correlation between the strength of religious belief and purpose in life, confirming the hypothesis. The results also showed that purpose in life was positively and significantly correlated to a belief that God is an all pervading presence ($\tau = 0.35, p<0.05$), belief in forces for evil in the universe ($\tau = 0.40, p<0.01$), belief that human physical contact can be a spiritual experience ($\tau = 0.27, p<0.05$), belief in life after death ($\tau = 0.31, p<0.05$), belief that one’s life has been planned out ($\tau = 0.33, p<0.05$), belief that there is a heaven ($\tau = 0.30, p<0.05$), belief that the human spirit is immortal ($\tau = 0.30, p<0.05$), and belief that there is a God ($\tau = 0.32, p<0.05$).

Phase 2 consisted of interviews with 9 of the survey respondents, yielding qualitative data that were analysed through an interpretative framework based on two hermeneutic theories. The qualitative analysis showed that religious beliefs are used to construct purpose in a meaning making process consisting primarily of three elements in a meaning system. Beliefs regarding what is ultimately good (ultimate concerns) and beliefs regarding the purpose and role of humanity (overall purpose) provides a foundation for the construction of purpose in life. The individual constructs purpose by locating himself/herself (self-definition) in relation to ultimate concerns and overall purpose. The results of phase 2 also showed that both the content and conviction of religious beliefs influence their use in the construction of purpose in life, further explicating the results of phase 1.

The joint analysis of the two phases showed that the results from phase 2 supported the results from phase 1, both regarding the beliefs involved in the construction of purpose in life and the importance of both content and conviction in meaning making processes.

Suggestions for further research include additional research on the connections between the various elements of a meaning system, research on the connection between religious beliefs, purpose and the development of self-definition, as well as further theoretical developments of meaning system theory, and harmonisation of meaning system theory with other, complementary theoretical perspectives.

**Keywords:** Religious beliefs, Purpose in life, Meaning, Meaning system theory, Christianity, 25-40 year-olds
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1. Introduction

The meaning and purpose of life, which has long been a primary topic of interest in theology and philosophy, has in recent decades made significant inroads into the field of psychology. One could make the case that there has always been an interest in meaning in psychology, but that this interest, due to the development of the field, was largely ignored during the middle of the 20th century. At the beginning of the 20th century (Wulff, 1997), pioneers in the field of the psychology of religion brought the study and consideration of meaning into the budding field of psychology. Still, thorough research of people's meaning in life was not to be undertaken for another 50 or so years. Influenced by the likes of Freud and Jung, religion quickly became regarded either as a collective neurosis (Freud, 1927) or a mere manifestation of the dynamics of the human psyche (Jung, 1954, in Wulff, 1997). Religion as a source of meaning in life was thus regarded as a vestige of more unenlightened times. However, a shift was about to take place through the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

Viktor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who was interned in various concentration camps during the Second World War, and was able to experience firsthand the impact that a sense of meaning in life can have on both physical and mental health. In the concentration camps Frankl was assigned a variety of tasks, among them the keeping of mental hygiene, which included helping new prisoners deal with loss, grief, depression and suicidal thoughts. He discovered that a sense of meaning in life was often a primary factor in the survival of his fellow prisoners. His experience in the camps led to the development of logotherapy, a form a psychotherapy that focuses on the development of meaning in life in the patient. Frankl's (1946/2004) central tenet was that man's basic motivation (or will) is not to find pleasure, or power, but to find meaning. He also postulated that many of the neuroses found in modern society are due to difficulties in finding meaning in life. Frankl posited that if the will to meaning is frustrated, the individual can experience a 'noögenic neurosis' which is characterised by boredom and excessive frustration at life. It can also lead to a host of destructive behaviours when individuals attempt to fill the 'existential vacuum' caused by a perceived lack of meaning in life.

Frankl's work has for the past 50 years inspired a proliferation of research on meaning and on the impact of meaning on the human psyche. The concept of meaning has become a topic of interest in many scientific fields, from research on organisational leadership to coping. Meaning has also become a central concept in the psychology of religion, which has opened up possibilities for the study of the psychological functions and effects of religion. The ultimate aim of this thesis is to contribute to the psychology of religion by studying the connection between meaning and religion.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Religion and meaning in a Swedish context

Today's Sweden is seen by many as one of the most secularised countries in the world (Tomasson, 2002; Zuckerman, 2009). But like many other countries in Europe, Sweden has a long history of faith, particularly the Christian faith. Apart from Svenska Kyrkan, the former state church of Sweden, the country also has a strong tradition of free churches, including a pentecostal movement which grew rapidly during the beginning of the 20th century. Nevertheless, much of contemporary research on religion in Sweden concerns the decline of religion, not its relevance for creating meaning in the lives of groups and individuals. Therefore, this study aims to research a Swedish population of believers, to better understand how religion can function as a source of meaning for individuals living in a secularised society.
The study of religion and meaning could in general benefit much from including populations from a Swedish cultural context. In a culture that is characterised by a lack of religious beliefs, but also a lack of meaning (Geels & Wikström, 2006), the research on how religious belief creates meaning is a salient endeavour that can provide new insight. Much of the existing research on religion and meaning focuses on populations in the United States (see section 1.6 below). A population from a Swedish context thus has the potential of casting additional light on the field of religion and meaning, producing knowledge from a cultural context different from a majority of other studies.

Also, individuals aged 25-40 are underrepresented in the current body of research. Due to factors of convenience, availability and scope, research has focused on college-age young adults and on the elderly, aged 60 and above (see literature review, section 1.6). Therefore, a study focusing on this particular age group will also be able to contribute original and valuable knowledge to the field. For more information regarding the choice of target population, see section 3.3. Because of the above considerations and those presented in section 3.3, a Swedish population of churchgoing, Christian believers were chosen for this study to explore religion and meaning in a Swedish context.

1.1.2. Adding clarity to religion and meaning: Respecting the past, facing the future

Prior research on meaning and religion has unfortunately been characterised by a lack of theoretical clarity, resulting in ambiguous results. Religion, which is multidimensional and consists of a variety cognitive, social and cultural factors (Geels & Wikstrom, 2006), has often been researched as a single construct (Paloutzian & Park, 2005), resulting in contradictory results. The situation is the same in the research on meaning (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009). However, theoretical and empirical developments have resulted in a better understanding of the multidimensionality of both constructs, enabling greater clarity and accuracy in research results. Viewing religion and meaning as multidimensional requires theory to be adapted to adequately model this multidimensionality. Theory must also be able to interpret data of a multidimensional kind.

Religion, religious groups and religious beliefs can provide adherents with a strong sense of meaning in life (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009), which is correlated with a host of salutary effects to health and well-being, both physical and psychological. However, the reasons for why religion is such a powerful source of meaning has yet to be understood. Prior research has consistently shown a correlation, albeit of varying strength, between religion and meaning in life. Studies of the association between Allport's religious orientation and purpose (Bolt, 1975; Crandall & Rasmussen, 1975) shows a positive correlation between an intrinsic religious orientation and purpose in life. Allport himself writes that an intrinsic religious orientation “floods the whole life with motivation and meaning” (Allport, 1966, p. 455, in Wulff, 1997). More recent studies have shown that several aspects of religion work together to facilitate a sense of purpose in life (Krause & Hayward, 2012), and that religious beliefs are part of a greater system that facilitates meaning. With this background, prominent researchers within the psychology of religion (Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Hood, Hill, Spilka, 2009) agree that there is a need for research on particular dimensions or aspects of religion and their association with particular aspects of meaning. Because of this, the current study aims to research the correlation between specific religious beliefs and purpose in life, and to explore the ways in which specific religious beliefs are employed in meaning making processes to construct a sense of purpose in life. This aim comes from a perceived need for researching specific aspects of both religion and meaning in order to better understand the connections between the two phenomena.
This study connects to past research by first testing the connection between religion and meaning which has been repeatedly demonstrated. It also takes steps into the future of the field by researching the connection between religion and meaning in a more nuanced way, recognising the complexity of both religion and meaning, and attempting to take this complexity into account in the research.

1.2. Research purpose and design
The purpose of this cross-sectional, two-phase, mixed methods sequential exploratory study is to research the connection between religious beliefs and a sense of purpose in life. The aim of the first phase of the study, using quantitative methods, is to test a hypothesis derived from prior research and from the study's theoretical foundation, regarding the correlation between religious beliefs and purpose in life. The results from the first phase will also answer one research question regarding the correlation between specific religious beliefs and purpose in life. The second phase aims to explore how religious beliefs are employed to construct a sense of purpose in life, which will be achieved by qualitative methodology. The results from the second phase will be used to answer a second research question.

1.3. Hypothesis and research questions
The hypothesis, based on meaning system theory and prior research is the following:

1. There is a significant, positive correlation between the strength of religious belief and purpose in life among Christians aged 25-40.

The research questions are:

1. What specific religious beliefs show a statistically significant correlation to purpose in life?
2. How are religious beliefs used in a meaning system for the construction of purpose in life?

1.4. Definition of terms
In this section, the central terms used in the study will be defined and explained. Firstly, the terms will be defined according to their basis in prior theory and research. Definitions will be used that clearly communicate the meaning of the terms and their use in the current study. The definition of terms will ensure a precision in the use of the terms in the context of this study and in the area of research in which the study is situated. The definition of terms will include the operational definitions used in the measurements and gathering of data.

1.4.1. Religion
The definition of religion used in this study is based on the use of the term in meaning system theory. As such, religion is viewed as a particular form of meaning system. Silberman (2005) postulates that the attribute which characterises religion is "that it centres on what is perceived to be sacred. The sacred refers to concepts of higher powers, such as the divine, God, or the transcendent, which are considered holy and set apart from the ordinary" (Silberman, 2005, p. 645-646). The definition of religion as characterised by the sacred is taken from Pargament's definition of religion as a "search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (Pargament, 1997, p. 32). Pargament's definition of the sacred is slightly more encompassing than Silberman's. The sacred is defined as "divine beings, higher powers, God, or transcendent reality, and other aspects of life that take on spiritual character by virtue of their association with
the divine. According to this definition, any aspect of life can take on extraordinary character through its association with, or representation of, divinity" (Pargament & Abu Raiya, 2007, p. 752).

Based on the two definitions above, religion will in this study be defined as a meaning system that centers on what is perceived to be sacred. The sacred refers to concepts of higher powers, such as divine beings, higher powers, God, or transcendent reality, and other aspects of life that take on spiritual character by virtue of their association with the divine.

1.4.2. Religious beliefs
'Religious beliefs' will be defined according to the definition of religion above, and a definition of beliefs from Boden and Berenbaum (2010). They summarised the psychological definitions of belief as characterised by two features: content and conviction. Content refers to the mental representation of the object that is believed in, whether this be God, people, events, or anything else capable of being mentally represented.

The second feature of belief is conviction. This refers to the strength or certainty that one has regarding the existence and characteristics of that which is mentally represented. Since belief can encompass both past, present and future objects and concepts, conviction also includes a certainty of the existence of objects in the future, or of the coming to pass of anticipated events.

Based on the definitions of religion and beliefs above, the following definition of religious beliefs will be used: Religious beliefs are mental representations of concepts of higher powers, such as divine beings, God, or transcendent reality, and other aspects of life that take on spiritual character by virtue of their association with the divine.

1.4.3. Mental representation
The basic definition of meaning used in this study involves the term 'mental representations'. The understanding of representation in the study is the following: “A representation, mental or otherwise, is a system of symbols. The system of symbols is isomorphic to another system (the represented system) so that conclusions drawn through the processing of the symbols in the representing system constitute valid inferences about the represented system” (Gallistel, 2001, p. 9691-9695).

1.4.4. Meaning
The basis for the definition of meanings will be Baumeister’s: "meaning is shared mental representations of possible relationships among things, events and relationships" (1991, p. 15). This corresponds in a useful way to the definition of beliefs, in that both beliefs and meaning concerns mental representation, placing them both in the realm of psychology. The second useful feature of this definition is that it defines meaning through "possible relationships". This implies a need for interpretation and choice on the part of the person whose mind houses the mental representations. There can be multiple possible relationships between beliefs, and the individual must interpret what relationships are possible and choose between them to establish a particular meaning.

But there is one aspect of meaning that Baumeister’s definition fails to take into account. This aspect is expressed by Spilka et al. (2003): "the cognitive significance of sensory and perceptual stimulation and information to us" (Ibid, p. 16). This definition incorporates "cognitive significance", i.e. a form of end-product of the interpretation and choice between the possible relationships in Baumeister’s definition. The view in this thesis is that meaning is not simply the mental representations of the chosen relationships between objects, but also includes the resulting cognitive significance. The latter part, "sensory and perceptual stimulation and
information to us" will in this thesis be regarded as the precursors to mental representations, and will thus not be included in the definition. The definition of meaning used in this thesis, based on Baumeister (1991) and Spilka et al. (2003) is therefore the following: Meaning is the cognitive significance of shared mental representations of possible relationships among things, events and relationships.

The last piece necessary for defining meaning for the purposes of this study is the definition of what constitutes "meaning in life". Baumeister states that meaning in life is not a specific kind of meaning, but rather the same kind of meaning as any other. The defining characteristic of meaning in life lies in what the meaning concerns (the entirety of one’s life). Meaning in life will therefore be defined as the cognitive significance derived from the interpretations of the relationships between the mental representations of one’s entire perception of life.

1.4.5. Purpose in life
Purpose in life will in this thesis be regarded as an aspect of meaning in life. Baumeister (1991) regards purpose in life as one of the four needs for meaning, i.e. psychological needs that meaning must provide for a person to experience life as meaningful. "The vital thing is to interpret one’s current activities, in relation to future or possible states" (Ibid, p. 32). Reker (2000) specifies purpose as one of two fundamental aspects of meaning. Meaning, according to Reker, consists of "a sense of coherence (sense of order, reason for existence, understanding)" (Ibid, p. 39) and "a sense of purpose (mission in life, direction, goal orientation)" (Ibid, p. 39). Reker operationalises purpose for the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale, as "having life goals and a sense of direction from the past, in the present and toward the future" (Reker & Woo, 2011, p. 4).

Just like Baumeister, Reker’s definitions denote an orientation toward future goals, and a life that is lived in the direction of those goals. Paloutzian, in his meaning system theory and model, writes about purpose as "whatever a person values and strives to fulfil at a higher and more encompassing level" (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 342).

Both Baumeister’s, Paloutzian’s and Reker’s definition of the term 'purpose' have three basic features. The first is that a sense of purpose in life includes a future goal orientation, an orientation toward a future state, achievement or fullfillment. The second is that one’s current activities are directed toward this future goal. The third feature of a sense of purpose in life is that the sense encompasses the entirety of life, not just particular events or seasons. Purpose in life concerns a sense of purposefulness and goal-directedness that encompasses one’s entire life, not just temporary endeavours.

The definition of purpose in life used in the current study is based on these three features, and borrows much of its language from Reker and Baumeister. Purpose will be defined as having life goals, a sense of direction toward the future, and the ability to interpret one’s current activities in relation to future or possible states.

It should be noted that a significant part of Reker’s definition has been excluded, namely the reference to actions receiving direction from the past. The reason for this is the theoretical perspective in this thesis, which postulates that purpose can be derived from other sources than one’s past.

1.5. Boundaries and limitations
There are several limitations regarding the scope and explanatory range of the study. Firstly, there are limitations due to choice of population and sample. While it would have been very interesting to research the correlation between belief and purpose in life in a large population containing many forms of religiosity and belief, the theoretical and methodological implications
of such a study are vast, going far beyond the resources allocated to this thesis. Therefore, the population was limited to individuals perceiving themselves as Christian.

Secondly, the access to Christian populations, at least the access to contact details, was submitted to the control of congregational gatekeepers, i.e. pastors. This led to some congregations choosing not to participate at all, while other limited their participation to a set number of members. An inclusion of more congregations would have enabled a more thorough study of differences between congregations.

Thirdly, the sample size was limited by the time-span of data gathering and the access to the congregations. No telephone calls were allowed to the members of the congregations, only contact through email and regular mail. This made follow-ups of non-responses more difficult, since there was never a confirmation of direct personal contact with the individuals who did not respond. For the quantitative phase of the study a total \( n \) of 40 was achieved, and for the qualitative phase, an \( n \) of 9. A larger sample with an equal representation of respondents from each congregation would have made possible statistical tests to check for statistical differences in responses between congregations, and not only in background variables such as age, gender and income.

Because of the limitations, the greater purpose of researching religious beliefs and purpose in life was limited to Christians in the age range of 25-40. However, due to the research design there remains a level of generalisability regarding the psychological dynamics and connections between religious beliefs and purpose in life.

1.6. Research Review

1.6.1. Literature search

The literature search was conducted using a two-pronged approach. Firstly, digital avenues were explored. Using the Uppsala University Library’s search engine for articles and digital books, sources with relevant subject matter for the thesis were sought out. The first search, including all available databases as well as the library catalogue, on the single word ‘meaning’, yielded 6 242 426 hits. No articles or books were included as a result of this search.

The search had to be narrowed down to yield a manageable amount of articles to peruse. This was done by firstly setting the search parameters to only include articles from peer-reviewed journals, only sources with full text available online, and limiting the types of publications to books and articles. This search, using the word ‘meaning’, yielded 1 385 544 hits, with no articles include.

More specificity in the searches was needed, and this was achieved by searching in individual databases using the same search parameters as before. First, PsycInfo was employed searching the word ‘meaning’. This yielded 21 897 hits. Many of the hits were still from other fields than psychology, but in this search several articles of interest were found. A total of 14 articles were included from this search. The relevance of the articles in the search declined markedly after the first 350 hits. Out of the 14 articles, 10 concerned meaning in life in relation to well-being or coping, 2 were studies of meaning in life in relation to religion, and 2 were reviews of literature on meaning in life in the field of psychology.

To further narrow down the search the words ‘meaning’ and ‘beliefs’ were used together, with the same search parameters, resulting in 1011 hits. From this search, 16 articles were included. Once again the majority (10 articles) were studies of meaning in relation to coping and well-being. 4 articles concerned the relationship between religiousness and meaning in life and the remaining 2 were studies of beliefs in relation to meaning and psychological meaning making processes.
This narrowing down of results using two-word searches proved to be very effective in finding relevant sources, and was used in all the remaining searches for digital literature. For a presentation of the searches conducted, see appendix 1. A total of 71 articles were included through the literature search.

In addition to the digital sources, handbooks and summaries were examined and evaluated. These books were available in libraries in the Swedish cities of Stockholm and Uppsala. Also, books from the personal library of the author were used. This literature search led to the inclusion of a total of 12 books as sources of research on religion and meaning.

1.6.2. Literature review

The following is a review of the articles and other literature found through the literature search. It will review past research on the topic of meaning and religion. The specific purpose is to review prior research on beliefs and purpose in life. This is done to provide a clear picture of the intended direction and purpose of the current study, to locate the study in the greater body of research, to frame and contextualise the study’s research questions in relation to other research, to show the need for further research, and to demonstrate how the present study will fill this need.

The review consists of four sections. The first section reviews research on religious beliefs (the independent variable of the study) and their impact on human psychology and behaviour. The second section reviews research on purpose in life (the study’s dependent variable). The third section reviews research on both beliefs and purpose in life that can be used as a point of comparison for the results and conclusions drawn in this study.

Lastly, the review will be summarised, focusing on the most relevant studies presented, the major themes of prior research, the position of this study in relation to the reviewed literature and the need for further research.

1.6.2.1. Independent variable: Religious beliefs

The literature on religious beliefs is multi-faceted, encompassing a wide range of scientific fields. The literature found in the literature search will here be categorised and presented according to two criteria. The first is the way in which the construct 'religious beliefs' is used in the study, depending on whether it is used as an independent or dependent variable. The reason for this criteria is firstly that it will aid in comparing this present study to prior research, and secondly that it will give an overview of the way the construct is perceived in the field in general. The second criteria of categorisation is the research topic of each study, with related topics being presented sequentially. The aim of this categorisation is to provide a sense of coherence and facilitate understanding of prior research on religious beliefs and the conclusions drawn from it.

In the literature search, 10 articles were found that presented research on religious beliefs. Out of these 10 articles, four used religious beliefs as an independent variable, three were reviews of research and/or theory on beliefs, and the other three had beliefs as a dependent variable. Out of the four studies who used beliefs as an independent variable, three had topics closely related to this study and will be presented in section 3 of the literature review. The final one is presented here.

Flannelly, Galek, Ellison and Koenig (2010) studied the influence of beliefs about God on mental health, specifically the severity of psychiatric disorders. Their hypothesis was that belief in God that leads to a sense of security counteracts psychiatric disorders that arise from beliefs about the world being overly dangerous. They conducted a quantitative study using data from the National Study of Religion and Health, a 2004 large-scale survey in the USA. The sample size was 1306 individuals from all 50 states of the USA (50% men, 50% women). The mean age of the
sample was 49.3 years (SD=17.4). 79% were Christians (55% Protestant, 24% Catholic, 0.9% Orthodox), 4.7% were reported as Jewish, 0.6% as Islamic. 3.1% reported other religious adherence, and 9.5% reported that they had no religious affiliation at all. Finally, 3.2% did not respond to the question of religious affiliation. The study found that belief in God as close and loving was significantly correlated with lesser degrees of severity of psychiatric symptoms. Belief about God as approving and forgiving, or creating and judging had little or no such correlation, supporting the hypothesis that belief that gives a sense of security can help to lessen effects of psychiatric disorders.

The following three studies all have beliefs as a dependent variable. Albrecht and Cornwall (1989) studied how positive and negative life events influence religious beliefs and practices. Their hypothesis was that the normal, daily experiences of life have an impact on religious beliefs. Some may strengthen them, while others may prompt a reevaluation of one’s beliefs. The study was conducted with quantitative methods, using a 32-item questionnaire mailed out to the potential respondents. The sample consisted of members from the Mormon church and was selected through random selection of 27 congregations in the USA. In these congregations, the bishop was approached to determine what subjects were active (defined as those attending church services at least once a month) and inactive (those who attended services rarely or not at all). After this categorisation, membership rosters were used to randomly select a sample of 1847 individuals, all over the age of 18. No other information on the sample was included in the article. The study found that life events, whether they are interpreted as having a religious meaning or not, influence religious beliefs. Negative life events led to a decrease in religious conviction, while positive life events led to an increase.

Benson and Spilka (1973) researched the way attitudes toward the self is associated with beliefs about God. The study was based on cognitive consistency theory. This theory postulates that information which contradicts one’s own view of oneself and one’s capabilities create an unpleasant cognitive dissonance. Therefore, an individual will try to harmonise incoming information to their attitudes by various filtering techniques, such as denial and selective perception. The researchers wanted to test whether this extended to beliefs about God. The hypothesis was that people’s attitudes toward themselves would influence their beliefs about God. A person with low self-esteem would find it harder to believe in a loving God than a person with high self-esteem. Similarly, a person who regarded themselves as having control over their lives would choose to accept a view of God as uncontroling and freeing, while another who did not think himself in control of his life would accept a view of God as directing much of his life, to counter cognitive dissonance. The study used 5 different quantitative instruments. The sample was taken from a Catholic high school, with the final sample consisting of 128 boys. Mean age was 15.4 years. The results supported the hypothesis of a connection between self-attitudes and beliefs about God, specifically between self-esteem and belief in a loving, kind God ($r = 0.51$, $p<0.01$ for Loving God scale and $r = 0.31$, $p<0.01$ for God as Kindly Father scale). Self-esteem also correlated negatively to the Vindictive God scale ($r = -0.49$, $p<0.01$), lending further support to this hypothesis. The results did not, however, support the hypothesis of sense of control being correlated to a certain belief in God as controlling or uncontrolling ($r = .02$).

Recently, some research in cognition has researched correlations between certain cognitive styles and religious beliefs. Willard and Norenzayan (2013) researched the relationship between certain cognitive biases, and beliefs and purpose in life (PIL). Based on an aggregate of several cognitive theories, which together postulate that religious belief emerges as from cognitive biases, such as mentalising, mind-body dualism, and teleological intuitions, they used path analysis to test whether cognitive bias was significantly correlated to beliefs and PIL. Using quantitative methods, they measured various aspects of cognitive bias, belief and purpose in
Two samples were used for the study. The first consisted of 492 undergraduate students from a university in Canada (mean age: 20.5 years, 23% male, 77% female), and the second of 920 adult Americans (mean age: 34.7 years, 34% male, 66% female). The results supported the path model constructed by the researchers: the foundation of mentalising, i.e. inferring or thinking about the mental state of other beings, led to other cognitive biases, which in turn was significantly correlated to religious belief, paranormal belief and purpose in life in the model presented in by the researchers. The strongest correlation was that between the cognitive bias of dualism (to postulate a clear delineation between body and mind) and beliefs (Sample 1: Religious belief, \( r = 0.41 \); Paranormal beliefs, \( r = 0.43 \); PIL: \( r = 0.49, p<0.01 \) for all. Sample 2: Religious belief, \( r = 0.42 \); Paranormal beliefs, \( r = 0.33, \) PIL, \( r = 0.39, p<0.01 \) for all). Another interesting result from the study, although not a part of the original aim of the study, was the correlation found between religious beliefs, specifically belief in God, and purpose in life. There was a high correlation in both samples (\( r = 0.62, p<0.01 \)).

### 1.6.2.2. Dependent variable: Purpose in Life

The research on purpose in life (PIL) is just as multifaceted as the research on beliefs, and the two topics connect theoretically at several points. Just like the research on beliefs, the research on PIL uses the construct mostly as a dependent variable. Out of the 16 articles found that presented research on PIL, only one has it as an independent variable, while the other 14 had it as a dependent variable. One article will be presented in section 3 as particularly relevant to the current study.

Something that needs to be considered when reviewing research on this topic is the conceptual overlap that exists between ‘purpose in life’ and ‘meaning in life’. The terms are sometimes used interchangeably (Crandall & Rasmussen, 1975; Soderstrom & Wright, 1977; Gruner, 1984; Dewitz et al., 2009) to signify an individual's perception that their life makes sense and that they have overarching goals to be achieved (Baumeister, 1991). The terms will not be used interchangeably in this study, and the definition of terms below will explain why. However, for the purpose of this literature review it will be assumed that they are used interchangeably in the articles, if the articles themselves do not specify a distinction between the terms or the conceptual disparity is deemed to great.

Firstly, a review of the article with purpose (meaning) in life as an independent variable. Stillman, Lambert, Fincham and Baumeister (2011) studied how meaning in life affects interpersonal appeal. Their hypothesis was built on Frankl's theory that a basic human drive is the will to meaning, to seek and find meaning (Frankl, 1946, 2004), and that meaning is often found through human relationships. Thus they postulated that people would seek relationships with people who have a high sense of meaning in life and that a person with a strong sense of meaning would be more attractive in interpersonal relationships. To test this, they conducted two quantitative studies with samples of undergraduate students. The first sample consisted of 70 undergraduate student (55 female, 15 male, age not reported) and the second of 72 undergraduate students (38 female, 36 male, age not reported). In the first study, the participants filled in questionnaires to report meaning in life. They were then filmed during an interaction with a friend. The second study was like the first one, but instead of being filmed while interacting with a friend, the participants recorded a 10 second video where they introduced themselves. The results from both studies showed that meaning in life was a significant predictor of interpersonal attraction (Study 1: \( B = 0.30, p<0.01 \). Study 2: \( B = 0.30, p<0.01 \)), showing that meaning in life was associated with interpersonal appeal.

Now follows a review of articles with PIL as a dependent variable. Crandall and Rasmussen (1975) studied the correlation between PIL and values, and between PIL and extrinsic and
intrinsic religiosity. They wanted to research the association between PIL, values and mode of religiosity to test Frankl's theory of meaning (Frankl, 1946, 2004). They conducted two studies, where the samples for the first consisted of 86 individuals (46 male, 40 female, age not reported) and the second of 71 individuals (34 male, 37 female, age not reported). In the first study they used quantitative methods to measure PIL and 18 existential and terminal values. From those 18 values, 4 (pleasure, comfort, excitement, salvation) produced significant differences between two groups, one with high PIL and one with low PIL. The values of pleasure, comfort and excitement were significantly more important for the group with low PIL, whereas the reverse was true regarding the value salvation. The second study also used quantitative methods to measure PIL and mode of religiosity. The results showed no significant correlation between extrinsic religiosity and PIL ($r = 0.002$), but a correlation between PIL and intrinsic religiosity ($r = -0.31, p<0.01$) where a low score indicated more intrinsic religiosity.

Soderstrom and Wright (1977) researched the association between mature religious commitment and purpose in life. They hypothesised, based on Frankl's (1946, 2004) theory of meaning, that mature religious commitment would aid people in making or finding meaning and purpose in life. Using quantitative methods, they measured religious orientation in three dimensions: Intrinsic and extrinsic (Allport, 1959), committed and consensual (Allen & Spilka, 1967), and vertical and horizontal (Davidson, 1972). They used a sample of 427 college students between the ages of 18 and 20. They found that an intrinsic, committed religious orientation was indicative of a higher purpose in life, with individuals in a group characterised by intrinsically motivated, committed religious involvement scoring significantly higher in PIL than other groups at $p<0.01$. The results led the researchers to the conclusion that a mature religious commitment should indeed be able to aid people in finding purpose in life.

Jacobson, Ritter and Mueller (1977) studied the effects of rehabilitation from alcoholism on PIL and values. Their aim was to test whether or not a rehabilitation program led to changes in PIL and values. Using a sample of 57 patients (49 male, 8 female, mean age 41 years ($SD = 11.9$), mean educational level 11.1 years ($SD = 2.4$), mean length of problem-drinking history 12.9 years ($SD = 9.7$) at a rehabilitation hospital in the USA, they used quantitative methods to measure PIL and values in the participants at the beginning (5-8 days after admission) and at the end of the program (24-28 days after admission). They found that PIL increased significantly for men ($t = 2.59, p<0.02$), while the increase was marginally significant for women ($t = 2.09, p<0.10$). PIL increased significantly for the whole sample ($t = 3.21, p<0.01$). The results show that one aspect of rehabilitation from alcoholism is the increase of PIL, the reasons for which the researchers did not comment on.

Gruner (1984) studied the impact of a drug rehabilitation program on PIL among the participants. The rehabilitation program was Teen Challenge, part of an international Christian rehabilitation organisation. The hypothesis being tested was that the program provided the participants with a sense of meaning and purpose in life, which facilitated rehabilitation. In other words, the study tested PIL as an operating variable in the rehabilitation process. The sample consisted on 128 individuals from six locations worldwide: India ($n = 18$, mean age = 22 years), Holland ($n = 21$, mean age = 19.5 years), Germany ($n = 17$, mean age = 20.4 years), France ($n = 16$, mean age = 23 years), Guam ($n = 26$, mean age = 19.6 years) and Hawaii ($n = 30$, mean age 21.3 = years). Using quantitative methods, these individuals were tested for PIL three times during their participation in the year program. The first time was within days of admission to the program, the second after 6 months and the third upon completion of the program. The results of the study showed a significant increase in PIL in all locations ($F = 325.33, p<0.01$), supporting the researcher’s hypothesis.
Paloutzian (1981) researched the effects of religious conversion on PIL and values. The study employed quantitative methods to measure PIL and values, and analysed this data in relation to participants' self-reports of religious conversion. The study's main interest was to measure how PIL was associated with religious conversion over time, that is, if PIL changed as a function of the time elapsed after the experience of conversion. The general hypothesis was that PIL would increase after conversion. The sample consisted of 91 individuals, with 40 being control subjects and 51 being experimental subjects, who self-reported as Christian believers. The subjects were divided into groups who self-reported as having been converted 1 week or less, 1 week to 1 month, 1 month to 6 months, and more than 6 months. The results of the study show a statistically significant difference in PIL between the groups, using a one-way ANOVA ($F = 5.5$, $p<0.001$). The difference was such that PIL was high in those converted up to 1 week, then decreased from 1 week to 1 month, and then increased from 1 month to 6 months, and stabilised there from 6 months forward. The results supported the hypothesis that PIL increases after conversion, but with some modifications, since PIL decreased after 1 week and increased again from 1 month onward.

Reker (1977) conducted a study to find out how the PIL scores of a population of inmates were correlated to measures of self-concept, locus of control, personality traits and various demographic variables. The sample consisted of 48 prison inmates (mean age = 24.25 years) sentenced to an average of 52 months of incarceration. The study employed quantitative methods to measure variables which were then subjected to various forms of statistical analysis. In addition to the analysis of the data from the inmates, the study used a t-test to analyse the means of PIL in the inmate population against a population of non-incarcerated individuals from a different study (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969). Reker found that PIL was positively correlated to a positive self-concept ($r = 0.61$, $p<0.001$), a positive view of life at present ($r = 0.45$, $p<0.01$) and life in the future ($r = 0.54$, $p<0.001$). PIL was inversely related to a high self-ideal self discrepancy, i.e. the was one perceives oneself as being the best one can be ($r = -0.40$, $p<0.01$). The results also showed a highly significant inverse correlation between PIL and locus of control ($r = -0.71$, $p<0.001$), where a higher sense of internal locus of control leads to a lower score. A higher PIL was thus correlated to a higher sense of internal locus of control. The t-test between the PIL means of inmates and the non-incarcerated yielded a significant difference in PIL ($t(805) = 4.72$, $p<0.001$).

McShane, Lawless and Noonan (1991) studied personal meaning in a population of shoplifters. Their aim was to see if PIL could be used to discriminate between shoplifters and non-shoplifters, with the hypothesis that shoplifters would have lower scores of PIL than non-shoplifters. Using Crumbaugh and Maholick’s Purpose in Life Test (1969) as well as Crumbaugh’s Seeking of Noetic Goals measure (Crumbaugh, 1977), the study measured PIL and the seeking of meaning in a sample of 75 shoplifters and 75 non-shoplifters, a total of 150 subjects (84 male, 66 female). The group of shoplifters consisted of 42 males (mean age = 40.21 years, 18-79 years old) and 33 females (mean age = 40.79, 18-88 years old). The non-shoplifter group consisted of 42 males (mean age = 22.14 years, 18-42 years old) and 33 females (mean age = 25.88 years, 18-42 years old). The study employed quantitative methods, specifically stepwise multiple discriminant analysis to predict the group membership of the subjects. The discriminant analysis was able to discriminate between shoplifters and non-shoplifters in 78% of the cases, based on PIL and SONG scores alone, which is statistically significant ($p<0.001$). The results also showed a significant difference in PIL in the sample means between shoplifters and non-shoplifter ($F = 37.91$, $p<0.001$), with shoplifters having lower PIL scores.

Debats (1999) studied the sources of meaning in life for young adults. The study used two samples, one consisting of patients from a psychiatric unit at a university, and one of non-
patients from a college. The aim was to explore the creation of meaning through relationships, and also to test three hypotheses. The first was that "relationships is the most frequent source of meaning in life", the second that "patients are less committed to their personal meaning than non-patients", and the third was that "Participants' LRI scores are related to the degree of their commitment to their personal meaning" (Debats, 1999: 34). The study used a mixed methods design with both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method was a questionnaire in which the participants were asked one open question about sources of meaning in their lives. The question was answered freely and openly, with no limits set on categories or other coding pertinent to the study. The answers were coded and categorised, and used to test the first hypothesis. The quantitative method consisted of the Life Regard Index questionnaire (Battista & Almond, 1973), which was filled out by all participants. This data was used to test hypothesis 2 and 3. The results of the study showed that relationships with other people was the most used source of meaning for a majority of the sample, confirming the first hypothesis. The most frequent sources of meaning were, in descending order, relationships, lifework, personal well-being and self-actualisation. The quantitative findings supported the second and third hypotheses, showing that there are significant differences ($t = -4.14, p<0.001$) between patients and non-patients in meaning and the commitment to personal meaning. Ergo, the psychiatric patients showed a lesser degree of perceived meaning in life and also a lesser commitment to the meaning they did perceive. The conclusions drawn in the study were that young adults find relationships to be the most significant source of meaning in life, and that individuals who manage to maintain significant relationships and also find fulfilment in their chosen career are more likely to maintain psychological health, while those who suffer from long-time unemployment and loneliness are more vulnerable to psychological pathologies and stresses.

Krause (2007) studied the effects of social support on meaning in life using quantitative, longitudinal data from a large survey on older adults (age over 65 years). The survey consisted of 5 waves of interviews, and the study used data from wave 4 ($n = 1518$) and 5 ($n = 1166$, from wave 4). After deletion of cases with item nonresponse, the total sample was 959 individuals. The mean age at wave 4 was 73.3 years ($SD = 6.7$, range = 65-98 years), with an average schooling of 12.3 years ($SD = 3.3$ years). 88% at wave 4 were White, 45% men, 55% women, 62% were married. The data and methods were quantitative. The data were gathered through interviews and measured meaning in life (values, purpose, goals and reflections on the past), enacted support (emotional support, tangible support, informational support), negative interactions and anticipated support. The data were analysed through various statistical methods, such as linear regression analysis and chi-tests. The results of the study showed that, of all the measures of enacted support, emotional support had the highest positive association with meaning in life ($\beta = 0.109, p<0.05$). Tangible support, on the other hand, had a negative association with meaning ($\beta = -0.136, p<0.01$) and informational support did not have a significant association at all ($\beta = 0.008, ns$). The results also showed that negative relational interactions was negatively associated with meaning ($\beta = -0.151, p<0.01$) and that anticipated future social support was highly associated with a higher sense of meaning in life ($\beta = 0.259, p<0.001$). The analysis also yielded results that showed the effects of social support on meaning over time, calculating the change in meaning between wave 4 and wave 5, as well as the effects of enacted support on anticipated support. The results showed that no types of enacted support had significant direct effects on changes in meaning. The results did however show several interesting indirect effects of enacted support on meaning. Since anticipated support was highly associated with a higher sense of meaning, the effect of enacted support on anticipated meaning was of interest to the results and conclusions of the study. The indirect effects proved
to be significant in the case of emotional support, which had a significant effect on anticipated support ($\beta = 0.381, p<0.001$), and also on meaning ($\beta = 0.145, p<0.001$), calculated with anticipated support as a mediating variable.

Krause (2008) researched the effect of spiritual and emotional support on religious meaning in life among older adults. The study’s aim was to find out how spiritual and emotional support from informal relations influenced a person’s meaning in life over time. It used quantitative methods and a latent variable model was used to test the hypothesis that increased church attendance leads to more informal spiritual and emotional support (support derived from situations outside the regular church programs). The data were longitudinal and gathered at two points (wave 1 in 2001, wave 2 in 2004) through structured interviews, from a sample of older adults, 66 years or older, in the USA. The sample size of wave 1 was 1500 adults (748 European Americans, 752 African Americans). The same sample was reinterviewed in wave 2, but due to various attritional factors the number of individuals was reduced to 1024. Further list-wise deletion of cases was done due to item nonresponse and the final analysis was based on 607 individuals. Mean age at wave 1 was 74 years ($SD = 5.9$ years), 37% were men, 45% were European americans. The sample had an average schooling of 12 years ($SD = 3.4$ years). The data were analysed mainly through regression analysis and chi tests. The results supported the hypothesis that increased church attendance was associated with more informal spiritual support ($\beta = 0.37, p<0.001$) and emotional support ($\beta = 0.17, p<0.001$). The analysis also showed that religious meaning at wave 1 was linked to more spiritual support ($\beta = 0.200, p<0.01$) and emotional support ($\beta = 0.159, p<0.001$). Another interesting result was that more spiritual support was associated with higher religious meaning at wave 2 ($\beta = 0.17, p<0.05$), while emotional support did not yield a significant association ($\beta = 0.03, ns$), leading to the conclusion that spiritual support impacts the maintenance of religious meaning over time, while emotional support seemingly does not. In summary, the results of the study supported the hypothesis of the connection between church attendance, spiritual and emotional support, and religious meaning in the life of older adults.

Dewitz, Woolsey and Walsh (2009) conducted a quantitative study of the correlation between PIL and self-efficacy, based on the Frankl’s theories of meaning in life (1946, 2004) and Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy. Using Crumbaugh and Maholick’s PIL test (1969) and three measures of self-efficacy (college, social and general self-efficacy) the study sought to test whether self-efficacy was positively associated with PIL. The study used a sample of 344 undergraduate students from a large university in the USA. 68% ($n = 233$) were female, 32% ($n = 111$) were male. Mean age was 19 years, with a range from 16 to 42 years. The data were analysed using correlational analysis, hierarchical regression analysis, and ANOVAs. The results showed that all three measures of self-efficacy were positively and significantly correlated to PIL (college: $r = 0.59$; social: $r = 0.53$; general: $r = 0.64, p<0.01$ for all). General self-efficacy was the most significant predictor of PIL, accounting for 41% of the variance. ANOVAs for groups of the 30% with the highest and 30% with lowest scores of the different measures of self-efficacy showed a significant difference in PIL between the two, for all measures ($p<0.001$). The results of the study showed that self-efficacy is highly associated with PIL, in line with the theoretical predictions of Baumeister (1991).

Duffy and Sedlacek (2010), using quantitative methods, researched the association between 6 variables: a sense of career calling, a search for career calling, a sense of meaning in life, a search for meaning in life, religiousness and life satisfaction. The study sought to replicate results from other studies where correlations had been found between these variables (Wrzesnieski et al., 1997; Dik et al., 2008, in Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010) in populations of adults. The sample was taken from a large university in the USA, with first-year students being the primary participants.
The total sample was 5523 individuals (51% male, 49% female) with a mean age of 17.88 years ($SD = 0.50$ years, range = 17-26 years). In the sample, 27% reported themselves as Protestant, 25% Catholic, 15% Jewish, 10% agnostic, 10% atheist, 5% no preference, 2% Muslim, 1% Hindu, 1% Buddhist and 4% did not report a religious preference. Using quantitative methods, the variables were analysed to determine whether correlations could be found. The study found that the presence of a sense of calling was negatively correlated to the search for such a calling ($r = -0.33, p<0.01$), and positively correlated to life meaning ($r = 0.39, p<0.01$), life satisfaction ($r = 0.16, p<0.01$), and religiousness ($r = 0.10, p<0.05$). The search for a career calling was negatively correlated to religiousness ($r = -0.18, p<0.05$) and life satisfaction ($r = -0.12, p<0.05$), and positively correlated to a search for meaning ($r = 0.28, p<0.01$). Other significant correlations were found between religiousness and life meaning ($r = 0.27, p<0.01$), and life meaning and life satisfaction ($r = 0.43, p<0.01$). The conclusions drawn were that there is significant overlap between the sense of calling and of meaning in life, as well as life satisfaction, and that the search for calling was associated with search for meaning. The search for a career calling could thus be a part of a search for meaning, and the presence of a sense of calling is linked to a sense of meaning in life.

Hedberg (2010) studied the correlation between purpose in life and mental health in older women and men. Using a cross-sectional design, Hedberg researched the levels of PIL in a sample of 189 individuals (120 women, 69 men, mean age 88.7 ($SD = 4.1$), using quantitative methods. Crumbaugh and Maholick’s PIL test (1969) was used to measure PIL as the dependent variable, and the Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale (PGCM) and the Göteborg Quality of Life Instrument were used for various health-related measures. The aim of the study was to see how PIL correlated with gender and various measures of health, both mental and physical, in a population of older adults. The study showed that women reported less PIL than men, and that this difference was significant (mean (women) = 102 vs. mean (men) = 108, $p<0.013$). All of the subscales of the PGCM were positively correlated to PIL (agitation: $r = 0.25, p<0.001$; attitude towards one’s own ageing: $r = 0.51, p<0.001$; lonely dissatisfaction: $r = 0.27, p<0.001$). Thus the results of the study showed differences in gender in relation to PIL, and PIL was positively correlated to all measures of positive mental health measures.

Finally, in a large, multinational, quantitative study, Oishi and Diener (2013) researched the connection between societal wealth and meaning in life. The study was aimed at testing whether religion and religiosity in a country acts as a mediating variable in the connection between wealth and meaning. The total sample was 141738 respondents (65830 men, 75883 woman, 25 non-responses) from 132 countries. These data were taken from Gallup survey that measured religiosity, meaning in life and social support. Other data were procured from multinational surveys measuring suicide rate (2011 WHO report, in Oishi & Diener, 2013), GDP per capita (World Bank, 2009, in Oishi & Diener, 2013), education (United Nations Development Programme, 2011, in Oishi & Diener, 2013), fertility rate (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011, in Oishi & Diener, 2013), and individualism (http://geert-hofstede.com/ countries.html, in Oishi & Diener, 2013). The data were analysed using a path model, mediation analysis, Pearson’s $r$ and regression analysis to ascertain whether the hypothesis was correct. The study found that all key variables were significantly correlated to meaning in life, among them religion ($r = 0.63, p<0.01$). After a regression analysis between religiosity and meaning in life, and using each key variable as a third variable in the analysis, religion was the most significant predictor of meaning in life. This confirmed the hypothesis that religion and religiosity mediates the relationship between societal wealth and meaning in life.
1.6.2.3. Research on the connection between religious beliefs and purpose in life

In this section, research will be reviewed that is closely related to this study, i.e. that uses belief as the independent variable and purpose in life as the dependent variable.

Schweiker (1969) studied the effect of religious belief and religious participation on the concept of integration, i.e. perceived meaning and purpose of everyday activities in relation to society and societal norms. The study was aimed at testing the hypothesis that religion functions as a superordinate meaning system that gives meaning not only to religious practices, but also to activities of everyday life. Schweiker measured intensity of religious belief, participation in religious and secular organisations, and integration. The sample consisted of 609 businessmen from Minnesota in the USA. No other demographic information was provided. The sample was divided into groups, first of high or low church participation, then these groups were in turn divided into high or low intensity of religious belief, resulting in a total of four groups. These for groups were analysed for Pearson’s r to find out how strong the correlations were between the measures of integration (meaning) and religious participation and intensity of beliefs. The results showed a significant difference between the group with high religious participation and high in intensity of beliefs, and almost all of the measures of the group with low religious participation and belief (p<0.008). High religious beliefs and participation was negatively correlated to all measures of negative integration (r = -0.25 for anomia, -0.29 for powerlessness and confusion, and -0.30 for need inviolacy, p<0.001) and positively correlated to morale (r = 0.21, p<0.001). In the group with low intensity of belief and high religious participation, the measures of integration were still significantly, but more weakly correlated to beliefs and participation (r = 0.07 for need inviolacy, -0.14 for powerlessness, -0.18 for anomia and bewilderment, p<0.001), while the groups of low church participation showed weaker correlation between all of the measures. The results supported the hypothesis that religion can indeed endow the everyday life with meaning.

Molcar and Stuempfig (1988) researched the association of world view with PIL in a sample of 201 university students (128 female, 73 male) in the USA. The aim was to test the hypothesis that different world views or belief systems have a direct impact on the level of PIL in their adherents. Two quantitative instruments were used for data gathering. The first was a single-item measure of world view, giving the participants the option to choose between five world views: Christianity, Deism, Naturalism, New Consciousness, and Other monotheisms. The second was Crumbaugh and Maholick’s PIL test (1969). ANOVAs were performed on the different self-reported groups of adherents to the five world views. The overall effect of world view on PIL proved to be non-significant (F(4, 196) = 2.40, p<0.05), but the item effect was highly significant (F(19, 3724) = 23.24, p<0.001) and the world view x item interaction almost reached significance (F(76, 3724) = 1.26, p<0.07). This prompted further analysis of the data, leading to a factor analysis of the items in the PIL. This yielded two distinct factors. Factor 1 "involved general feelings of satisfaction with life goals and meaning life" (Molcar & Stuempfig, 1988, p. 369) and factor 2 "dealt with a more "here and now" excitement with day-to-day living" (Molcar & Stuempfig, 1988, p. 369). When analysing the differences in factor 1 and factor 2 among the world view groups, significant differences were found between groups for factor 1 (F(4, 196) = 2.83, p<0.03), but not factor 2 (F(4, 196) = 0.72, p<0.50). Results also showed a significant difference for factor 1 between the combined monotheistic groups (Christianity, Other monotheisms) and Naturalism and Deism combined (p<0.05). The results showed that a worldview centred around a personal God was positively associated with PIL.

Fletcher (2004) conducted a qualitative study of the effects of religious belief on the creation of meaning in life. He interviewed 12 women between the ages of 70 and 94 years, using a semi-structured approach based on seven themes of religious belief and its relation to meaning.
The seven themes were (1) ownership of life and the function of God, (2) benefits of faith, (3) God’s role in everyday events, (4) fidelity of beliefs, (5) social and spiritual aspects of church involvement, (6) life meaning, and (7) expectations for afterlife. Each woman was interviewed once and the interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes. 10 of the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and two were recorded using extensive notes. The answers were ordered according to the seven themes, and based on the answers, each woman was categorised into one of three groups: belongers, doubters or believers. The answers were analysed mainly through the theories of Berger (1969, in Fletcher, 2004), Mead (1934, in Fletcher, 2004) and Stark (1999, in Fletcher, 2004). Fletcher found that the content of religious beliefs, as well as the certainty with which the beliefs are held, play an important part in the way belief is used to create meaning. In the group of ‘believers’ the religious beliefs were held with such certainty and confidence that they were able to provide a coherent sense of meaning through which all other aspects of life were interpreted and ordered. The religious belief and the relationship to a Divine other was the most significant factor in the creation of life meaning, and this meaning was more fully integrated in the view of self and in the social relationships in the lives of the ‘believers’. One reason for this could be that this group regarded the control of their lives to have been completely given over and submitted to the Divine other, which guided them in their everyday lives.

The ‘belongers’ had a more pragmatic view of religious belief, community and the ownership of their lives. Their beliefs were derived from many sources, some religious, some otherwise, and their constant negotiation of their view of a Divine other and their view of self provided a belief with less certainty than that of the ‘believers’. The lower level of certainty in their beliefs made them rely not only on their beliefs, but also on social relationships to provide them with meaning in life, and their pursuits were centred on outworking a perceived meaning through social relationships and service of others, and trying to fulfil an internal potential to please a Divine other with whom they had a very distanced relationship.

The ‘doubters’ had beliefs that resembled those of the ‘belongers’, in that it was not held with much certainty and compiled from a variety of sources, religious and secular. The ‘doubters’ had an even more distant relationship to a Divine other than the two other groups, with most of them not believing in a Divine other at all. Without this relationship, the ‘doubters’ relied even more on social relationships to give meaning to their lives. Their pursuits were guided by a belief that their legacy among their social relationships were most significant in life, not their performance or relationship to a Divine other. In summary, the results of the study showed that both the content and the certainty of beliefs held contributed to their impact on the individual’s creation of meaning in life.

Krause and Hayward (2012) studied the effects of different aspects of religion on meaning in life, and also the association of changes in meaning in life with changes in physical functioning. They used a quantitative, longitudinal design to research this, conducting interviews in 6 waves. The samples of each wave consisted of older adults who were non-institutionalised, 65 years or older, retired and English-speaking. 1103 individuals were interviewed for the first wave of interviews in 1992-1993, 605 were re-interviewed for the second wave in 1996-1997, and 530 for the third wave in 1998-1999. A total of 1581 individuals were interviewed for wave 4 in 2002-2003, of whom 269 had participated in the earlier waves. 1166 of these were re-interviewed for wave 5 and 1011 for wave 6. The mean age of all participants was 79 years (SD = 7.4 years), 37% were men and 63% women. The data gathered during the interviews measured the following: functional disability (How well older people could perform everyday tasks), church attendance, close relationship with God, emotional support to others (the extent to which the participants provided emotional support to others), and meaning in life. Using regression...
In summary, the literature on religious beliefs and purpose in life is diverse and features a multitude of perspectives. The articles in the review ranges from the field of neuropsychology to oncology and gerontology.

What can be ascertained from this review is that even with a focus on the association of religion and meaning, the research is fragmented and lacks clarity regarding the central concepts and definitions. Also, the theoretical perspectives available for studying meaning and religion have in the past been inadequate to fully encompass the complexity of the phenomena.

Results that are of special salience to the current study, and which will be used as references, are Crandall and Rasmussen’s (1975) results of a significant correlation between intrinsic religiosity and purpose in life ($r = -0.31, p<0.01$), Duffy & Sedlacek’s (2010) correlation between religiousness and life meaning ($r = 0.27, p<0.01$), and Oishi & Diener’s (2013) meaning in life x religion: $r = 0.63, p<0.01$. All of these results show a significant, positive (Crandall & Rasmussen used an inverted measure of religiosity) correlation between religiosity and purpose in life. This correlation will be tested in through the hypothesis in the current study. The first research question only has one result in the literature review which can be used for comparison of the
correlation between specific religious beliefs and purpose in life: Willard and Norenzayan’s (2013) finding of a significant correlation between belief in God and PIL ($r = 0.62, p<0.01$).

The results of the second research question can be compared to Fletcher’s (2004) qualitative study with regard to the ways in which religious beliefs impact one’s view of meaning in life. Fletcher found that the ways in which individuals relate to religious beliefs impact their understanding and construction of meaning in life. The analysis also showed that both the content of the beliefs and the conviction with which the beliefs are held impact the processes of meaning making. While the current study will not use the categories in Fletcher’s study, the results can still be meaningfully compared.

With regard to the results mentioned above, the literature review shows that the current study has several points of connection with prior research, but also some areas where its results will contribute with new knowledge.
2. Theory

In this chapter, the theory used in this thesis will be presented. The chapter consists of four sections. Section 1 consists of a presentation of the theories, section 2 of theoretical considerations of the study, including critiques of the theories used, section 3 of an analysis of the compatibility between the theories used, along with a motivation for using them in tandem in research. Finally, section 4 presents a consolidation and summary of the research model of this thesis. It contains a visual presentation of the theoretical research model, of the different phases of the research and the theoretical perspectives employed.

2.1. Presentation of theory

2.1.1. Theory use in phase 1

The theoretical foundation for this study is meaning system theory, specifically Paloutzian’s (2005) meaning systems model, based on Baumeister’s (1991) seminal work on meaning. In phase 1 of the study, postulates on relationships between religious beliefs and purpose in life will be researched with quantitative methods.

2.1.1.1. Baumeister’s Meanings of Life

An oft-cited source in the study of meaning is Baumeister’s Meanings of Life (1991). It is a summary of contemporary research on meaning in the social sciences. Baumeister also provides a theoretical foundation for the understanding of meaning in psychology, by building on existing research.

Baumeister begins by stating that "meaning connects things" (Baumeister, 1991, p. 15). The term ‘meaning’ is defined as "shared mental representations of possible relationships among things, events and relationships" (Ibid, p. 15). He uses the metaphor of a web, where points are connected to each other. The more points available, the more connections are possible and the more complex the web. So it is with meaning. The human psychological exercise of creating meaning consists of creating and maintaining perceived connections between mental representations.

According to Baumeister, meaning has two primary functions for human beings: external and internal adaption. Internal adaption concerns the understanding of one’s inner states. By making connections between different states and stimuli, and learning to control oneself, meaning enables a person to live a life above and beyond the seeking the experience of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Thus the human being can live for more long-term goals, forsaking short-term pleasure for more desirable states.

External adaption concerns the understanding and manipulation of the external. Meaning facilitates adaption to external circumstances through recognition of patterns and connections in the environment, enabling adaption to and utilisation of the environment. An example is agriculture, where patterns of weather, sowing, growth and harvesting all need to be recognised and understood to be manipulated in a beneficial way. External adaption also includes social adaption, where meaning, in the form of language and systems of knowledge, enables groups to develop meaning and knowledge socially, over several generations, giving rise to increasingly complex systems. Human civilisation, with its multitude of complex systems, is a product of the human ability to create increasingly higher levels of meaning.

In Baumeister’s theory, these ‘levels of meaning’ are a natural outcome of the human ability to create meaning. A web of meaning can begin with connections between a few points, but as more knowledge is gained about oneself and the environment, more points are created and more connections can be made. Over time, levels of meaning emerge, when several webs of
meaning are interconnected, and a web of webs is created. An example of this is modern science, which consists of a multitude of areas and fields that are all subsumed under the heading of ‘science’. The levels of meaning roughly correspond to the scope of space and time which they encompass. Low level meanings are often more specific and normally concern only a small amount of space and time. The higher levels of meaning are more wide-ranging in their scope. Examples of higher levels of meaning can be found in many of the major religions of the world, and their grand, overarching narrative, encompassing the entire history of the universe, from its beginnings to its eventual end.

Baumeister makes another point regarding the distinction between high and low levels of meaning: meaning exists and changes according to the networks or contexts in which it resides. Meaning can be very different in different networks of ideas and different contexts of space and time. For example, a chess move only makes sense within the context of a game of chess. More specifically, depending on which game of chess it concerns, it can be a good move, a bad move, or an impossible move. A specific chess move only makes sense in the network of ideas which comprise the game of chess, and also depends on the context (the specific space and time) in which the game is played.

Baumeister goes on to talk about meaning as a social and individual enterprise. Meaning, as a social phenomenon is "owned by the culture and society and passed along to each new member" (Baumeister, 1991, p. 26). Meaning, on an individual level also involves an interpretative process, as "making use of meaning involves interpretation. Interpretation is a matter of processing things and events with meaning" (Ibid, p. 24). Thus, meaning is preserved and transmitted by a culture and society, and interpreted and negotiated by the individuals residing within that culture and society. Baumeister mentions "ideologies", signifying large networks of ideas with high levels of meaning that shape and affect entire societies. Ideologies are large networks of meaning prescribing certain interpretations of meaning. These interpretations are founded on a value base, which is formed through other interpretation of the nature of the universe and the things therein. Marxism is an example of an ideology with a particular value base. Marxism is an ideology, where Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ interpretations of the world and its history serve as a basis. The value base (in a simplified form) can be said to be Marx and Engels’ interpretation of the driving forces of the world, i.e. materialism, class struggle, revolution and an eventual proletarian rule. These form the central interpretative tenets upon which Marxism is built. Another example is Christianity, where the value base is God. In Christianity, the interpretations, derived from holy scriptures or other divine inspiration, are seen as prescriptive for interpreting life, thoughts, behaviours, etc. As an ideology gains followers, it increases its power to affect society, and thereby be transmitted to later generations in that society.

In the final part of his theory of meaning, Baumeister elaborates on where meaning resides. He states the "one locus of the meaning of someone’s life is in that person’s own mind. People will act on the basis of how they interpret their own lives, circumstances, and activities" (Baumeister, 1991, p. 27) and further that meanings “exist in people’s minds, as well as in the social structures and institutions people create” (Ibid, p. 27). Thus meaning is defined as a psychological (and peripherally sociological) construct.

Baumeister goes on to theorise about the needs for meaning, i.e. the psychological needs that meaning must meet. If the needs are met, the individual will most likely feel that their life has meaning. If the needs are not met, then the individual will feel a lack of meaning in life. He postulates four needs for meaning: purpose, value, efficacy and self-worth. Baumeister thus makes a distinction between meaning in life and purpose in life, a distinction which will be maintained in this thesis.
The first need for meaning in Baumeister’s theory, purpose, or purposiveness, is “the need to see one’s activities as oriented toward a purpose”, and “to interpret one's current activities in relation to future or possible states” (Baumeister, 1991, p. 32). Purpose signifies that “the person’s current activities derive meaning from the ideas of possible future event, states, or outcomes” (Ibid, p. 36). Thus, purposiveness concerns activities and their connection to an anticipated future. This definition raises an important point in the metaphor of meaning created through connecting mental representations. Baumeister postulates that the connections between the points in the web are not just in the present, but also reach into the past and the future. The connections thus have a temporal element. Purpose involves connecting activities to the future and the past. For example, retribution for past actions can give purpose to activities, giving them direction toward a desired future outcome.

The second need for meaning is value. He defines the need for value as “people’s motivation to feel that their actions are right and good and justifiable. They need to see their current actions as well as their past acts as not being bad and objectionable, and they want to see their life as having positive value” (Baumeister, 1991, p. 36). For an individual to fully experience life as meaningful, their actions have to be judged as positive and valuable in relation to a value system, which ultimately derives its meaning from a value base. A value base is perceived as a foundational source of value, providing an interpretative foundation for value, but is not itself dependent on an outside source for its value. For example, the value base in religion is often some form of deity, often perceived as the source of all everything. Using again the metaphor of a web of meaning, a value base can be said to be a point in the web from which other points (objects, events, activities or relationships) get their value. It is the standard against which the individual evaluates itself and the world. A sense of meaningfulness arises if an individual acts in accordance with the standards derived from one’s value base.

The third need for meaning is efficacy. It is defined as “feeling capable and strong” (Baumeister, 1991, p. 41). Efficacy is part of the individual’s sense of participation in the meaning of his/her life. An individual may very well understand what its meaning of life is, but lacking the capacity to live out this meaning will lead to dissatisfaction. Efficacy is intimately tied to both purpose and value. If one perceives oneself as having a purpose in life but finds that one is unable to live out this purpose, this will lead to significant dissatisfaction. In the same way, if your value base prescribes certain behaviour, but you are unable to comply with the prescription, this will also lead to dissatisfaction.

The fourth and final need in Baumeister’s theory is self-worth. He writes that “people need to find some basis for positive self-worth. People seek some criteria according to which they can regard themselves and convince others to regard them positively” (1991, p. 44). Much like value, self-worth is founded on a value base. Baumeister discusses the increasing complexity of finding self-worth in today’s modern western society. A powerful source of self-worth has in past times been one’s place in a rigid system of social hierarchy. However, modern society has in many ways made it harder for people to find a stable sense of self-worth, due to social mobility and the obscuring of clear boundaries between social classes, as well as a fragmentation of old, stable systems of meaning (Berger, 1967, 1990). Therefore, the methods of obtaining and maintaining self-worth are more multifaceted in today’s western society. People define themselves by the accumulation of wealth, or moral superiority, or race, or particular achievements, or a host of other markers (and most often a combination of many of them). There is however one aspect of the quest for self-worth that does seem to remain unchanged. This is the distinction of oneself and one’s group in relation to other groupings or individuals. Some level of self-worth is always obtained by being "not them", where "them" is a group that one considers to be below oneself and one’s group. This stratification for the purpose of creating
self-worth can be found among all social groups. The need for self-worth thus seems to be a powerful motivation in the psychology of individuals and groups, and part of the basic need for meaning.

2.1.1.2. Paloutzian’s meaning system theory
Baumeister’s theory of meaning is a good foundation for a basic understanding of meaning in human psychology. However, his theory does not provide any kind of model of how meaning is created in the human psyche, or what the building blocks of meaning are. From the postulate that meaning connects things, no further elaboration is made regarding how mental representations are connected, or regarding any larger categories of mental representations which constitutes elements of meaning. As such, research on meaning based on Baumeister’s theory alone would not be able to give added insight into the construction and maintenance of meaning in human psychology. But researchers have developed theories based on Baumeister’s foundation which are better suited to researching meaning empirically. This study will employ one of these theories: Paloutzian’s (2005) meaning system theory. This theory is based on a view of meaning as consisting of several psychological constructs that together form a system, from which meaning is derived. Paloutzian’s theory enables the kind of research that has been presented as lacking in prior studies, i.e. research on specific elements and aspects of both meaning and religion.

Park (2005), Silberman (2005) and Paloutzian (2005) have all created meaning system theories and operationalisations of meaning based on Baumeister’s theory. Paloutzian’s theory was chosen for this study for two reasons. The first is that Paloutzian’s model was developed with a focus on the effects of religious belief and changes in religious belief. Park’s model is built to be able to analyse religion in relation to coping and coping strategies, and Silberman’s model is focused on sociopsychological factors involved in the analysis of the meaning system. For the purpose of this thesis, which focuses on the effects of religious belief on an individual’s purpose in life, Paloutzian’s model is the most well-developed and conceptually adequate. The second reason is that Paloutzian’s is the only model that explicitly postulates connections and effects between the elements of a meaning system. Park’s and Silberman’s models include some references to the way in which elements of a meaning system are interrelated, but none are as explicit or as firmly supported by prior research as Paloutzian’s model. Thus, Palotzian’s model is the most useful in terms of studying the relationship between religious beliefs and purpose in life.

Paloutzian’s meaning system model consists of 7 elements: beliefs, attitudes, values, goals, overall purpose, self-definition and ultimate concerns. The element of ‘beliefs’ refers to what a person regards as existing, true and real. Religious belief often has an added dimension of belief which also include putting one’s trust in the thing in which one believes. Belief in supernatural beings and phenomena are not the only form of belief. This also include things in the natural world that one regards as existing, true and real. In short, beliefs are the mental representations of the all the things that make up the individual’s perception of the world, whether regarded as real or theoretical. Closely linked to beliefs is the second element postulated by Paloutzian: attitudes. Attitudes are “evaluative components of social cognition (broadly construed) that are comprised of cognitive, affective, and behavioural tendency components” (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 340). If beliefs are mental representations of all the things that make up the individual’s perception of the world, attitudes are the ways in which the individual regards these beliefs. Attitudes include positivity and negativity, hostility and benevolence, and a host of other attitudinal positions. Paloutzian’s emphasises that attitudes and beliefs are intimately connected, and that it is not always easy to conceptually distinguish between the two.
The third element is values. According to Paloutzian, values “function as overall guides for setting priorities and for making attitudinal and behavioural choices; thus attitudes and behaviours can be regarded as expressions of values” (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 340).

The fourth element is goals. This is the component of a meaning system that is most closely linked to behaviour, because it decides and guides the everyday life of the individual. Goals are things which the person strives toward, ranging from everyday concerns to the overarching life goals of the individual. Emmons, cited by Paloutzian, defines goals as “what a person is typically or characteristically trying to do” (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 341). Goals guide the day-to-day behaviour of the individual, and are an expression of values and overall purpose.

Overall purpose is the fifth element of Paloutzian’s model. It is described as being what “a person values and strives to fulfil at a higher and more encompassing level” (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 342). Overall purposes often guide the aforementioned goals, and can give meaning to the most mundane daily tasks, if these tasks are perceived as being connected to the fulfilment or achievement of one’s overall purpose. Because overall purpose concerns the higher and more encompassing levels of a person’s life, it is often intimately connected to a person’s ultimate concern, the seventh element in Paloutzian’s model.

The sixth element is self-definition. Self-definition can be defined as the way in which the individual views him- or herself. Other terms that are sometimes used are ‘sense of self’ and ‘core identity construct’. The central concept being expressed is the way in which an individual perceives him- or herself in relation to one’s perception of the world. Religious belief in a sacred or spiritual reality makes a person put themselves in relation to this reality and affects the way in which they perceive themselves and their overall purpose. Paloutzian mentions research on religious conversion which shows that a religious conversion affects self-definition in profound ways, resulting in reports of greater personal competence, lower levels of stress, a new relationship with God and a sense of love and security.

The seventh and last element is ultimate concerns. Paloutzian does not define this explicitly, but simply states that ultimate concerns are “the most global, encompassing aspects of a person’s meaning system and would likely be the most difficult to alter” (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 343). The ultimate concern is just that: what a person regards as of ultimate concern, for themselves and for the world. This ultimate concern touches upon several other elements in the model, but stands apart as a focal point of meaning in the entire system.

2.1.2. Theory use in phase 2 - Adding narrative theory

Baumeister’s theory likens meaning to a web, with points and connections. In the context of this study, the first phase will research the points (beliefs) and their correlation to one aspect of meaning made from them: purpose in life. The second phase of the study will explore how the beliefs are employed in the construction of a sense of purpose in life. To do this, narrative theory and methods will be added as a complement to meaning system theory. The rationale for this is the following: Meaning system theory provides a framework to study the components that together form a person’s system of meaning. This enables the study of the relationship between these components. However, it lacks a theoretical and methodological perspective to analyse and interpret qualitative data on how and why these connections are made. For example, research has shown that religious beliefs lead to an increase in sense of purpose in life (Paloutzian, 1981), but has yet to show how religious beliefs are involved in processes of meaning making for the creation of purpose in life. A narrative, connective approach provides such a lens. Through the postulate of narrative as an organising principle that guides the psychological processes of meaning making, the use of narrative theory and the analysis of narrative data can illuminate the processes behind the connections made in a meaning system.
2.1.2.1. Narrative as a vehicle of meaning

Along with a growing interest in the study of meaning has come a perceived need for the use of diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives in the research on meaning, to gain a fuller understanding of the psychological dynamics of meaning. Many (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009) have prescribed a relaxing of strict adherence to positivist perspectives (which rely heavily on quantitative methods) and have proposed an inclusion of other perspectives that are better suited for use in both quantitative and qualitative inquiry. For example, Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) have called for a new multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm, where perspectives from both quantitative and qualitative methods are included. Such a paradigm would open up new vistas for understanding the varied phenomena and effects found in the research on religion and meaning. Also, the study of meaning in psychology is intrinsically focused on the experience of the individual (Baumeister, 1991), and as such needs to incorporate theoretical perspectives and methods that are able to plumb the depths of subjective human experience.

One such theoretical perspective is the narrative approach in psychology. With the rising interest in meaning, narrative theory and methods have also seen a rise in prominence. Narrative theory (Ricoeur, 1984, 1990; Sarbin, 1986) focuses on the ways that people make use of and construct narratives to create order and meaning in their experience of the world. Like meaning system theory, narrative theory postulates that meaning is made through connections (Johansson, 2005). Narrative theory postulates that one of the basic psychological processes for creating understanding and meaning is the construction of a coherent, future-oriented life narrative. People create meaning through creating stories about themselves and the world which they perceive themselves a part of (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000; Johansson, 2005), through connecting objects, people, and events into chronologically and causally coherent narratives.

Narrative theory can be divided according to two assumptions about the nature of narrative and narrative knowledge. The first is to view narrative as a discursive form. In this view, narrative is simply one of many forms of organisation of speech or text. It is distinct from other forms of organisatory strategies, such as a philosophical argument, or a judicial letter, but is part of the same category.

The second view of narrative is a continuation and development of the first. It considers narrative as ontologically constitutive of social and individual life. This perspective regards narrative as an organising principle in human psychology, through which we understand the world, create meaning and make behavioural decisions in everyday life. The current study will hold to this second view. As such, the narrative, connective statements made in speech and writing are seen as an expression of a person’s perceived meaning.

The second phase of this study will employ narrative theory and methods to gain a deeper understanding of the results from the first, quantitative phase. The purpose is to explore people’s experience “behind” the quantitative data, and study how religious beliefs are used to make meaning. The specific narrative theory used in this study is Labov’s (1972, in Johansson, 2005) theory of narrative structure, complemented by Robinson’s (2011) relational analysis.

2.1.2.2. Labov’s theory of narrative structure and Robinson’s relational analysis

In 1972, sociolinguist William Labov published a highly influential article (Labov, 1972, in Johansson, 2005) on the syntax of narrative. In it, he proposed that a narrative can be deconstructed into 6 elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. A fully-formed narrative is one that contains all the parts (although many narratives do not).
In Labov's narrative syntax, an abstract is the start of a story that signals that the story is about to begin and is intended to draw the attention of the listener. An orientation is aimed at orienting the listener in the story, regarding place, time, people and things involved. A complicating action is the element that sets in motion the events of the story. It is an event which prompts some form of movement or action in the narrative. The resolution is the final key event of the story, where the consequences of the complicating action are resolved. It describes what happened in relation to the complicating action. The coda is the final part of the story. It is similar to the abstract, but instead of signalling the beginning of the story, a coda signals that the story has ended. The evaluation, or evaluative statements in the story do not have a specific part in relation to the other elements. Evaluations can be related to any part of the story and is a comment by the narrator or a person in the story regarding someone or something in the narrative. The purpose of evaluative statements vary, but they often serve to emphasise certain points or pieces of information in the narrative. Labov makes a further distinction between external and internal evaluation, where external evaluations are made from the narrator’s perspective, and internal evaluations are more from the perspective of something or someone in the narrative. Labov’s theory of narrative elements will be used to analyse the qualitative data in phase 2 of the current study.

Labov’s theory will be complemented by Robinson’s relational analysis. This will give an added dimension to the narrative analysis, in that it will enable analysis of both narrative structure and the relationship between concepts expressed in the text. The relational analysis is the analysis of relational forms between concepts expressed in qualitative data, and is used to analyse connections on a more detailed level than Labov’s narrative structure. The relational analysis is based on 10 Key Relational Forms (KRF) that can exist between concepts. Both Labov’s theory and Robinson’s mode of analysis fit under the umbrella of narrative theory and methods, with Robinson’s functioning as a complementary analysis to give added depth to the analysis. Both are presented in more detail in chapter 3.

Labov’s theory and the relational analysis are theoretically linked to the foundational postulates of both meaning system theory and narrative theory, namely that meaning connects things and that a basic form of meaning making in human psychology is the construction of narratives. It is on this basis that Labov’s theory and relational analysis are used.

2.2. Theoretical considerations

2.2.1. Considerations and critique regarding meaning system theory

The theoretical foundation for this thesis is Baumeister’s (1991) theory of meaning, and Paloutzian’s (2005) meaning system theory and model. Paloutzian’s meaning systems model, based on Baumeister’s theory, is the operational model through which meaning will be understood and researched.

Paloutzian’s model has mainly been used for reviews of prior research and in the research review for this study, no original research was found that uses Paloutzian’s model. Therefore, the use of Paloutzian’s model and components of a meaning system will be interesting, in that it will be among the first times that the model has been used as a foundation for research, and not as an analytical perspective of prior research. This also poses several challenges. Firstly, the operationalisations of Paloutzian’s model have not been tested, nor have instruments been developed specifically to measure Paloutzian’s components of meaning. The components will be explored through instruments based on other theories of meaning. This can cause a challenge to the validity of the study, particularly regarding the measurement of purpose in life. After an analysis of the definition of ‘purpose’ used by Paloutzian and the three features found in both Baumeister’s, Paloutzian’s and Reker’s definitions, some conceptual disparity between the
three definitions has been found, but deemed to be sufficiently overlapping to enable the use of measures from one theory to measure the construct of purpose in another.

Secondly, Paloutzian’s model was developed in the context of research on religious conversion and spiritual transformation. This differs from the direction of this thesis, and could become an issue with regards to the way in which the theory is designed to be used. Paloutzian explicitly states that his model is designed to analyse change in a meaning system, in situations and processes of religious conversion and spiritual transformation, while the current study researches meaning making processes in situations with a stable, religious meaning system. However, Paloutzian proposes that a necessary direction for a deeper understanding of religious conversion and spiritual transformation in a meaning systems framework is a general understanding of the relationships between components in a meaning system. Thus, the direction of research in this thesis can be seen as a sort of “basic research” in meaning system theory, in line with Paloutzian’s suggested directions of future research. In the light of the considerations above, the challenges of using Paloutzian's model can also be seen as possibilities, a view supported by Paloutzian himself.

Another challenge in using Paloutzian’s model in a mixed methods study is the lack of theory regarding the processes of meaning making. Meaning system theory postulates that meaning is a result of psychological processes and that these psychological processes involve the seven elements of Paloutzian’s model. However, it says nothing further about these psychological processes. To research this and provide an answer to the second research question, additional theory and conceptualisation is required. Therefore, the study needs the addition of narrative theory for phase 2.

2.2.2. Considerations and critique regarding narrative theory
Narrative theory, in this study operationalised through Labov’s theory of narrative structure and Robinson’s relational analysis, is used to explore meaning making processes and the ways in which religious beliefs are involved in these. Most of the critique raised against narrative theory concerns the validation of narrative methods and the validity of qualitative data in general. As such, much of this section is devoted to presentations of the interpretative philosophy and assumptions and the theoretical foundation of the validity of the qualitative phase.

One possible critique that does not concern arguments of validity is the fact that neither Labov’s theory nor relational analysis explicitly state how meaning making processes are related to their theoretical constructs or operationalisations. However, this level of theory within the narrative approach to psychology is situated on a higher theoretical level (presented in section 2.1.2.). As such, both Labov’s theory and the relational analysis are second-level theoretical constructs and operationalisations based on the premises of foundational narrative theory, which does conceptualists meaning making.

2.3. The compatibility between meaning system theory and narrative theory
The use of Paloutzian's meaning system model together with narrative theory and methods is, as far as the research review shows, a novel enterprise. The methodological challenges in combining the quantitative and qualitative data in the study will be discussed below in chapter 3. In this current section, the compatibility of meaning system theory and narrative theory will be discussed. First, the epistemological roots of the theories will be explored, followed by conceptual differences and similarities, and ending with an argument for the complementary value of using narrative theory together with meaning system theory. The theories will be
analysed on two levels. Firstly, on the paradigmatic level, to ascertain whether they both can be categorised under the same metatheoretical paradigm. Secondly, they will be analysed in regard to their conceptual content and possible joint uses in research.

2.3.1. Paradigmatic analysis
Meaning system theory has its roots in an aggregate of theories. Foremost among them are anthropological analysis of culture (Geertz, 1973), theories of social cognition (Higgins, 2000), and coping theory (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Pargament, 1997). However, since proponents of meaning system theory often espouse an integrative agenda, other theories and data are frequently cited regarding each component of a meaning system (e.g. Emmons, 1999, 2000, on purpose and ultimate concerns, and Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, on beliefs). Despite the disparate sources, meaning system theory fits into a social constructionist paradigm of epistemology and cognition, according to four characteristics of that paradigm proposed by Burr (1995, in Johansson, 2005, p. 25):

1. A critical attitude to truth and knowledge - ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ are not objective representations of a world ‘outside’ of ourselves. Instead, the creation of knowledge and perceived truth is an active process, where our preconceptions and biases received from socialisation play a crucial part in shaping a context-specific view of ourselves and the world.

2. Knowledge as contextually specific - our knowledge of the world is always shaped by our historical and cultural context. Knowledge is contingent upon context, and does not represent some form of essential or ultimate truth.

3. Knowledge as a result of social processes - our perception and knowledge of the world is created and maintained through social interactions and processes.

4. Knowledge results in social action - our contextually specific perception and knowledge of the world leads us to certain actions, that in turn are part of the creation and maintenance of knowledge. Thus the social construction of knowledge results in physical action.

Meaning system theory postulates that meaning is created and learned in the mind of the individual through social interaction, but also through the individual’s own interpretative psychological processes. Meaning is thus a result of social processes and is therefore contextually contingent. According to Burr’s characteristics, this situates it within the social constructionist paradigm.

The roots of the narrative approach to theory and methods can be found in linguistics and literature studies. Through the work of structuralist and post-structuralist theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Jaques Derrida and Michel Foucault, the role of language and narrative structures have been reevaluated in the social sciences. In both psychology and sociology there has been an increasing interest in language and narrative as constituents of social and individual reality (Sarbin, 1986; Johansson, 2005). Other fields have also contributed to this development, among them the sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). As mentioned above, narrative theory and method consist of a collection of theories and methods concerned with the exploration of narrative forms, functions and expressions. The use of narrative in the social sciences can be said to fall into the paradigm of social constructionism, again based on Burr’s four characteristics. Narrative theory views narrative as constitutive of social reality (Sarbin, 1986), and that narrative is a basic organising principle in a person’s psychology. Thus knowledge is both a result of social processes and contextually specific (Crossley, 2000; Johansson, 2005), and resulting in social action (Crossley, 2000).
Based on this analysis of compatibility, meaning system theory and narrative theory shares several traits on a paradigmatic level and can be categorised under the same paradigm, opening possibilities for conceptual and practical compatibility.

2.3.2. Analysis of conceptual content and possible uses in research
This section will look first at the differences, then the similarities in regards to conceptual content and uses in research of meaning system theory and narrative theory. It will then argue for their compatibility, and give a rationale for using them in tandem in a mixed methods study.

Firstly, differences between the theories. The theories have followed different pathways of development and are influenced by different theoretical assumptions. Apart from the superficial differences in theory and terminology, the major difference stems from the central constructs of each theory and the conceptual and practical consequences of these constructs. In meaning system theory, the categories and components of what constitutes a meaning system are clearly defined, and are intended to be used deductively to interpret data (Paloutzian, 2005; Silberman, 2005). Although there are some differences in the exact definitions used in the different meaning system models, the models all cover the same conceptual ground (Paloutzian, 2005) and are also in agreement regarding the basic delineations between components of a meaning system. The theory postulates a system which, in comparison to narrative, is conceptually rigid and well-defined. The theory lends itself to deductive approaches and is useful for theory generation and testing (Paloutzian, 2005; Silberman, 2005).

Narrative theories are much less rigid in their approach to central constructs and theoretical concepts (Johansson, 2005). Indeed, even the definition of what constitutes a narrative changes between specific narrative theories. However, the lack of a single specific definition of narrative reflects the view that narrative is an ontological aspect of social reality and cannot be regarded merely as a single theoretical construct. Instead, narrative is often perceived as more than a construct: it is an organising principle (Sarbin, 1986; Somers, 1994) in personal and collective psychology. This postulate gives the narrative approach the ability to go beyond preconceived constructs or categories and the methodology gives the subjects a high degree of freedom in expressing their meaning interpretations of themselves and the world (Johansson, 2005).

The two theories also have conceptual similarities. Like the differences, these similarities are a product of central constructs and postulates. Firstly, both theories postulate a basic, ongoing psychological process whereby the individual creates meaning through the creation of a coherent system or narrative. In both theories, meaning is a product of this psychological process. Narrative postulates that the organising principle behind the creation of coherence is the narrative form, while meaning system theory is mute regarding the nature of the organisation, but is more explicit regarding the components that are part of coherent meaning system. Underlying the creation of coherence is another assumption that both theories share: the view of meaning as connection. The creation of coherence requires that mental connections be made between mental representations.

One aspect in the similarity of viewing meaning as connection is the theories’ view of time as an essential part of meaning. In narrative theory, consideration of time is built into the concept of narrative, being one of the few aspects of a definition of narrative that is similar across the multitude of narrative theories. A person’s life narrative encompasses the past, explains and gives meaning to the present and creates a vision and anticipation for the future (Crossley, 2000; Reker & Chamberlain, 2000). In the same way, meaning system theory views time as a central part of meaning. One of its basic tenets is that "meaning connects things" (Baumeister, 1991, p. 15). One of the dimensions of these connections is time. Meaning is achieved by connecting the past to the present, and the present to the future. This is demonstrated in the element of
purpose in a meaning system. Purpose is an intrinsically temporal concept, involving motivation derived from the past, a sense of purpose in the present, and an orientation of one’s actions toward future goals. Other elements of a meaning system also have temporal features (Paloutzian, 2005), among them self-definition, goals and ultimate concern. The temporal dimension is not emphasised as much in meaning system theory, although it is included, while temporal relationships and their expression in text and speech often have a central position in the narrative approach (e.g. Schwab, 2013).

In summary, meaning system theory and narrative theory have enough similarities in their concept of meaning and meaning making to make them compatible in mixed methods strategies of inquiry. Furthermore, their differences can also be viewed as a strength when combined, in that they focus on different aspects of the meaning making processes. Their combination thus offers a possibility of a deeper and broader understanding of how meaning is created psychologically.

2.4. Theoretical research model

The research model used in this study is illustrated by figure 1. In the phase 1, the correlations between specific religious beliefs and purpose in life will be researched, using quantitative methods. Phase 2 employs narrative theory and methods to research how beliefs influence a meaning system, and how they are used to create a sense of purpose in life.

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical research model of the study. Phase 1 is based exclusively on meaning system theory and is linked primarily to hypothesis 1 and research question 1. The theory and methods of phase 1 are designed to research the presence and strength of the correlation between religious beliefs and purpose in life. In phase 2, narrative theory is added with the aim of researching how religious beliefs are used in meaning making processes to construct a sense of purpose in life. In other words, phase 1 of the study researches if there are correlations between specific religious beliefs and a sense of purpose in life, and phase 2 researches how the specific beliefs are used in meaning making processes to construct a sense of purpose in life. This is achieved through analysing how religious beliefs influence the different elements of a meaning system, and how these elements in turn are used in the construction of a sense of purpose in life.

The narrative theory is still used within a meaning system theory framework, and as demonstrated above, the two theories are compatible. Narrative theory provides a theoretical basis for the analysis of meaning making in qualitative data and serves as a complement to the framework provided by meaning system theory. Specifically, Labov’s theory of narrative structure and the add-on method of Robinson’s relational analysis will enable a theoretical basis for the analysis of meaning making processes in qualitative data.
Figure 1. Research model

Meaning system theory is the foundation of the study. In phase 1, the correlation between religious beliefs and purpose in life is studied, using concepts and operationalisations from meaning system theory. In phase 2, the results of phase 1 are explored through narrative theory and narrative, hermeneutic methods, to study meaning making processes and how religious beliefs are involved in these.
3. Method

This chapter will present the method used in the study. The first four sections of the chapter concern the mixed methods strategy of inquiry used in the study. The first section of the chapter gives a rationale for the use of a mixed methods strategy, and also provides a general argument for the use of mixed methods strategies in the study of religion and meaning. In the second section, the specific mixed methods strategy, as defined by Creswell (2009) is presented. In the third section, the choice of target population is presented and motivated. In the fourth, fifth and sixth sections, the two phases of the research strategy are presented, including sampling, data collection procedures, the methods of analysis and data validation. The seventh and eighth sections presents considerations of validity, reliability and generalisability for the entirety of the study. Finally, section nine presents the ethical considerations of the study.

3.1. Rationale for using mixed methods procedures

The history of mixed methods procedures can be said to have its origins in the paradigmatic and methodological split which began in the 1960’s (Todd et al., 2004), between the classic paradigm of quantitative methodology in the social sciences, often mirroring the philosophical assumptions of the natural sciences, and the paradigm arising out of the ‘hermeneutic turn’, in which qualitative methodology is seen as more enlightening than its quantitative counterpart. The position of the latter paradigm is that human beings and human experience cannot be reduced to quantitative data. The classic paradigm is accused of reductionism in their quest for understanding, while proponents of the classic paradigm accuse the other side of subjectivity and a lack of true scientific validity.

While these two paradigms and their differences at first glance might not seem to warrant such animosity, the two positions are based on different epistemological assumptions, which in turn manifests in differing trajectories in the development of both theory and method. In the past two decades new voices have been raised in favour of a third paradigmatic and methodological path, with a growing number of researchers choosing to incorporate both methodologies in research. This third alternative, or paradigm, is often characterised philosophically by pragmatism (Creswell, 2009) and a willingness to include both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve a number of interrelated goals in research. This pragmatic position enables researchers to achieve a measure of triangulation (the use of several forms of methods and data to get more reliable results) when using two or more methods which yield complementary results. Also, a pragmatic position with regard to methodology enables the mixing of methods in order to explore and understand several different levels of the same phenomenon.

A pragmatic approach to epistemology and methodology also opens new possibilities for connection between research disciplines. The pragmatic approach encourages researchers to appreciate the contributions of others, and to use results and conclusions from other disciplines to enrich their own field. The inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative methods in studies can also increase the accessibility of the research to the general public and to professional spheres other than the scientific community. Different methods and data can be used to better illustrate and communicate results (Todd et al., 2004), thus increasing understanding and the perceived relevance of the research.

The rationale for the employment of mixed methods procedures in the current study follows the arguments put forth by proponents of the third paradigm. Firstly, the chosen topic and the phenomena involved necessitates a methodological approach that can explore complex phenomena on different levels. As mentioned above, much of the deficiency in prior research
can be traced to researching religion and meaning from a one-dimensional perspective. The sequential exploratory mixed methods strategy employed in this study serves to provide both quantitative and qualitative data on the relationship between religious beliefs and purpose, enabling multi-leveled insight.

Secondly, the pragmatic approach facilitates the inclusion of data and research from several fields. Research on meaning is not confined to the psychology of religion. Rather, it is a research program that incorporates data and results from a wide range of scientific fields. The use of a mixed methods research strategy enables this study to be put into a much larger context of data and research than just psychology of religion.

3.2. Presentation of mixed methods strategy: sequential explanatory strategy

This study will employ what Creswell (2009) calls a sequential explanatory strategy of inquiry. It is a mixed methods strategy according to Creswell’s definition:

Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study. Thus, it is more than simply collecting and analysing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research. (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

The sequential explanatory strategy is, according to Creswell (Ibid, p. 211), "characterised by the collection and analysis of quantitative data in the first phase of research followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a second phase that builds on the results of the initial quantitative results.” The strategy used in this thesis will follow Creswell’s definition through the use of two separate, sequential phases of data collection and analysis, followed by a joint interpretation of the results from the two phases.

The underlying philosophical assumptions of a sequential explanatory strategy can best be characterised as pragmatic, which is signified by “a concern with applications – what works – and solutions to problems. Instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasise the research problem and use all approaches available to understand the problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 10). The pragmatic worldview and the resulting methodological possibilities was deemed most useful for this study, in that it provides opportunities to focus on the research problem, and develop the use of methods to contribute to the overall understanding of the topic.

Creswell categorises mixed methods strategies according to four aspects: timing of data collection, weighting or priority given to quantitative and qualitative approaches, mixing of the data, specifically when and how the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data occurs, and the theorising that underlies the use of the mixed methods strategy.

In the sequential explanatory strategy used in this thesis, the timing is sequential, with a first phase of quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by a second, qualitative phase. Weight or priority is given to the first, quantitative phase. The data and results of the second phase will be used in a complementary fashion, to explore the results of the first phase. The mixing of the data occurs between the first and second phase, when the results of the first phase is used to inform the sampling, data collection and analysis of the second phase. Finally, the theoretical guidance of the strategy is provided by meaning system theory and its postulates. A visual model of the strategy is presented in figure 2.
3.3. Target population

Based on prior research, and perceived deficiencies therein, the choice of target population was made according to three major considerations (apart from the cultural factors described in section 1.1.1): age, duration of time since a conversion experience and religious affiliation.

Firstly, based on the literature review, the age bias of prior research is skewed toward the age ranges of 18-25 (9 studies: Benson & Spilka, 1973; Willard & Norenzayan, 2013; Stillman et al., 2011; Soderstrom & Wright, 1977; Gruner, 1984; Paloutzian, 1981; Reker, 1977; Dewitz et al., 2009; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010), and 65 and over (5 studies: Krause, 2007; Krause, 2008; Hedberg, 2010; Fletcher, 2004; Krause & Hayward, 2012). Out of the 24 studies reviewed in this thesis, 14 were focused on these two age ranges. Of the remaining 10 studies, none focused specifically on a different age range. This bias is problematic, since research shows that an individual's sense of meaning changes as a function of age (Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987; Reker, 1992; Reker & Chamberlain, 2000; Reker & Fry, 2002). To add to the field and remedy some of the age bias, the age range chosen for this thesis was 25-40. This choice was also motivated by information from developmental psychology. In this field, the period of adulthood is seen as starting at around 25 years of age. At this age, the individual is fully developed physically (Passer, Smith, Holt, Bremner, Sutherland & Vliek, 2009) and has begun the stage of early adulthood that, according to Eriksson's (1968, in Shaffer & Kipp, 2009) theory of identity development, is characterised by finding an identity and a place in close and loving relationships. The delimitation of the age range to 40 years of age was also based on Eriksson's model, as well as data on physical development. According to Eriksson's model, the stage of early adulthood ends at age 40, and physical deterioration resulting from age begins to manifest in a more pronounced way at 40 years of age (Passer et al., 2009). 25 to 40 years of age is thus characterised by a relative stability in physical development and ensuing self-image, and also a gradual development of cognitive meaning through the building of significant relationships, with research showing that interpersonal relationships are one of the most potent sources of meaning in life (Debats, 1999). The meaning making processes of 25-40 can thus be seen as centred more on cognitive than physical factors, thus making cognitive factors, e.g. beliefs and meaning systems, highly salient in this part of psychological development. This makes the age range of 25-40 optimal for the study of how religious beliefs influence processes of meaning making.

The second consideration regarding the target population is the duration of time since a conversion experience. Paloutzian (1981) has shown that purpose in life changes as a function of time after a conversion experience. It reaches a peak after 1 week of conversion and drops...
down to pre-conversion levels after 1 month, and then rises slowly to stabilise at 6 months. To avoid bias and to not have time since conversion as a confounding variable, the target population will not include individuals who have been converts for less than 6 months. Like the choice of age-range for the target population, the considerations regarding time since conversion is a matter of choosing subjects with a relatively stable meaning system.

The third consideration regarding the target population of the study, religious affiliation, is based on the assumed presence of religious beliefs, the assumed similarity of content in beliefs, and the need for specificity in researching beliefs and meaning (Hood et al., 2009). The chosen target populations were from congregations of Christian churches in Stockholm, Sweden, from different denominations. The choice was motivated firstly by the assumed presence of religious beliefs among these populations. Being a part of a Christian congregation should imply that one has religious beliefs in accordance with the Christian faith, and since this study is concerned with purpose in life as a function of religious beliefs, it needs a population adhering to those beliefs.

The inclusion of only Christian congregations was motivated by similarities in the content of beliefs. In short, the content of the beliefs, being derived from the same religious writings, should be conceptually similar (Rasmussen & Thomassen, 2007; Ford, 1997, in Woodhead, 2004). Thus, the inclusion of only Christian denominations was a matter of maintaining a level of content validity in the study. A study involving several different religious meaning systems would require a more rigorous process of testing to ensure the content validity of the quantitative instruments, because of differences in concepts of the divine and other aspects of the meaning system, which nonetheless have the same, or similar terms of description (e.g. the concept of God in Christianity and Islam).

Because of the factors described above, the target population of this study were members of Christian congregations from different denominations in Stockholm, Sweden, who were between the ages of 25 to 40 and who had been believers for more than 6 months. These criteria were applied to the sample and all non-compliant individuals were excluded.

3.4. Phase 1: Quantitative

3.4.1. Sampling phase 1

The sampling for the first, quantitative phase of the study was made on the basis of access and power calculations. Firstly, access to members of the congregations was ascertained by contacting the head pastor or priest in each congregation. After a description of the aim and method of the study, and the ethical guidelines used in the study (according to the Swedish law of ethics regarding research that involves humans (http://www.epn.se/en/start/startpage/)), a choice of participation was given. A total of four congregations in the Stockholm region were approached with an offer of participation in the study, and a total of two chose to participate.

The next phase of the sampling involved power calculations for sample size for the statistical analysis. Power analysis for the correlational analysis of the variables (using Pearson’s r) required a sample of 35 subjects (calculated on an effect size of 0.40, alpha level of 0.05, and a power of 0.7). Power calculations were performed using the G*Power program created by the University of Düsseldorf (http://www.gpower.hhu.de/en.html).

No sampling procedures to reduce bias were used. The questions of age and gender bias were considered, but the sample was not stratified according to age cohorts in the range of 25-40 years of age, or according to gender cohorts. Instead, all responses from viable subjects in this age range were used, partly to satisfy the needed number of subjects, but also because of the validation of the instruments used, where age invariance was tested (Reker & Fry, 2002; King et al., 2005).
3.4.2. Data collection procedures

The data collection for phase 1 was conducted through the use of questionnaires distributed digitally and through mail. The digital distribution was achieved through converting the questionnaire to a Google Forms-format, the link of which was then emailed to the respondents. The respondents who were unreachable through email received a letter with the link to the digital survey.

The use of a digital survey format was chosen because of its relative cost-effectiveness, and the convenience of receiving the data in digital format, which facilitates statistical analysis through computer programs. However, some considerations were had regarding possible bias inherent in the use of surveys distributed and data collected digitally, through the internet. Bethlehem (2010) and Gigliotti (2011) both highlight methodological weaknesses that must be considered when using internet-based surveys.

Bethlehem (2010) discusses the risks of self-selection and under-coverage in internet surveys, which can result in biased data. Self-selection is problematic for the validity of survey data since it leaves the sampling frame, and consequently the estimation error, unknown. Thus self-selection leaves the data open to bias and significantly hampers the accuracy of statistical tests. In this current study, the sampling was not based on self-selection, and the various error calculations can be estimated with an acceptable degree of accuracy.

Under-coverage is another potential risk to the validity of the data in internet surveys, particularly in large scale surveys intended to include a representative sample of a large population in a country. Under-coverage concerns the possibility that not all individuals in a given target population has access to the internet. Depending on the internet coverage, the sample, especially if self-selected, will only represent the part of the population that has access to a device with an internet connection. This group is called the frame population, being the population from which the probability of inclusion in a sample is more than zero. If one conducts an internet survey, the parts of the target population that fall outside the frame population due to lack of internet coverage will have no chance of being represented in the sample, thus hurting the validity of the study.

Gigliotti (2011) conducted a study on the use of internet surveys in the gathering of data from a population of hunters in the USA. Like Bethlehem, he found that issues concerning sample validity due to under-coverage of internet access could become problematic and result in a biased sample. Gigliotti also found a larger percentage of non-response in internet surveys, compared to surveys distributed and collected through regular mail. This gives internet surveys a higher risk of response bias, depending on the reason for the non-response.

Both Bethlehem and Gigliotti show that sample validity is an issue that has to be considered when conducting an internet survey. To ensure sample validity in the current study, the discrepancy in mean age and gender percentages between the target population and the frame population were analysed (see chapter 4). The main issue regarding sample validity arises when the discrepancy between the target population and the frame population is large, and the characteristics relevant to the study are unknown on part of the target population that falls outside of the frame population. This unknown part of the target population makes the calculation of estimation errors inaccurate, thus rendering population estimates inaccurate. In this study, the gender representation in the target and frame populations, and the sample were checked for significant differences to ensure that the sample was representative.

3.4.3. Instruments and operationalisations

The following instruments were used for data collection in phase 1: firstly, the Beliefs and Values Scale (BVS; King, Jones, Barnes, Low, Walker, Wilkinson, Mason, Sutherland & Tookman, 2005) to
gather data on the variable of religious beliefs. Secondly, the Purpose subscale of the Life Attitude Profile - Revised (LAP-R; Reker, 1992; Erci, 2008) and the Spirituality, Religiosity and Personal Beliefs subscale of the WHO Quality of Life (WHOQOL-SRPB, BRIEF version) to gather data on purpose in life. These three instruments were compiled into one digital form consisting of a total of 36 items (see appendix 2).

Permissions to use the instruments were not explicitly given, except in the case of the WHOQOL, where permission was received from Prof. Valerie DeMarinis of Uppsala University. The two other instruments were available through the PsycTest database and contained explicit instructions that the instruments could be used for research, as long as the authors were notified. Authors were indeed notified by e-mail, but no reply was given.

The BVS was used to measure religious belief, both as a composite and for specific beliefs. Religious beliefs were operationalised according to the two features of content and conviction mentioned in section 1.1.4.2. The BVS consists of statements regarding religious beliefs. These statements are representations of the content of beliefs. The instrument measures the level of conviction on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The BVS presents the content of belief, and measures the conviction of that belief.

The operationalisation of purpose was done through the LAP-R and the WHOSPRB-BRIEF. The LAP-R is a composite of eight items reported on a 5-point Likert scale, which gives a combined score for purpose in life. The WHOSPRB-BRIEF is a single item on a 5-point Likert scale. Purpose was measured using both items. Because of the lack of proper validation of the instruments for a Swedish context, the WHOSPRB-BRIEF also functioned as a check for the LAP-R's construct validity through a basic correlation analysis. In the event of a large discrepancy in the construct validity of the LAP-R, the WHOQOL was to be used as the sole measure of purpose in life.

3.4.3.1. Validation of instruments
The BVS and the LAP-R are both developed, tested and validated in English, and were backtranslated to Swedish for the purpose of this study. The backtranslation process consisted of translating the instruments to Swedish, then asking three Swedish people to individually translate the instruments back to English. Discrepancies between the English backtranslations and the original English instruments were discussed to reach a consensus of meaning, and to ensure that the Swedish items of each instrument would not be misinterpreted by Swedish respondents. The discrepancies in the English backtranslations mostly consisted of differences in syntax, as well as a few differences in terminology. The differences in syntax were regarded by the translators as arbitrary, in that they could have used any of the options presented to them in the consensus-discussions. The terminology was agreed upon in the discussions to reach consensus. Like the differences in syntax, it was a matter of similar meanings of english word in relation to Swedish translations, both of which were understood by the translators. The discussions to reach consensus found no irreconcilable differences in the translations.

This quick translation process leaves the study open to questions regarding the validity of the test. This study is conducted in such a way that neither time nor means are sufficient for a thorough translation and validation of the English instruments. However, the inclusion of the WHOQOL-SRPB subscale enabled a test of construct validity of purpose in life of the LAP-R.

Validation of the english BVS found an internal consistency of 0.93 (Cronbach’s alpha) and a criterion scale score of 0.70 (p<0.001). Test-retest reliability was >0.5 for all items.

The LAP-R has been translated to at least two languages from English, namely Turkish (Erci, 2008) and Greek (Anagnostopoulos, Slater, Fitzsimmons & Kolokotroni, 2011). The only available data on the validation of these translations and the original itself, is the English version and
3.4. Data analysis
The data gathered during phase 1 were analysed through various non-parametric tests, because of the non-normal distribution of the data. The analyses were performed using the Wizard Statistics-application on an Apple Mac computer, as well as the SPSS Statistics program (version 22) on a Windows PC.

The background variables of gender, age, education, income and congregational involvement were tested against the variable of purpose in life. For gender, a Mann-Whitney U analysis was used to test for significant differences between genders. For age, Kendall's tau was calculated to test for a significant correlation between age and purpose in life. For education, income and congregational involvement, Kruskal Wallis tests were used to test for significant differences between educational groups and purpose in life, income and purpose in life, and congregational involvement and purpose in life.

The correlational analysis between religious beliefs and purpose in life was conducted using Kendall's tau. Correlational analyses were performed between the composite measure of religious belief and purpose in life, as well as between the measures of specific beliefs and purpose in life, to test the study’s hypothesis and first research question. Kendall's tau was chosen because of the non-normal distribution of the data of the variables, and because of its robust statistical properties (Newson, 2002).

3.5. Phase 2: Qualitative
3.5.1. Sampling phase 2
The sampling of phase 2 was based on the data and results of phase 1, particularly the measure of PIL. The ambition was to include 4 (2 men, 2 women) individuals with a low PIL measure (1-3) and 4 (2 men, 2 women) with a high PIL measure (4-5). 9 individuals responded to the invitation to an interview. A total of 9 subjects were thus included in the sample, 4 (2 men, 2 women) from the group with high scores of PIL and 5 (2 men, 3 women) from the low-scoring group. The selection of gender was based on a goal of gathering data from both genders. The inclusion of an extra woman in the low PIL group was motivated by availability and the opportunity of gathering more data from the low PIL group. For a presentation of the sample in phase 2, see section 4.3.1.

The division of respondents into subgroups based on gender and PIL score was done to be able to analyse differences between groups to further explore the connection between religious beliefs and purpose in life.

3.5.2. Data collection procedures
The data collection procedure in phase 2 consisted of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. These interviews were approximately 35-50 minutes long, recorded digitally and then transcribed verbatim. The interviews were semi-structured according to a prepared structure (see appendix 4). The interviews were started by an open question, letting the interviewee tell
his/her life story. The questions following were designed to probe that life story, particularly in relation to the beliefs measured by the BVS in phase 1 of the study, and also in relation to the constructs that make up Paloutzian’s meaning system theory.

The interview schedule was designed in two stages. In the first, narrative data was gathered. Respondents were first asked to retell their life story with no restrictions or guidance regarding which topics or themes to focus on. Then, in the second question, they were asked to retell their life story with a particular focus on their religious beliefs and their sense of purpose in life. After this, further questions for clarification were asked.

3.5.3. Data analysis
The qualitative data was analysed through a five-step process. Firstly, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Secondly, the text was segmented to facilitate coding according to narrative structure and relational analysis. Thirdly, the text was coded (for a more detailed account of the coding, see section 3.5.3.2. below). Fourthly, the coding was related to the elements of Paloutzian’s meaning system model, which functioned as the themes through which the coded data were analysed. This analysis consisted of ascertaining how religious beliefs influenced each element of the respondents’ meaning system. The element of beliefs was not analysed in relation to religious beliefs, since the latter is a part of that element. Fifthly and lastly, the data were analysed to ascertain how each element in the meaning system was used in the construction of a sense of purpose in life.

3.5.3.1. Analytical model
The text was interpreted and analysed according to the constructs of Paloutzian’s meaning systems model (beliefs, attitudes, values, goals, overall purpose, self-definition and ultimate concerns) using two complementary models of analysis. The first was Labov’s (1972, in Johansson, 2005) model of narrative structure. The interview material was further analysed using a complementary qualitative analysis termed relational analysis (Robinson, 2011). This type of hermeneutic analysis is used to analyse the relationships between different concepts or themes in the material. As mentioned in the theory above, meaning is about connections, and a relational analysis of the material was used to bring to light the ways in which an individual connects various concepts to form a coherent, purposeful whole. A relational analysis is essentially an analysis of language and the concepts found therein, as well as the relationships described linguistically. Robinson (2011) posits a list of ten key relational forms (KRF) that were used in this study to analyse relationships between concepts (A and B in these examples):

- **Descriptive relations (KRF1)**: B describes an example or property of A.
- **Comparative relations (KRF2)**: B is similar to/different from A.
- **Semiotic relations (KRF3)**: A signifies or symbolises B.
- **Evocative relations (KRF4)**: B provides an evocative image to illuminate A.
- **Contigency relations (KRF5)**: Weakened: If A, then B is more likely. Strong: A is a necessary condition for B.
- **Causal relations (KRF6)**: A causes B, B is an effect of A.
- Reciprocal relations (KRF7) A and B influence each other and so interact.
- Dialectical relations (KRF8) A is in opposition to, but inseparable from, B.
- Conceptual part-whole relations (KRF9) A is conceptually subordinate to B.
- Contextual part-whole relations (KRF10) A is a part of B and B is its context.

These ten relational forms were used to analyse how different concepts mentioned in the interviews were related to each other, thereby giving a picture of the conceptual connections made by the respondents. These concepts were identified through the ones already proposed in the research question and theory of the study (specific religious beliefs and the elements of Paloutzian’s meaning system model). This analytical form follows the template analysis style defined in Malterud (2014).

3.5.3.2. Coding
The coding of the interview material was conducted through a segmentation of the text transcribed from the recorded interviews. The material was imported into the computer program Microsoft Excel, where sentences and subsentences were segmented, one for each row of the spreadsheet. Each row of text was then coded in four columns according to the two forms of qualitative analysis specified above. The first column contained the row’s Labovian code. The second column contained the first concept mentioned in the sentence. The third column contained the key relational form expressed in the sentence. The fourth column contained the second concept mentioned in the sentence. Thus, the first column contained the Labovian coding, while the second to fourth column contains the coding for the relational analysis. The concepts of the second and fourth columns were coded according to the form they took as they appeared in the text, i.e. the concepts expressed through terms used by the respondents. No abbreviation or other augmentation was made.

3.5.4. Validity of qualitative data and results
3.5.4.1. Considerations regarding the validation of qualitative research
The validity of results from narrative, hermeneutic analysis of qualitative data has been questioned since the emergence of narrative and other qualitative methods in the social sciences. Malterud (2014) argues that all science should be characterised by systematic, critical reflection and that issues of validity should always be reflected upon throughout the entire research endeavour. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) echo Malterud’s position in viewing validity as an ongoing process throughout a research project and they posit that validity is a craft more than a single procedure in a study. To ensure validity in a qualitative study, the researcher should always check the interpretations made and the positions taken in relation to the data, question these interpretations and positions, and theorise regarding the foundational view of the data, the interpretation and the possible positions in relation to the data. Furthermore, Kvale and Brinkmann make a distinction between communicative and pragmatic validity. Communicative validity is derived through communication, and validation of data is achieved through argumentation based on selected criteria. The interpretation that best explains the data according to the criteria is seen as valid. Pragmatic validity is derived from the usefulness of the interpretations, i.e. the most valid interpretation is the one that has most practical use in a particular context.
Polkinghorne (2007) has also discussed the concept of validity in relation to narrative theory. His position is similar to Kvale and Brinkmann’s communicative validity. The point of his argument is that validity and the “validating of knowledge claims is not a mechanical process, but, instead, is an argumentative practice. The purpose of the validation process is to convince readers of the likelihood that the support for the claim is strong enough that the claim can serve as a basis for understanding of and action [sic] in the human realm” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 6).

Polkinghorne also identifies two areas that need to be addressed by researchers employing narrative methods to prove claims of validity. The first area is the validity and validation of the collected data. In conventional research, validity is determined by how well the instruments have measured the intended constructs, and how well the constructs are represented in the collected data. Polkinghorne argues that, in narrative research, data is also validated through a determination of what the data represents, and if the data represents that which is intended to be studied. Researchers need to explicitly state how they view the data they collect, and if the data can be used to study the intended topic and object.

The second area of validation in narrative research is, according to Polkinghorne, the validation of the analysis of the data, i.e. the interpretation of the data. Researchers have to be explicit in their method of interpretative analysis, and also in presenting the interpretations made. This includes the conversion of data (e.g. transcription of interviews), the coding of data, interpretative process before (e.g. the choice of analysing data according to predetermined themes) and after the data collection and analysis.

According to the postulates of Malterud (2014), Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), and Polkinghorne (2007), the validity of the qualitative part of this study is an ongoing process, characterised by a systematic, critical reflection. This concerns both the view of the data, the process of interpretation (including theoretical positions taken), and the presentation of the interpretations. How this process of validation is constituted can be seen throughout this thesis in the transparent presentation of the background, purpose, research questions and theories used. There is also a critical reflection on the theories, their uses, their compatibility and their combination in a mixed methods study. The view of the data, the position of the researcher and a presentation of the population and sample used in the study for both phases also constitute a part of the process of validation. Furthermore, the qualitative data will be validated through a process of communicative validity. There will also be specific, practical criteria for the validation of the qualitative analysis, results and conclusions.

3.5.4.2. Interpretative philosophy and assumptions

Schwandt (2000, in Polkinghorne, 2007) notes two major positions regarding the view of interpretations of text within the community of hermeneutic research. The first, more idealistic position, termed the ‘Verstehen’ approach, maintains that interpreters can transcend the cultural and historical context in which they find themselves and gain an unbiased understanding of a text. In essence, interpreters can uncover the intended meaning of a text through a process of interpretation where the interpreter seeks to empathically understand the intentions and meanings conveyed by the producer of the text.

The second position is termed philosophical hermeneutics and holds that interpreters always encounter a text from a perspective influenced by their cultural and historical milieu. Thus, textual interpretation is always a product of a specific perspective, which must be taken into account in the interpretative process.

This study takes a kind of middle ground between the extremes of Verstehen and the complete relativity of philosophical hermeneutics. Based on the concept of meanings being formed and communicated within different contexts, the role of the interpreter is to strive
toward an empathic understanding of the authors context, intentions and meanings. The goal is to achieve an understanding of the authors context, so as to better understand every aspect of the meaning being communicated. However, the idealistic position, that total understanding of a context is possible, is not held in this study. An interpretation will always be influenced by the interpreters perspective. The middle ground between Verstehen and philosophical hermeneutics occupied in this study is that an interpreter can, within the perspective of his/her context, strive toward and gain an understanding of an authors perspective. Interpretation then, is ultimately a matter of aligning two perspectives, the author’s and the interpreter’s, for the interpreter to better understand the author’s intention and meaning. The interpreter might not be able to completely understand the author’s context, or completely step out of his/hers, but there can be a seeking of greater understanding of the author's context, and an awareness of the interpreter's context, which will all need to be considered in the process of interpretation.

3.5.4.3. View of narrative and other textual data

The position on narrative and textual data in this thesis is that narratives and narrative cognition is a constitutive aspect of social and individual life. We live our lives through the stories we are taught or create, and through the language we learn (Johansson, 2005). Within narrative theory, this is often called an ontological view of narrative, since narrative is seen as ontologically constitutive. While this position is theoretical, it has implications for the view of narrative expression and text in everyday life and in research situations. The data that will be analysed in this study are narratives told by interviewees in interview situations.

In this study, the text derived from the interview is seen as a representation of the interviewees personal meaning regarding the topics of the interview. This representation, however, is not an uncomplicated, "pure" communication of the interviewee's meaning. The text is influenced and shaped by the setting of the interview, the questions asked, the interviewee’s expectations beforehand and the interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer. This view of the influence on the text because of the interview-setting does not mean that the text somehow is "tainted" by the situation. Every interaction and production of language is always a product not only of the producer’s "pure" meaning, but rather a product of the producer’s perceived meaning and several other contextual factors.

Polkinghorne (2007) specifies four areas related to the influencing of the text that can pose a threat to the validity of the data produced, but that can be mitigated through interviewer-interviewee interaction and the questions asked. These four areas are:

1. The interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Depending on the approach of the interviewer, the expectations and judgments of the interviewee, and the relationship between them, the text will be influenced. For example, the prejudice of an interviewee may cause him/her to be more or less revealing to the interviewer, or to present themselves and their experienced meaning in a more positive light.

2. The interviewee’s resistance to self-revelation. People are often resistant to fully revealing themselves and their thoughts to others, especially to strangers. In an interview situation it is unlikely that the interviewee and interviewer have a prior relationship that could counteract this resistance.

3. The complexity of experienced meaning. The human experience involves a multitude of sensations and cognitions. Not all of these are available to the human awareness, although disciplined reflection can be used to uncover additional experienced meaning. The
interviewer should be aware of the unconscious aspects of experienced meaning, and use follow-up questions to aid the interviewee in a reflective process.

4. The inadequacy of language. Due to the complexity and vastness of human experience, the language available to communicate experienced meaning is inadequate to do just that. The fullness of human experience is simply too complex to be communicated thoroughly and exhaustively through language. Polkinghorne suggests that interviewers encourage the use of figurative speech in order for the interviewee to more fully express their experienced meaning.

In the interview process of this study, a mitigation of the effects of these four areas was achieved through an open listening stance by the researchers, where unexpected and unusual responses were taken into account and processed with the same level of interest as the more expected ones. The interviewee was also informed and encouraged to use figurative language if literal expressions should prove to be inadequate. Furthermore, the interviewer endeavoured to quickly develop a rapport with the interviewee, through an introductory period of acquainting himself with the interviewee, to ease tension in the interview situation. The general goal to be achieved through the mitigation of the four influences was to cause the respondent to be relaxed and willing to share as much information about themselves and their perceived meaning in the interview situation as possible.

Regardless of the complications of meanings created in an interview setting, and the view that answers to interview questions are not “pure”, the text produced will still be regarded as an expression of the respondents meaning in the interview situation, informed by the respondents meaning system and the narrative understanding of their life (Paloutzian, 2005; Sarbin, 1986; Polkinghorne, 2007; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007). Since the text is an expression of the respondents’ meaning, it can be analysed to gain knowledge of that meaning and the respondents’ meaning system.

3.5.4.4. Considerations regarding the position, bias and interpretation of the researcher
Several things need to be considered regarding the position and possible biases of the researcher in the process of interpretation. While effects of bias cannot be completely eradicated (Polkinghorne, 2007; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007), a consciousness regarding the position and possible biases of the researcher in relation to the topic of the study, the data and the interpretative process increases the generalisability and validity of the results. This increase is achieved through increased transparency of the interpretative process and the facilitation of communicative validity.

Several aspects of the researcher’s position in relation to the topic, data and interpretative process need to be taken into account. Some of these are related to the fact that the researcher is a believer of the same faith as the respondents in the study. Firstly, since the researcher is himself a believer, he might be biased through a conscious or unconscious desire to portray people of the same faith in a positive light because of feelings of sympathy toward the respondents. Secondly, he might be biased through a desire to portray belief as a more attractive option than unbelief. There is also a possible bias of wanting to portray one’s own faith as more attractive than other beliefs, but because the current study only involves people of the Christian faith, this bias is not relevant to the results of the study. The two possible biases of portraying people of like faith in a positive, biased light and portraying belief as more attractive than unbelief need to be taken into account in considerations of the validity of the interpretative process and its results.
These biases will be mitigated through a transparency regarding the possibility of bias, a consciousness of these biases by the researcher throughout the entire study and a transparent analysis of the data gathered, allowing others to question and correct potentially biased interpretations.

Other sources of bias, arising from the researcher’s religious and group identification, as well as demographic realities, are possible. One is that the respondents of the study are from congregations other than the one of which the researcher is a member. This could lead, consciously or unconsciously, to negative bias based on prejudice. Also, both the age and gender of the researcher in relation to the respondents could lead to bias.

There are other considerations regarding the experience and position of the researcher that need to be taken into account, which can be seen as positive for the validation of the results and conclusions of the study. The researcher and the respondents are part of the same Swedish cultural context, sharing conceptual and linguistic idiosyncrasies. The shared cultural context will facilitate interpretation of the qualitative data.

In all the above mentioned areas where bias is possible, the same methods of mitigation will be employed: a transparency and consciousness of possible biases and a transparency in the analysis of the data. Specific validity strategies will also be employed to further add to the validity of the study.

3.6. Joint analysis of the results from phase 1 and 2 and considerations regarding the mixing of data

After the separate analyses of phase 1 and 2, the results from the two phases will be analysed jointly for further conclusions. This analysis will mainly be concerned with seeing how the results from phase 2 support and explicate the results from phase 1.

An aspect of the validity of results in a mixed methods study is the viability and feasibility of mixing two kinds of data derived from two different methods. Creswell (2009) gives a useful summary of the various ways in which data in mixed methods studies can be used and combined. He posits a spectrum, where one end represents a scenario where different forms of data from a mixed methods study are merged, often by converting one form of data so that it is compatible with another. The data are then used concurrently, and both have equal weighting in the final results and conclusions of the study. On the other side of the spectrum is a separation of data in all stages of the study. Most studies with a mixed methods strategy fall somewhere between these two extremes. In some studies, the data are connected through the data analysis of phase 1 and the data gathering of phase 2, where the latter is informed by the former. Other studies use a strategy of embedding one form of data with another, where one database serves as the primary source of data, while other databases are used to provide supportive information for the results and conclusions of the first.

The mixing of data carries with a potential of obscuring results, or jeopardising the validity of the results of the study. This is, among other things, due to methodological concerns of converting one form of data to another, of using two forms of data to answer one specific questions in which case contradictory results might occur, and considerations regarding how to analyse two different forms of data, even if they have been harmonised to the same form. Thus, mixing data should be undertaken with serious considerations regarding the strategy and consequences of the mixing.

In this current study, there will be a mixing of data through connection between the data analysis of phase 1 and the data gathering of phase 2. Phase 1 will inform the data gathering of phase 2. The data from both phases will also be used in the final results and the conclusions of
the study. However, the weighting of the data holds the quantitative data as primary, with the qualitative data from phase 2 adding to the final results.

It should also be noted that the data will be analysed separately, and that the quantitative and qualitative data are used separately to answer different research questions in the study. Thus, the mixing of the data only occurs in the connection between the data analysis of phase 1 and the data gathering of phase 2, and in the presentation of the final analysis and conclusions of the study (see figure 2). The risks posed by data mixing are thus minimised through the separation of the analysis of the different forms of data, the lack of any form of conversion of data from one form to another, and the separation of the use of the data into answering separate research questions.

3.7. Validity strategies

Various aspects of the validity of qualitative data have been discussed above. In this section, the practical, methodological aspects of the validity and validation of both the quantitative and qualitative data will be considered and discussed.

In this study, validity is seen as an argumentative practice where the interpretation that is most persuasive and holds the most argumentative power will be considered to be most valid. The criteria for validity will be presented in this section, along with other practical considerations regarding the validity of the study.

Creswell (2009) presents validity strategies that can be used to increase the validity of research, which were be employed in this study. The first is triangulation, which adds to the validity of the study by using several sources of evidence and proving a coherence and consensus among them in relation to the topic and questions of the research. Another validity strategy is member checking which is a practice of letting the respondents weigh in on the interpretations made by the researcher. Creswell proposes a process where the respondents are shown the final interpretations and have an opportunity to approve or disapprove of them. This specific process was not employed in this study, but the interview technique involved questions where the respondents were asked to evaluate the interviewer’s interpretation and understanding of their answer. Another validity strategy used in this study was clarification of bias. This was achieved through explicitly stating and problematising the bias and position of the researcher in relation to the object and topic of research. Presentation of negative or discrepant information was also used as a validity strategy. Finally, peer debriefing was part of the practical aspects of the validation of the study. The instructor overseeing the study reviewed the thesis and critically evaluated it, including the qualitative research. This review included the instructor evaluating the coding process and the analysis, to ensure the validity of the qualitative phase.

Apart from the more overarching validity strategies, there are also specific criteria relating to the validity of the qualitative analysis. The first criterion was fidelity to the analytical model and the predetermined process of interpretation. The analysis of the quantitative data was conducted using predetermined statistical tests and the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data was conducted using an explicit, structured, five-step-process. Fidelity to this process gives the reader an opportunity to assess the presented interpretations and results in relation to this process, and adds another layer of transparency to the interpretation. Also, the structured nature of the interpretation, involving a clearly defined analytical model and direct connection to predetermined terminology and categories, limits the possibility for interpretations that are far removed from or inadequately based on the data.
Secondly, each conclusion derived from the qualitative analysis had to be supported by the data through explicit narrative and semantic structure. As with the first criterion, this gives the reader opportunities to evaluate the interpretations connected to each conclusion.

Thirdly, the presentation of the data and the conclusions was done with as many examples as possible from different respondents, once again to give the reader opportunities to assess the interpretations and the conclusions drawn from them.

3.8. Reliability, validity and generalisability of the entirety of the study

The reliability, validity and generalisability of the study must be considered both with regard to the two phases respectively, and to the entirety of the study.

The reliability and validity of the quantitative phase of the study is established through the statistical testing methods applied to each instrument, the methods used in the translation of the instruments and the representativeness of the sample population. Beginning with the statistical tests used to establish the reliability and validity of each instrument, the tests that were used and their results are presented above in section 3.4.3. Two of the instruments have been thoroughly tested, while the third, the WHOSPRB-BRIEF, is still in the process of being tested. However, only one item was used from the WHOSPRB-BRIEF, to measure sense of purpose in life, and the understandability and clarity of this one item should contribute to an acceptable level of content validity.

The external validity of the quantitative phase was tested through testing the target, frame and sample populations for significant differences in background variables. As these tests did not show any significant differences between the populations, the sample population can be regarded as representative and the quantitative phase as externally valid in relation to the target population. The external validity and reliability was also supported by findings in previous studies regarding the correlation between religious beliefs and purpose in life.

As mentioned in the presentation of the instruments, the content validity of the instruments can be called into question when considering the method of translation used, and the lack of statistical validation tests of the translated instrument. This is a pertinent criticism and one that can only be met by pointing to the limitations in time and resource of the study. The fact that the instruments were backtranslated separately by three different individuals and that a consensus was reached between the three regarding the final translation adds a level of content validity to the instruments.

The reliability of the qualitative phase is harder to determine. The validity of qualitative methods has already been discussed above. Here follows a brief discussion on reliability of qualitative methods. Golafshani (2003) states that there is no clear consensus regarding the use of the term ‘reliability’ among researchers employing qualitative methods. However, in accordance with Golafshani, the term ‘trustworthiness’ will be used to explain the understanding of the reliability of qualitative methods in this study. This term can also be applied to the concept of validity, and in qualitative research the two can seen as more closely linked than in researching using only quantitative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, in Golafshani, 2003). With this in mind, the question to answer in relation to reliability is, “Are the results trustworthy?” In qualitative research, this question is answered using the ideas of replicability and repeatability. In other words, can research be replicated with the same results? If so, the results are considered reliable. In qualitative research, the replicability and repeatability of studies are much harder to prove. This does not, however, mean that the results and methods used cannot be replicated and repeated. One aspect in the consideration of the reliability of the current study is whether or
not the results can be connected to findings in previous studies. Based on the results of the study, this has proven to be so, albeit in a limited manner, with one previous study showing similar results with similar methods. While this does not provide complete certainty regarding the reliability of the qualitative phase, it does provide some support for it.

Having considered the reliability and validity of the two phases separately, a case can be made for the reliability and validity of the entirety of the study, but before this is done, some additional factors need to be taken into account (Creswell, 2009): the interpretation of the data and the results from both phases and the weighting and mixing of the data.

The interpretation of the data and results from both phases is included in the general methodological practices for ensuring validity, and is conducted using the same validity strategies as the qualitative phase. While the findings of the current study have been concordant with results from other studies, there is a weakness arising from the fact that the theory and methods employed, and the ways in which they are combined, have never been attempted before. This can be seen as a weakness both in terms of validity and reliability. However, this is not due to lack of scientific rigour, but rather the scarcity of other studies with which the methodology and results can be compared.

Based on all of the factors presented above, there is grounds for arguing that the current study has an acceptable level of reliability and validity, both in the two phases respectively and in the entirety of the study. However, due to the small sample size and the methodology employed, generalisations based on the study on larger populations is not encouraged. Rather, the study should be taken for what it is: an exploratory study of religion and meaning.

3.9. Ethical considerations
The study was designed according to the guidelines of the Central Ethical Review Board of Sweden. All data were anonymised to prevent the identification of respondents. Permission and consent was sought at each stage of the study, with clear instructions regarding the scope, purpose and people responsible for the study. No respondents were under the age of 18, or in any other way incapable of giving their informed consent to their participation in the study. No financial remuneration was provided for any of the respondents. No financial dependencies existed between the researcher and the respondents, or the researcher and any external financier. The research was considered a low-risk endeavour, with little or no risk of physical or psychological harm.
4. Results

In this section, results from both phases will be presented separately. First, the results from the quantitative phase will be presented, including results from statistical analyses. Second, the results from the qualitative phase will be presented, with excerpts from interviews to support the interpretations made. The analyses of the data from each phase, as well as the two phases together, can be found in chapter 5.

4.1. Population and sample statistics

Based on the contact lists provided by the two congregations, the total population consisted of 343 (205 female, 138 male, mean age = 32.2 years, SD = 4.1) individuals. Out of those, 252 were contactable through email or mail. The rest did not have accurate addresses through which they could be reached. The frame population was thus 252 individuals (149 female, 107 male, mean age = 32.5 years, SD = 3.9). Out of the 252, 40 responded to the questionnaire (25 female, 15 male, mean age = 31.8 years, SD = 4.6), giving a response rate of 16%.

This is a slightly lower response rate than anticipated (anticipated 20%). However, tests for differences between the age means of the target and frame population, and the sample, revealed no significant difference between them (target and frame population: $p = 0.75$; frame and sample: $p = 0.38$; target and sample: $p = 0.47$). The gender distribution of the sample was slightly skewed toward females (62.5% vs. 60% in target). However, because of the small sample and the small amount of skewing, the sample was not corrected for exact representation of gender distribution.

Out of the 40 responses, none had non-responses to specific items. The reason for this was the design of the questionnaire, where an answer to every item was required to proceed to the next. The use of this design can thus be effective in producing complete data sets, sans item non-response.

4.2. Results - Phase 1

4.2.1. Sample characteristics and frequencies

The data were checked for skewness and kurtosis, using the 1.96 or greater rule (Cramer & Howitt, 2004). The data were also checked for normality. Due to it being a smaller sample, a Shapiro-Wilk test ($p<0.05$) was used for checking normality. The skewness test revealed that a large number of the variables had major violations to skewness and/or kurtosis, including the measures of purpose in life. Also, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed that all but one of the variables violated the null hypothesis for normality.

Attempts were made to transform the skewed data to a more normal distribution using logtransformation. However, most of the data were skewed to the point where the transformation had little or no effect. Therefore, non-parametric tests were used for all data. Kendall’s tau was chosen as the non-parametric test for the statistical analyses of the data on religious beliefs and purpose in life, because of its robustness and superior statistical properties to Spearman's rho (Newson, 2002).
4.2.2. Concerns regarding the construct validity of the LAP-R

In the section on the definition of 'purpose', and the section on instruments used in phase 1, there were some discrepancies in the concept of purpose, between the definition and construct used in this study, and the one used in Reker's LAP-R instrument. Reker's definition not only involves a goal-direction and orientation toward a perceived future. It also defines purpose as being derived from the past. That is a postulate that is not supported in this study. Indeed, some people may find that they derive a sense of purpose from the past, but the point of this current study is to see how purpose can be affected by and based, not in the past actions of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number (sample)</th>
<th>(%) of sample</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25 (62.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15 (37.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.8 (4.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-habitation</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>22 (55%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 15 000 SEK/month</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 001 - 30 000 SEK/month</td>
<td>14 (35%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 001 - 45 001 SEK/month</td>
<td>9 (22.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 001 - 60 000 SEK/month</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 000 SEK or more/month</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>34 (85%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once/week or more</td>
<td>23 (57.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. once/month</td>
<td>10 (25%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. once/year</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Sample statistics

4.2.2. Concerns regarding the construct validity of the LAP-R

In the section on the definition of 'purpose', and the section on instruments used in phase 1, there were some discrepancies in the concept of purpose, between the definition and construct used in this study, and the one used in Reker's LAP-R instrument. Reker's definition not only involves a goal-direction and orientation toward a perceived future. It also defines purpose as being derived from the past. That is a postulate that is not supported in this study. Indeed, some people may find that they derive a sense of purpose from the past, but the point of this current study is to see how purpose can be affected by and based, not in the past actions of the
individual, but in religious beliefs regarding both past, present and future. As stated in section 3.4.3., the WHOSPRB-BRIEF was included as a second measure of purpose in life, partly to act as a basic construct validation for the LAP-R, to validate its use in the present study.

The results from a correlational analysis (see table 3) between the single-item measure of purpose of the WHOSPRB-BRIEF and the eight items of the LAP-R showed that all items of the LAP-R that were related to future-orientation and goal-directedness were positively and significantly correlated to the WHOSPRB-BRIEF measure, while items regarding present fulfilment and purpose derived from the past did not show a significant correlation. Indeed, some of these items even showed a weak, non-significant negative correlation to the WHOSPRB-BRIEF. Only LAP-R 3 shows a strong correlation that is statistically significant. As such, the construct validity of the LAP-R, particularly in the case of measuring purpose derived from religiosity, must be called into question.

Had more resources been allocated to this study, this could have been resolved at an earlier stage, where proper validation of the instruments could have been included. However, since this was not possible in the current study, other methods of validation had to be employed. With the construct validity of LAP-R being called into question, the statistical analysis was conducted using the single-item measure of purpose in the WHOSPRB-BRIEF.

### Table 2

**Correlational analysis of measures of purpose in life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAP-R 1</th>
<th>LAP-R 2</th>
<th>LAP-R 3</th>
<th>LAP-R 4</th>
<th>LAP-R 5</th>
<th>LAP-R 6</th>
<th>LAP-R 7</th>
<th>LAP-R 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHO 8</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
<td>0.282*</td>
<td>0.446**</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>-0.146</td>
<td>0.354*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p = 0.05 (two-tailed)
** p = 0.01 (two-tailed)

### 4.2.3. Background variables and purpose in life

The background variables of sex, age, marital status, education and income were tested in relation to the measure of purpose in life. For gender, a Mann-Whitney U test was performed, and showed a non-significant difference in purpose (p=0.98). For age, a correlational analysis was performed using Kendall’s tau, showing a non-significant correlation between age and purpose (τ = 0.19, p=0.14). For marital status, a Kruskal Wallis test was used, showing a significant difference between groups (p<0.05). Post-hoc, pairwise comparisons showed that the only significant difference was between the groups with the marital status of married and co-habitation (p<0.05). For education, income and congregational involvement, Kruskal-Wallis tests were used, showing no significant difference between purpose in life and educational groups (p=0.71), income (p=0.68) or congregational involvement (p=0.33).

### 4.2.4. Correlation between religious beliefs and purpose in life

The results of the correlational analysis showed that several beliefs were significantly correlated to a sense of purpose in life. A sense of purpose in life was also significantly correlated to the composite measure of religious beliefs (τ = 0.34, p<0.01).

Seven out of twenty specific beliefs were significantly correlated to a sense of purpose in life: a belief that God is an all pervading presence (τ = 0.35, p<0.05), belief in forces for evil in the universe (τ = 0.40, p<0.01), belief that human physical contact can be a spiritual experience (τ = 0.27, p<0.05), belief in life after death (τ = 0.31, p<0.05), belief that one’s life has been planned out (τ = 0.33, p<0.05), belief that there is a heaven (τ = 0.30, p<0.05),
belief that the human spirit is immortal ($\tau = 0.30, p<0.05$), and belief that there is a God ($\tau = 0.32, p<0.05$). For a full correlation matrix, see appendix 11.

4.3. Results - Phase 2
4.3.1. Interview respondents
A total of 9 respondents were included in phase 2 of the study. The goal was to include at least 8 respondents, representing groups divided by gender and strength of reported sense of purpose in life (strong PIL = 4-5, weak PIL = 1-3). The groups are presented in table 4. All other characteristics were excluded, to preserve the anonymity of the respondents. The respondents were divided according to gender and PIL score. Table 4 also presents the composite religiosity score of the respondents.

The interview data was coded according to the method described in chapter 3, resulting in 3385 lines of data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong PIL</td>
<td>Mark (110)</td>
<td>Mary (113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luke (104)</td>
<td>Ruth (121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak PIL</td>
<td>Matthew (49)</td>
<td>Esther (97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John (111)</td>
<td>Sara (109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rachel (103)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.2. Religious beliefs and the elements of a meaning system
In this section, the results of the qualitative phase will be presented. The results will be presented along with excerpts from the transcribed interview texts. Under the excerpts are the names of the respondents and the row(s) from which the excerpts are taken from in the original transcription. Since this thesis is written in English, but the majority of the interviews were conducted in Swedish, the texts were translated to English by the author.

The translation procedure aimed to reproduce text verbatim in relation to the original language. This was done in compliance with the aforementioned validity strategies employed in the study. One of the goals of the validity strategies was to maintain as high a level of transparency in the interpretation of data as possible. A word-for-word, verbatim translation was deemed more transparent due to the fact that it provides the reader with a more accurate rendition of the original words spoken by the interviewee than other forms of translation, e.g. where the translation focuses on conveying what the researcher interprets to be meaningful content beyond the text, such as tone or other dimensions in the language. By using a word-for-word translation, this interpretation of meaningful content is not made by the researcher in a way that hides the words in the original language. Instead, a word-for-word translation enables readers and reviewers to interpret the words themselves. Thus, a word-for-word translation increases validity through the maintenance of transparency.
Of course, there is always an element of interpretation involved in any translation, but by translating on a word-for-word basis, readers and reviewers are presented with content that is as faithful to the original data as possible.

The results are interpreted in relation to the theoretical model presented in chapter 2 and the interpretative model presented in chapter 3. The results will present how religious beliefs are used in relation to each element of a meaning system. The ways in which these elements are used in the creation of a sense of purpose in life will be analysed in chapter 5.

4.3.2.1. Attitudes
The qualitative data show that religious beliefs are used as motivations for attitudes toward things believed in, as well as toward things connected to the belief. The analysis of the data further shows that religious beliefs are used in narrative meaning making processes to motivate attitudes. Narrative structures, explicit or implicit, are present in all respondents during the motivation of attitudes. Motivations are presented as causally connected events and end in Labovian resolutions. For example, Luke motivates his attitude toward God and his relation to him thusly:

_Because I believe that God is God and Jesus shows who God is, and for to try to be like Jesus, to try and follow him in my daily life, that gives purpose to my life. I believe that is what he has called us to and that is the best life._

- Luke, row 102-104

Another example is Mary, who motivates her attitude toward social responsibility (and purpose) through religious beliefs:

_I think the Bible is complicated. The only thing I can clearly understand from it is that I should do good to other people or love other people, and it is so easy to think that only concerns acts toward people you meet, but also about consumption. That a person that I’m never going to meet still gets some form of love because we in the western world choose good products._

- Mary, row 152-156

Other respondents with a weaker conviction motivate their attitudes through other means than religious beliefs. Matthew motivates his attitudes toward purpose and other related concepts in terms of political thought and also refers to religious belief. However, his motivation is not based primarily on the religious belief. Religious belief is related to in a more distant manner, more as corroborating evidence than as the basic motivation:

_It has been, it is a part of the struggle [religious beliefs], but they are not connected to my purpose in life, it is not. I have a very hard time seeing this, I think it is more connected to my political thought. Of course, it [religious belief] is there as well, but it is not something that I explicitly think about. If I would dig I am sure I would find something, the social heritage is there as well, but nothing I think about._

- Matthew, rows 287-289

Note the narrative motivation for his attitudes, detailing his experience of meeting lonely people. Another example is Esther, who motivates her attitudes toward purpose and doing good through socialisation, of which religious beliefs are a part:
It has a lot to do with how I was raised, and that has to do with Christian thought and caring for the weak, to see who needs help. I have been influenced by people I have met, both in Christian context and in other places. My mother is very good at that, if there is a discussion, then she turns it around, “Think about this, what about the weakest person in the group, how will this be for them? What about the children and the old and the sick?” I think it is really important to have that perspective. I have also been encouraged in the [volunteer organisation], and you learn from that and you take it in. But also from church, to care for the weak, you get fed with that a lot.

- Esther, rows 231-242

Both Luke and Mary use religious beliefs as the sole motivation for attitudinal positions, while Matthew's and Esther's motivations are based on other influences. The latter both refer to socialisation and relate to their religious beliefs in a distant manner. Both Luke and Mary scored highly on the PIL-measure, while Matthew and Esther were part of the low-scoring group.

4.3.2.2. Values

The data show that religious beliefs are used in meaning making processes to motivate value-stances. In the meaning making narratives, religious beliefs are used as the cause of motivations, sometimes along with other beliefs. In any case, the beliefs are used in the beginning of the causal chains of the narratives. In other words, the beliefs are the basis for the motivations. In Ruth's words:

I have a pretty clear connection between faith and values, and I also live in a society that has certain values and you can choose to relate those to your faith. I feel that these values are very positive and exist in a lot of people, not only in the church. They are derived from a spiritual reality, and I think humans have foundational thoughts about what is good, about caring for each other. There is something there, and it has been put into us. Being human is in itself something religious, if we are created by God then how we are built, what we think and feel is automatically faith or spirituality. I think the values that exist in society, even if people would never say, “I care for the weak because I am a Christian”, they can be atheist, but I think, “Why would everybody do this, it isn’t always practical or logical, if there isn’t a soul or something deep down, why would we care about others? I relate a lot of my values to my faith, even if they are not a direct consequence of it, but they often are

- Ruth, rows 113-127

The same motivation can be found in Mary's account of her sense of purpose, tied to her values which are motivated by her religious beliefs:

What I understand from the Bible is that the purpose of humanity is to populate the earth, take care of the earth and believe in God.

- Mary, rows 35-38

The greater good is not a project, that when we reach point B we'll be done, it's a kind of philosophy of life, to make other people feel good through the way I am living my life.

- Mary, rows 168-170

In this account, Mary posits a hypothetical narrative of getting from point A to B, and that the greater good is antithetical to this, to motivate and explain her standpoints on values.
Motivating values from solely religious beliefs is less prevalent in individuals who reported a weaker sense of purpose in life. When asked about where she derives her values from, Esther replies:

A lot of it is from my upbringing, and the church, and the [volunteer organisation], I get a lot of my values from the [volunteer organisation], to meet adversity with mild temper and to be helpful and everything else. And you hear things and it is a combination of different influences, and you think, “That sounds good”.
- Esther, rows 301-307

Esther mentions various sources from which her values are derived. She is aware of the impact of socialisation, and does not relate her values directly to her faith, but rather understands her faith as part of her upbringing, through which she gets her values. She relates her values to variety of sources, and does not see her religious beliefs as the primary motivation for her values.

4.3.2.3. Goals
The theme of goals were not as prevalent in the qualitative data, mainly because it was not the main focus of the interview. Nevertheless, some respondents talked about goals in relation to values and purpose. No respondents talked about goals in direct relation to religious beliefs. Rather, goals were discussed as offshoots of more encompassing purposes in life.

Religious beliefs indirectly influenced goals through influencing values and understanding of purpose, which in turn influenced goals, as exemplified by Luke:

I believe there is a purpose in following Jesus, a purpose in trying, that he showed us how this life can be lived, and is our role model and exemplar, the one I want to emulate, the life he showed is also meaning, it gives meaning. The purpose of my life, in some way, if I am going to formulate it, is to follow Jesus and to want to be like him, and to think about how I, in my life, can practically live out the message he came with and showed who God is, and that gives my life purpose, because I believe that God is God and Jesus shows who God is, and for me to try and be like Jesus, to try and follow him in my everyday gives a purpose to my life.
- Luke, rows 94-101

The same dynamic can be found in this account by Mark:

I can create meaning, I can be a positive force in my environment by doing what God wants. Then you become constructive, you build things up and create and make things better for your fellow human beings. That is positive, God wants that. God wants people to be well, so that turns out well, but it is a choice.
- Mark, rows 179-185

Belief in a will of God, that God wants certain things, results in goals. Like Luke, Mark bases his motivation for goals on an understanding of purpose, God's purpose and will, and derives goals from this. One more example comes from Ruth, talking about her understanding of purpose:

My hope, as a Christian, is that when I look at other people, that I would look at them with God's eyes, and those are eyes that are kind, it means seeing people as good and valuable. And with this I think, it is both the purpose, that is our mission, what we are supposed to do, the purely theoretical, but also the emotional. I don't know if all Christians feel that way, but I
feel a strong empathy that is founded in my faith.
- Ruth, rows 79-83

Ruth also expresses goals as a product of an understanding of purpose. Her religious beliefs result in a particular view of the nature of the world, and the purpose of humanity, which in turn guides her in choices concerning goals in life.

4.3.2.4. Ultimate concerns

The data show that religious beliefs constitute or are used to motivate ultimate concerns. The data also show that ultimate concerns is connected not only to religious beliefs, but is also influenced by several other elements in a meaning system.

In talking about their ultimate concerns, the respondents touch on values, overall purpose, as well as religious beliefs, exemplified in the following excerpts:

I read a book recently, where the author wrote that if we are going to be Jesus’ hands, maybe we also need to be Jesus’ hands by protecting those who pick our coffee, maybe my hands have to choose the right coffee in the coffee-shelf, and I hadn’t done that before, so that went very deep into my faith. It is obvious that I, with my life and my resources, should help those who make sure I get coffee.
- Mary, rows 56-61

I think the Bible is complicated. The only thing I can clearly understand from it is that I should do good to other people or love other people, and it is so easy to think that only concerns acts toward people you meet, but also about consumption. That a person that I’m never going to meet still gets some form of love because we in the western world choose good products.
- Mary, rows 152-156

In Mary’s case, her faith in the teachings of the Bible (religious beliefs) result in an understanding of doing good to fellow humans (value) and a sense of responsibility toward others (overall purpose). The biblical imperative of loving others is expressed as an ultimate concern which informs her daily goals and decision.

Another example of this is Ruth, whose ultimate concern is constituted by both religious beliefs and overall purpose:

I feel that we are created to live in this world in love toward one another and in a loving relationship with God. That is a foundational thought that I have. And that we have received the earth as a gift, to care for it and protect it, and that influences me a lot, my choice of vocation, I’m a vegetarian, certain things that you do that feel very foundational to my choices in life.
- Ruth, rows 61-65

She motivates her choices in life by saying that humans are created for a purpose and have received the earth as a gift (religious beliefs) and that the purpose is to love one another and God, as well as caring and protecting the earth (overall purpose).

Luke expresses ultimate concerns based entirely on his religious beliefs about the identity of Jesus Christ and his exemplary life, which then informs his understanding of overall purpose:

Because I believe God is who he is, and because I believe Jesus is who he is, and because I believe Jesus showed us how we can live or should live, or should try to live, and also showed
us God’s ultimate love, I want to follow him and that means that I do my best and make an effort to do the best I can and that has an effect on my life and how I live and what I try to do, even though we are humans and do not always succeed with everything we want. It is clear that it has an influence on my life and my foundational faith is the starting point, my Christian faith is the platform from which I build my life, it has an influence on everything I do.

However ultimate concerns are constituted, whether by religious beliefs, values or overall purpose, they are highly influential within a meaning system because of their perceived importance to the individual.

4.3.2.5. Self-definition
Based on the data, religious beliefs are used as points of reference for self-definition. Respondents construct their self-definition in relation to religious beliefs and values. Luke relates his self-definition to his religious beliefs, specifically beliefs about God and God’s attitude toward him:

*The knowledge that there is a God who loves me does something to my self-image, and also, even if I absolutely try to follow Jesus and am trying to live that life, I know that it is also nothing I can achieve myself. It is about receiving and that I am accepted by God as I am, and that Jesus has done everything for me, and that I can rest in and feel safe in my faith. It’s not about me achieving things or performing or succeeding, but about receiving, that gives my whole faith a security, in terms of identity. To land in the fact that I am loved, and that there is something higher and greater than I.*
- Luke, rows 123-133

Another example is Sara, who talks about times of hardship and instability in self-definition. In those times, religious beliefs are used as a point of reference and function as a source of stability:

*I think when you are on a high, it’s not an issue who you are. But when you hit a low, that’s when you start to struggle. I sometimes struggle with low self-esteem, then I try to remember that I am a child of God and that he loves me no matter what.*
- Sara, rows 209-211

The function of religious beliefs as a form of anchor for self-definition is also evident in Mark’s account:

*God is the beginning and end of everything and if he has created everything, than the meaning of my existence is that God wants me to exist. That is meaningful in itself, there can be nothing more meaningful, per definition. “Do you believe that”, you say? Yes, I do. It is a foundation, something to stand on, there is nothing that can take me away from God’s purpose. He wanted this, actively. There is an active thought behind this, he wanted me.*
- Mark, rows 195-204

*Since God has made a decision that I should be who I am, then it is a true decision and it means that I am a real human being coming from a true purpose and that gives meaning. You have a true God who thinks a true, active thought that becomes a true, active action that Johan should be who he is born to be. From that you get a meaningful consequence. There is*
something pure, something genuine in my being, who I am.
- Mark, rows 319-327

You dare to expose yourself a bit more, you are a little more secure, you don’t have to defend your own as much.
- Mark, rows 297-298

4.3.2.6. Overall purpose
Overall purpose in a meaning system is, according to the data, informed by religious beliefs and values. As they do for attitudes and values, religious beliefs are used to motivate stances on purpose. One example of this is Mary, who motivates her understanding of purpose based on religious beliefs derived from the Bible:

I think I can divide into what I think that humanity's purpose is, and what I think my personal purpose is, and I think it floats a bit between the two for me. But what I can read in the Bible is that the purpose of humanity to populate the earth, take care of the earth, believe in God, and do good to fellow humans, I believe that is some kind of foundational meaning.
- Mary, rows 32-39

The same can be seen in several other accounts regarding purpose, for example from Mark and Luke:

I believe the purpose of my existence is my existence. That is the only purpose. God wanted me to exist. There is no, “[Respondent] exists to save the world or make people…”, that is a consequence. God can of course use people as tools, you have to believe that as a Christian, but the purpose is not that people are created for... I believed that as a child, because then it was often, “God has task that fits just for you.” And then I went around worrying when I was a teenager, “What is my task then?” But the whole idea is that you are not meaningless, you are meaningful. That is the whole point. I went around worrying that I would make the wrong choice. I want this, but what does God want? Maybe there is a task I should do, maybe I should go to Congo and distribute Bibles, maybe that is what God wants. I don’t want to do that, or I don’t know what I want. No, I think the purpose of me existing is that God is curious about what will happen to me.
- Mark, rows 146-162

I believe, because I believe in a God who is the creator of the universe and who is behind everything, I believe there is a purpose for all our lives, and that means that my life also has a purpose as a part of that whole.
- Luke, rows 85-88

All of the accounts above are from individuals who reported a strong sense of purpose in life. In their accounts, the religious beliefs are the primary motivations for stances on and understanding of purpose. In individuals with a weaker sense of purpose in life, the motivations for purpose were more multifaceted, in that they involved not only religious beliefs, but also other beliefs and values. Matthew, for example, argued his sense of purpose based on political thought, religious beliefs and personal experience:

I don’t often think that my purpose is connected to Christian thoughts, more than it being hammered into me at home that the purpose of my life is to do good for others.
- Matthew, rows 261-262
If I think about how I think politically, and also what I think is good about Christianity, is the view that a human being alone, solo, is a lot less than when you are a part of a group. A purpose is in that case to find a context and a community, and we should focus more on that in society. When I work I see a lot of people who are so lonely, and so, the purpose in life is to find a context where you can grow.
- Matthew, rows 268-273

Esther also refers to several sources for her understanding of purpose:

It is about following an inner compass, and how do you know if it points in the right direction? You don’t, you always have to check, but I think it’s about being nice and caring for others, that’s what you can do, doing good is taking care of yourself and taking care of others, to not only think about yourself, to not only think about surface but also function. To make something better, because there is so much in our society that is all about becoming more good-looking, richer and thinner, and I have a hard time seeing the purpose of that, the function that it leads to something good. Fellowship, however, to care for, to comfort, to hug a small scout who is sad, that feels good, that feels meaningful. To make others happy and have fun with others and have fellowship, that is important.
- Esther, rows 218-229

Like Matthew, Esther motivates her understanding of purpose using many sources, not primarily her religious beliefs. Likewise, Rachel refers both to religious and other beliefs when discussing purpose:

I can definitely see that he [God] has [a purpose for everyone], but I don’t feel that I have a lot of knowledge regarding the existence of everything. I have appreciated that with this way of seeing things, the emphasis on that God is greater, even if a come from a free-church context where everything sometimes is pretty cute, and it feels more true for me to be able to talk about these hard questions. If the answer could have been given in one sentence it would have been too complex in a way, and I can appreciate that. What I like about physics and cosmology is that we are in our dimensions as human individuals. There is a macro-world and a micro-world and wavelengths that we don’t see, wavelengths we don’t hear. Out of that I think we should understand and take in . . . Every time I go back to the natural sciences I remember, “right, I am in a small box here and even in that box it is impossible to understand everything and grasp the complexity.
- Rachel, rows 207-209

There were also respondents who disassociated their understanding of purpose with their religious beliefs, because of incomprehensibility of this purpose, or because of other reasons. Sara argues that she has no way of knowing her purpose, and no way of changing it if she did know it, making it irrelevant to her life:

I think people say God created, they try to give reasons why God created people, and I still don’t get it. And I try not to think in those terms either. It’s something like, people in Sweden complain about the weather, and then they ask me, “You come from [a warm country], it must be tough for you to live in Sweden”. But that is something that I cannot change, so the weather doesn’t bother me, what bothers me is relationships, it’s very hard to know people, because that I can change. The same with my purpose in life. Say I find my purpose tomorrow, can I change it? I don’t think I can, so it’s not so important for me to know the purpose of life.
- Sara, rows 118-125
Sara, who scored highly on religious belief in the survey, has a distanced stance to overall purpose. Interestingly, she later motivates this stance through religious belief and beliefs regarding the limits of human understanding:

> And then I think, maybe if we knew, sometimes I have this faith, that someday I will understand [God’s purpose], it doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt or you don’t get frustrated but he [God] knows and he let this happen, so maybe it is for a greater purpose. I hate the word, but we can’t understand everything. Maybe it’s too mind-boggling to understand.

- Sara, rows 230-235

Sara’s stance on overall purpose highlights an interesting dynamic in her meaning system. She uses religious beliefs to motivate her stance that purpose is irrelevant, showing in this case that strength of religious beliefs is not in itself a guarantee of a stronger sense of purpose in life. Rather, it is also a matter of the content and combinations of beliefs in a meaning system that determines how purpose in life is constructed.
5. Analysis

In this section, the results will be analysed according to the theoretical model used in the study. The results of the two phases will first be analysed separately, then jointly, based on meaning system theory and narrative theory.

5.1. Analysis - Phase 1

The correlations between specific beliefs and purpose in life can be interpreted as pointing to a relationship between a sense of purpose in life and specific beliefs about the existence of God, beliefs about a spiritual dimension, beliefs about humanity's relation to this dimension and the nature of human beings. A further analysis of the non-significant results give some support for this, as beliefs with content similar or connected to those mentioned above are nearer to significance than other beliefs. This is not to say that non-significant results should be viewed as significant, but that their proximity to significance can be carefully considered as supportive of the analysis, in part because of the low power of the test due to the small sample size. What also needs to be considered in the context of the theory of the study, particularly the definition of “beliefs”, is that the results show that conviction is positively correlated to purpose in life. The composite measure of religiosity (i.e. overall conviction of beliefs) shows a positive correlation to purpose in life, thereby showing a connection between stronger conviction of certain beliefs and purpose in life.

5.2. Analysis - Phase 2

In this section, the data and results of the qualitative study will be analysed based on narrative and relational analysis. The association between religious beliefs and the elements of a meaning system will be analysed separately, followed by an analysis of the effect of content and conviction of beliefs will be undertaken.

5.2.1. Religious beliefs and attitudes

An analysis of the data and results show that religious beliefs influence attitudes by functioning as motivations for attitudinal stances. Both the narrative and relational analyses reveal that religious beliefs are used as motivators for attitudes and that these attitudes are the results of narrative constructions. In the data, the respondents provide narratives to support their attitudes, with religious beliefs often given as reasons for these. The relational analysis also sheds light on what beliefs are most frequently used to motivate attitudes on purpose in life. In the group with a strong sense of purpose in life, religious beliefs are used in exclusivity as motivation for attitudes. There is a clear difference between groups with varying strength of PIL when it comes to how religious beliefs are used in relation to attitudes. The individuals in the strong PIL-group are much more likely to only use religious beliefs to express attitudes toward purpose, while individuals with a weaker sense of PIL are more likely to use religious beliefs in tandem with other beliefs and experiences.

The narrative analysis along with the relational analysis shows a directionality in the relationship between religious beliefs and attitudes. There is no case in the data where a religious belief is motivated by attitudes. Instead, all of the cases show a directionality, where it is the religious beliefs that motivate attitudes.

5.2.2. Religious beliefs and values

As shown by the data, religious beliefs are used to motivate values to varying degrees. Narrative analysis shows that religious beliefs form a foundation in narratives where values are motivated.
Both the narrative and relational analyses show a clear connection between beliefs and values, where religious beliefs are expressed as a basis for values by the respondents.

The narrative analysis shows the same pattern as the analysis of attitudes. Values are derived from and motivated by religious beliefs and the expression of this motivation takes the form of a narrative. The narratives can vary in scope and focus, and some respondents use several interconnected narratives to explain a particular value. In each narrative, though, there is always some form of reference to how a religious belief has motivated the respondent to value something or someone.

The relational analysis shows that belief in God as existing and involved is often used as a foundational belief in the motivations of value. God is seen as something ultimate and is regarded as someone to be emulated, someone who communicates his will through the Bible and who has a will for the lives of the respondents. Respondents who express belief in God as existing and active often use this belief as the sole motivation for values, while respondents who do not use this belief are more likely to use a variety of beliefs, religious and otherwise, to motivate values.

5.2.3. Religious beliefs and goals

The relationship between religious beliefs and goals is not as straightforward as that between religious beliefs and attitudes, or religious beliefs and values. The relational analysis of the data shows that goals are not influenced directly by religious beliefs, but rather by beliefs about overall purpose and/or values, which are in turn influenced by religious beliefs. Thus, the element of goals is influenced by religious beliefs, but in one degree of separation. Religious beliefs influence other elements in a meaning system that influence goals.

The narrative analysis also shows that goals are connected to religious beliefs in a different way than the aforementioned elements. While values and attitudes are motivated narratively and these narratives always involved references to both religious beliefs and the individuals self-definition, the narratives used in the expression of goals are barely narratives at all. Instead, they are accounts of how the respondents' values and religious beliefs are outworked in their everyday lives. Goals are not expressed as something that is influenced by religious beliefs directly, or that touches the individual's self-definition, values or attitudes. Rather, goals are expressed as the results of values, attitudes and beliefs about overall purpose, when the establishment of these is already a fait accompli.

5.2.4. Religious beliefs and ultimate concerns

As shown by the data, the element of ultimate concerns and its relationship to religious beliefs differ from other elements in a meaning system. The data show that religious beliefs can be used to motivate ultimate concerns, but also that religious beliefs can become ultimate concerns depending on the attitude that the individual has toward this belief. In other words, a religious belief can be an ultimate concern, and is perceived as ultimate because of its weight and importance to the individual. Ultimate concerns can also be motivated by religious beliefs. In the case of religious beliefs motivating ultimate concerns, the ultimate concerns are then constituted by values or overall purposes that are motivated and informed by religious or other beliefs.

The narrative and relational analyses show that ultimate concerns are broad, overarching themes in a person's meaning system, connected to or consisting of a wide range of religious beliefs, values and beliefs about overall purpose. The analysis also shows that the categorisation of ultimate concerns as a distinct element in a meaning system is somewhat problematic. Both analyses show that ultimate concerns can be constituted by beliefs, values and overall purposes.
Ergo, the category can overlap with other categories. This overlap leads to a lack of distinction between ultimate concerns and other elements. One aspect of this problem comes from the fact that the distinction of the category of ultimate concerns arises from a different dimension than the other elements. The other elements are distinguished through differences in content and function, while ultimate concerns is distinguished by function and the importance with which the ultimate concerns is perceived. Other elements can thus constitute an ultimate concern, depending on their perceived level of importance to the individual. This issue with Paloutzian’s meaning system model and possible solutions is addressed in chapter 6.

5.2.5. Religious beliefs and self-definition
The analysis of how religious beliefs influence self-definition shows that religious beliefs function as a form of reference point or cognitive anchors for individual’s. Religious beliefs, especially concerning the nature of God and God’s relationship to the individuals, are used to build different facets of self-definition. These beliefs and their content are seen as extra-personal, in that they are perceived as points of reference outside of the individual himself/herself. Religious beliefs are used to form very foundational aspects of self-definition, including if one has meaning, the reason behind one’s existence and one’s value to God.

This use of religious beliefs as point of reference is most clearly seen in the relational analysis, where religious beliefs are connected to statements about self-definition in all the interviews. Furthermore, the relational analysis shows that religious beliefs are not used to motivate self-definition in the way that they are used to motivate other elements in the meaning system. Rather, the religious beliefs are the basis for self-definition, the foundation upon which various aspects of self-definition is built. The relationship between religious beliefs and self-definition is more direct than for example the relationship between religious beliefs and values. Whereas values are seen as caused by religious beliefs, the relationship between beliefs and self-definition can be defined as “creative”. It is not a matter of “because I believe in this, I have this value”, but of “God has made me such and such, therefore I am”. Religious beliefs have a direct impact on the individuals view of him/herself, where the process of causation is not mentioned. This more direct relationship is both due to the relationship between religious beliefs and self-definition, and to the nature of the element of self-definition. If a religious belief impacts a person’s self-definition, then that religious belief, by the very meaning of self-definition, impacts the most important part of a person’s psychology.

5.2.6. Religious beliefs and overall purpose
The data on the connection between religious beliefs and overall purpose shows little narrative connection between the two. Instead, it is the relational analysis which casts light of how religious beliefs influence overall purpose.

The relational analysis shows that the pattern of using religious beliefs as motivation, which is found in the analysis of attitudes and values, is also evident in the data on overall purpose. Religious beliefs are used as motivations for beliefs about overall purpose.

The relational analysis further revealed differences between individuals regarding the way in which they used beliefs to form overall purpose. In general, the individuals in the strong PIL-group were more likely to use religious beliefs as their sole motivation for overall purpose. Individuals from the weak PIL-group were more likely to use both religious and non-religious beliefs in their motivation of overall purpose. Some individuals in the weak PIL-group went so far as to posit ignorance or non-existence of purpose in life, based on both religious and non-religious beliefs.
5.2.7. Religious beliefs, elements in a meaning system and purpose in life

Thus far, the results and analyses have shown that religious beliefs are used in various ways to motivate, inform and construct different elements of a meaning system. While interesting, these results only show half of the meaning making process involved in the construction of purpose in life. The next half concerns the way in which the elements of a meaning system, influenced by religious beliefs, are involved in the construction of purpose in life.

The analysis of the data (exemplified by the excerpts in chapter 4) shows that several elements of the respondents' meaning systems are involved in the construction of purpose in life. Beliefs are involved, along with attitudes and values motivated by these beliefs. If the beliefs are religious, the purpose in life is seen as connected to a sacred dimension in reality. The religious beliefs and values that are involved in the construction of purpose in life are commonly seen as an ultimate concern by the respondents. Also involved is the construction of purpose in life as the individual's understanding of overall purpose. This overall purpose used in the construction of purpose in life either constitutes or is connected to an ultimate concern.

The analysis also shows that one more element is involved in the construction of purpose in life: self-definition. In the excerpts above, the respondents motivate their sense of purpose in life (or lack thereof) based on ultimate concerns and overall purpose. However, the respondents also motivate their sense of purpose in life through their self-definition in relation to ultimate concerns and overall purpose. Purpose in life is motivated narratively with the respondent positioning her- or himself in relation to their ultimate concerns and their understanding of overall purpose.

In summary then, the data show that religious beliefs are used as the basis for motivating attitudes, values, and overall purpose, that religious beliefs influence goals indirectly through the motivation of values and purpose, that they form ultimate concerns if they are perceived as ultimate, and that they are used as point of reference in self-definition. The data also show that the primary elements involved in the construction of purpose in life are ultimate concerns, overall purpose and self-definition. The relationships between religious beliefs, elements in a meaning system and purpose in life are visualised in figure 3 below.

An analysis of the qualitative results based on the theoretical model show that religious beliefs are involved in the construction of purpose in life both directly and indirectly. Firstly, the analysis shows that religious beliefs influence every element of a meaning system. This is done through a process where an individual uses the religious beliefs to motivate, inform or construct elements of their meaning system. This influence from religious beliefs has an indirect effect on the construction of purpose in life, as the elements that are influenced are involved in the construction of purpose in life.

Secondly, the analysis shows that religious beliefs can be directly involved in the construction of purpose in life. This direct influence occurs when particular religious beliefs constitute an ultimate concern. As shown by the results, ultimate concerns can be both motivated and informed (indirectly influenced) or constituted (directly influenced) by religious beliefs. When the religious beliefs constitute an ultimate concern, they are directly involved in the construction of purpose in life.

5.2.8. Content and conviction of beliefs

In addition to the analysis to ascertain how religious beliefs influenced a meaning system and the construction of purpose in life, the qualitative data were also analysed in relation to the findings of phase 1 of the study. The analysis from phase 1 showed that both conviction and content of religious beliefs affect the association between belief and purpose in life. The analysis of the qualitative data supports the results from phase 1. Firstly, the conviction with which
religious beliefs were held affected their influence on a person’s meaning system. As shown by the analysis above, respondents with stronger reported conviction were more likely to use religious beliefs as their sole motivation for values, attitudes and overall purpose. Respondents with weaker conviction were more prone to use a variety of beliefs, both religious and non-religious, to motivate elements in their meaning system. This distinction between respondents with different levels of conviction was also manifested in their motivation of ultimate concerns, which is constituted by of constructed through the above mentioned elements. Respondents with a stronger religious conviction were more likely to have religious beliefs directly constitute their ultimate concerns, while respondents with weaker conviction employed religious beliefs in a more indirect way to motivate ultimate concerns.

Figure 3. Visual model of relationships between religious beliefs, elements in a meaning system and purpose in life
The content of religious beliefs was also shown to be significant in the correlation between beliefs and purpose in life. The qualitative data show that beliefs about the existence of God were used prolifically to motivate both values and overall purpose, and also to construct self-definition. Other beliefs which were used were beliefs about the nature of humanity in relation to God, humanity's place in the universe, the ontology of the world, the overall purpose of human beings and beliefs about God having a plan for people. Beliefs that were not mentioned, but that showed a significant correlation to purpose in life in the quantitative data were belief in heaven, belief in spiritual forces of evil and belief in the spirituality of physical contact. The omission of these can however be due to methodological faults and does not necessarily disprove the findings of phase 1.

5.3. Joint analysis

The joint analysis of the results show a concurrence, both regarding the content of religious beliefs involved in the construction of purpose in life and the significance of conviction in this construction.

The quantitative results showed a correlation between beliefs about the ontology of the world, concerning spiritual dimensions, the existence of God and the nature of human beings, and a sense of purpose in life. In the qualitative data, these beliefs are prominently used to motivate, inform or construct elements in the respondents’ meaning system. The belief that one’s life has been planned out was also correlated to purpose in life, something which is reflected in many of the respondents’ motivations of their understanding of overall purpose. Thus the qualitative data supports the quantitative findings regarding the content of beliefs involved in the construction of purpose in life.

The two phases are also concurrent in relation to the significance of conviction. The quantitative results showed that religious conviction and purpose in life were positively correlated with a moderate strength correlation. This positive correlation was echoed and explained by the qualitative data. Respondents with stronger religious convictions were more likely to use their religious beliefs, and only their religious beliefs, to motivate, inform and construct elements in their meaning system and purpose in life. Respondents with weaker religious conviction were more likely to use a mixture of religious and other beliefs to motivate and construct elements of their meaning system and purpose in life.

In summary, the two phases point to concurrent conclusions regarding the religious beliefs involved in the construction of purpose in life, as well as the significance of conviction in meaning making processes.

5.4. Conclusions

5.4.1. Hypothesis: There is a significant, positive correlation between the strength of religious belief and purpose in life

Based on the data from the first, quantitative phase of the study, the hypothesis is confirmed. The data shows that there is a statistically significant, positive correlation between the measure of purpose in life and the composite measure of religious beliefs (BVS composite) (\(\tau = 0.34\), \(p<0.01\)).

5.4.2. Research question 1: What specific religious beliefs show a significant correlation to purpose in life?

According to the quantitative analysis, a sense of purpose in life is correlated to a belief that God is an all pervading presence (\(\tau = 0.35\), \(p<0.05\)), belief in forces for evil in the universe (\(\tau\))
belief that human physical contact can be a spiritual experience ($\tau = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$), belief in life after death ($\tau = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), belief that one’s life has been planned out ($\tau = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$), belief that there is a heaven ($\tau = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$), belief that the human spirit is immortal ($\tau = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$), and belief that there is a God ($\tau = 0.32$, $p < 0.05$). These seven beliefs were significantly correlated to a sense of purpose in life. These beliefs concern the ontology of the world, spiritual dimensions, the existence of God and the nature and future of human beings.

5.4.3. Research question 2: How are religious beliefs used in a meaning system to construct a sense of purpose in life?

The analysis of the qualitative data shows that religious beliefs can influence every part of a meaning system. Religious beliefs are used as a motivation for attitudes, values and stances on overall purpose, thereby indirectly influencing goals. They also function as a point of reference for self-definition, and as a source of ultimate concerns.

The analysis also shows the dynamics of different elements of a meaning system involved in the construction of purpose in life. Firstly, the individual’s ultimate concerns play a significant role in the construction of purpose in life. These ultimate concerns consist of beliefs and values and function as a focal point in the meaning system. Secondly, beliefs about overall purpose are a part of a sense of purpose in life. The individual relates her/his understanding of humanity’s overall purpose to their ultimate concerns and overall purpose often springs out of ultimate concerns. Thirdly, purpose in life is constructed through a process of positioning self-definition in relation to ultimate concerns and overall purpose.

The results of the qualitative analysis support the results of the quantitative phase regarding what beliefs were used in the construction of purpose. The content of beliefs involved in the construction of purpose in life concerned the ontology of the world, the existence of God and the nature and future of human beings.

In summary, and to answer the research question, religious beliefs influence every part of a meaning system. In relation to the construction of purpose in life, they are used as ultimate concerns and they influence understandings of overall purpose. They are also used as points of reference for self-definition, to which the individual relates their understanding of themselves. These three elements, ultimate concerns, overall purpose and self-definition, are involved in the construction of purpose in life and are influenced by religious beliefs in varying degrees.

5.4.4. Final conclusions

Taken together, the two phases of the study show that religious beliefs held with conviction contribute to a stronger sense of purpose in life. They do so by influencing every part of a person’s meaning system, particularly the three elements that are primarily involved in the construction of a sense of purpose in life.

The results of the study support postulates made by meaning system theorists regarding the role of religion in meaning making. Based on the findings of this study, religion, and religious beliefs in particular, can function as a framework that facilitates meaning making, by adding stability and coherence to a meaning system. Religious beliefs concerning the ontology and nature of the sacred and the world, as well as the nature of humanity, show a significant, positive correlation to purpose in life. These beliefs are also shown to be central to the construction of purpose in life in the qualitative data. The data show that in the cases where religious beliefs are the primary source of a coherent worldview, they also facilitate a stronger, clearer sense of purpose in life. However, when the religious beliefs are not the primary source, and are mixed with other beliefs, the resulting sense of purpose in life is not as strong.
6. Discussion and suggestions for further research

6.1. Empirical discussion

The findings of the study support several studies in the reviewed literature. Crandall and Rasmussen (1975), Soderstrom and Wright (1977), Oishi and Diener (2013), and Schweiker (1969), with results showing a correlation between religious beliefs and purpose in life, are echoed in this study. The findings regarding specific religious beliefs and purpose in life can only be referenced to Willard and Norenzayan (2013), who found a significant, positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) between belief in God and sense of purpose in life. Their results match this study’s, except for the strength of the correlation.

Crandall and Rasmussen’s study (1975) showed a correlation between intrinsic religiosity and purpose in life ($r = -0.31$, $p<0.01$) of similar strength to the one found in this study. They also tested for extrinsic religiosity and purpose in life but did not find a correlation. This categorisation of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity could possibly be related to this study’s findings that religious conviction and purpose in life are correlated. The definitions of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity includes a dimension of inner conviction, which can seen as a confirmation of this study’s results.

Crandall and Rasmussen also found differences in values between groups with high and low purpose in life. For groups with low purpose in life, the values of comfort and excitement were more important, while the group with high purpose in life were more concerned with salvation. Although the designs of the studies are different, these results can be linked to the qualitative results of this study, where stronger religious conviction is connected to the use of primarily religious beliefs and values in the construction of purpose, while weaker religious convictions result in the use of beliefs and values that are both religious and non-religious.

The findings of Soderstrom and Wright can also be linked to the findings of this study. They researched the effect of mature religious commitment, measured using three dimensions, including intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. They found that individuals with intrinsic, committed religiosity showed a significant difference in purpose in life ($p<0.01$) compared to other individuals. These results can also be said to be supported by the findings of the current study, where religious conviction (found in intrinsic, committed religiosity) is positively correlated to purpose in life.

Oishi and Diener’s (2013) findings are also supported by the results of the current study with regard to the correlation between religiosity and purpose in life. However, their study found a stronger correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.63$, $p<0.01$). The strength of the correlation is nearly the same as Willard and Norenzayan’s (2013) result when measuring the correlation between purpose in life and belief in God. The strength of this correlation is not matched by the current study, which found a weaker correlation between belief in God and purpose in life ($tau = 0.32$, $p<0.05$). However, when considering this, one must take into account that the non-parametric test used in this study has lower power than Pearson’s correlation used by Willard and Norenzayan.

The results of the qualitative analysis can be compared to the findings of Fletcher (2004), where content and conviction of beliefs resulted in different strategies of meaning making in religious individuals. Fletcher’s results are concordant with the results of this study, in that the content and conviction of beliefs decided how beliefs were used in meaning making. Fletcher found that individuals with stronger religious beliefs were more likely to have their beliefs as the sole source of meaning and purpose in life, while individuals with weaker religious beliefs created meaning and purpose using several different sources. These results mirror the results of the present study.
The results of the entirety of the study confirm several postulates made by theorists regarding the role of religion in creating meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009), showing that religious meaning systems provide stable and high level meanings that facilitate the construction of purpose in life.

6.2. Contribution
The contribution of the study to the research on meaning and religion is a confirmation of results from earlier studies regarding the correlation between religious belief and a sense of purpose in life. It also contributes original results regarding the correlation between specific religious beliefs and a sense of purpose in life, as well as results regarding how religious beliefs are employed in meaning making processes. Not only does the study show that religious belief in general is significantly, positively correlated to a sense of purpose in life, it also shows what specific beliefs are positively correlated to purpose in life, and it shows how the beliefs are employed in meaning making processes to construct a sense of purpose in life.

The study also contributes to the methodological and theoretical development of the psychology of religion by employing meaning system theory in combination with narrative theory and methods, with promising results. This combination has proven fruitful in that it can provide a more in-depth analysis of the workings of meaning making processes, using both the structured approach of meaning system theory, and the hermeneutic framework of narrative theory. These two theories combined should be considered as a viable option in the future study meaning and religion, particularly considering the multidimensionality of these two phenomena. Their successful combination in this study should also be considered in relation to the ongoing debate regarding the use of mixed methods. It can function to strengthen the argument for the use of mixed methods approaches in the psychology of religion, and in other fields as well.

6.3. Theory
The novel use of meaning system theory coupled with narrative theory and methods, although not without its issues, has in this study proven fruitful. Meaning system theory generates a number of hypotheses and postulated relationships between the elements of a meaning system which are testable and can be explored through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The addition of narrative theory to the framework of meaning system theory also shows promise for further research. That being said, there is much that needs to be developed if research of a high standard is to be achieved with this mix of theoretical perspectives. Firstly, much more needs to be done to harmonise the concepts and terminology. For example, the view of identity in narrative theory could prove very fruitful when combined with meaning system theory, but first the two theoretical perspectives would have to be analysed and harmonised, both in concept and terminology.

The issue of harmonisation of concepts and terminology also concerns the operationalisation of concepts and constructs. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the main difficulties faced in the study of both religion and meaning is the lack of clear concepts which are adequately delineated in terminology and can be fruitfully operationalised. While this study attempted and in part succeeded in adding a measure of clarity to the results of the association between religion and meaning, there is still much to be done, not least in the theoretical arena. A possible tool for this task, in general, but also specifically concerning meaning system theory and narrative theory, is DeMarinis’ (2003) triangle of assessment.

Apart from the combination and clarification of theoretical content, there is also some development that can be suggested to the individual theories based on the findings in this
study. Meaning system theory could be improved through the inclusion of a processual, directional dimension. As shown in this study, beliefs, values and overall purposes can be seen as building blocks in a meaning making process that produces a sense of purpose in life. A valuable addition to meaning system theory would be a delineation between what is a product and what is a resource in a meaning system, adding a dimension of directionality to the model. Some elements can be classified as both, but a processual perspective would at least be able to further clarify connections between elements and yield more powerful models for understanding meaning systems.

Another development suggested by the results of the study is the refinement of the element 'ultimate concerns' in Paloutzian's meaning system model. This study has shown that the current categorisation in Paloutzian's model does not function well when it comes to the element of ultimate concerns. This element transcends the categorisation of other elements because it is not based on differences in content. Rather, the element of ultimate concerns is delineated based on the relevance of an individual's concern. While the results of the study show that relevance and conviction are important factors in meaning making processes, the inclusion of ultimate concerns as a separate element of a meaning system adds more confusion than clarity to the model. It is the current author's stance that ultimate concerns should be removed as an element of a meaning system and that a separate dimension should be introduced in the model, apart from the elements of a meaning system. This dimension is relevance, i.e. the importance of beliefs, values and other elements. As this study has shown, this dimension is as important a factor as the content of elements in a meaning system. This dimension could very well be developed out of the concept of centrality, which has recently gained a measure of prominence in the psychology of religion (e.g. Zwingmann & Gottschling, 2015).

Paloutzian's model can be further improved by introducing a level of parsimony to the terminology and definition of 'beliefs'. The delineation between beliefs and other elements Paloutzian's model is somewhat hard to make. Beliefs, values and overall purpose could all be seen as beliefs of different kinds. A clearer delineation would greatly increase the clarity and usefulness of Paloutzian's model. Because of this, Silberman's definition of belief (Silberman, 2005) or Rokeach's (1973, in Koltko-Rivera, 2004) taxonomy of beliefs could be worthwhile improvements to Paloutzian's model.

Finally, on a more meta-theoretical level, theoretical and methodological level, the concept of 'belief' could be clarified, developed and better operationalised. Insights from neurology, philosophy and psychology could together provide a better definition and conceptualisation of 'belief', which would aid future studies concerned with this topic. Such a development would facilitate the integration of studies on the topic of belief into a larger body of research in the aforementioned areas.

6.4. Methodology and validity

The use of mixed methods research design is, in line with recommendations from leading researchers (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009) a fruitful way of approaching the theoretical and methodological difficulties that exist in the research on religion and meaning. Using methods in sequence, as in this study, or in other combinations (see Creswell, 2009, for a review of mixed methods strategies) provides a much needed addition of powerful methodological tools to research two highly complex and multidimensional phenomena.

The use of a mixed methods, sequential exploratory research design in this study was not without its challenges. Firstly, the use of mixed methods study is significantly more complicated with regard to the planning and design of the entirety of the study, both theoretical and
methodological aspects, as well as the combination of the two and the interpretation of the results. Add to this that the topic being researched is not without complication either. Despite this, the methods employed in the study did yield interesting results, especially when considered and interpreted in tandem.

An improvement that must be incorporated in any future studies with a similar topic to this one is a more thorough consideration of which quantitative measurement of purpose that is used. While it was fortunate that two different measures of purpose in life were used in this study, and that this enabled a basic analysis of the validity of the primary measurement, it is clear that the choice of measurement could have been made with more care. Despite the recent rise in interest in meaning and purpose, there are still major hurdles to be overcome when it comes to the concepts and operationalisations of meaning and purpose. There still exists a degree of confusion regarding the exact definition of purpose, and though the concept and its definition has similarities in its different iterations in various theories, there are also discrepancies between them that need to be considered and addressed in any study attempting to study purpose.

Another foundational methodological improvement for future studies is the inclusion of more respondents. Although the statistical analysis did yield significant correlations, and the interview data did show a similar process of meaning making for all respondents, the inclusion of additional respondents could have increased the certainty of the results. It is also worth mentioning that the inclusion of only Christians is the probable cause of the skewed distribution on most of the items on religious belief in the survey. Future studies should consider the inclusion of additional respondents from other faiths as well as non-believers. However, this would also necessitate a more thorough process of creating a questionnaire on belief that is applicable to respondents of all kinds and types of faiths. This process would be necessary to ensure content validity with regard to the content of beliefs and values. For example, the conceptual differences in the concept of God in Christian and Hindi faiths would pose a serious threat to content validity if two groups from the different faiths and/or traditions used the same survey. This, and other examples of the difficulties which arise when studying religion quantitatively, makes a strong case for the inclusion of qualitative methods, both for the creation of accurate and valid quantitative instruments, and for qualitative studies of religious individuals, groups and phenomena. Furthermore, concerning the possibilities of quantitative analysis, data that is normally distributed is open to a host of statistical opportunities not possible with skewed and non-normally distributed data. Bivariate analyses with higher power than its non-parametric counterparts, regression analysis and various analyses of variance are some tests that could bring significant insights to quantitative data on religion and meaning.

The inclusion of more respondents could also be extended to include respondents from different age cohorts, to more thoroughly test the effects of age on meaning making processes. As described in chapter 3, one of the reasons for the choice of target population (individuals between the ages of 25-40) was the relative psychological stability in relation to meaning in this age-range. Future studies could include several age cohorts to study how levels of purpose in life and meaning making processes correlate and are affected by age.

The qualitative part of other mixed methods studies could benefit from lessons learned in this study. Once again, more clarity and forethought in the planning and use of theory is always needed, but this is also the case in the methodological aspects of qualitative analysis. The narrative analysis and relational analysis used in this study were fruitful in their complementary capabilities, and gave greater insights into the data as a result. However, the analyses could have benefited from a more clearly defined theoretical perspective to help guide the analysis and interpretation of the data. The use of DeMarinis' (2003) triangle of assessment is a viable tool for developing this.
The validity criteria and validity strategies used in the study have some merit, but according to the perspective of validity as an ongoing process during the whole study, there are some significant weaknesses that need to be addressed. The first has already been discussed: the use of an inadequate measure of purpose. This has already been addressed in isolation, regarding the specific use of quantitative instruments. However, this also needs to be discussed in the larger context of validity strategies and the ongoing checks for validity throughout the entirety of a study. The failing in this case is in the theoretical and methodological considerations, i.e. the design of the research. This flaw in the original research design could have had vast consequences for the validity of the entire study. The inclusion of another measure of validity saved the study from becoming useless in terms of results and conclusions, but the very existence of such a flaw requires serious thought regarding the design of research, especially research using mixed methods. Much can of course be attributed to the researcher, who can take more care in future scientific endeavours to thoroughly investigate the implications of using instruments from different theoretical perspectives. Part of the issue though, is the aforementioned lack of clarity in the conceptualisation of purpose and meaning. This is unfortunately a hazard for any study researching these topics and something that should be taken seriously by researchers wanting to study them. A more thorough theoretical and methodological analysis before data-gathering and analysis could have averted this, and any study that wishes to study purpose and meaning should take special care regarding the analyses performed for the foundational research design.

Despite this flaw, however, the validity strategies employed in the study have functioned well in the context of a mixed methods design. The qualitative phase of the study and the validity strategies employed there could have been bolstered by additional peer reviewing, with peers specifically trained in the interpretative theory and methods used. Also, the validity strategy of member checking of the qualitative data and analysis could have been included if more resources had been available for the study. Both additional peer reviewing and member checking could have been added to further increase the argumentative validity of the study.

6.5. Concluding reflections

Despite the many needs for improvement, the study has made original and thought-provoking contributions to the study of religion and meaning. As mentioned above though, the grounds for generalising the results are not strong. The small sample size and the original methodology employed is not enough to make more encompassing generalisations. However, the study and its results can be seen as a small beginning, leading to many more questions regarding the connections between religion and meaning and the psychological processes that mediate these connections.

It is the opinion of the current author that the main problem standing in the way of increased fruitfulness and understanding derived from research on meaning and religion is the gap between the subject matter and the theories and methods used to understand it. The development of theory must be able to match the complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomena being studied. As such, the author of this study would like to join the choir of voices advocating a cross-disciplinary, multimethod approach to the study of religion and meaning.

6.6. Suggestions for further research

One of the major questions raised by this study concerns the relationship between purpose in life and self-definition. The connection between the two is supported by several studies (Reker, 1977; Debats, 1999; Fletcher, 2004; Paloutzian, 2005). This study has shown that one of the
elements of the construction of purpose is a positioning of an individual’s self-concept in relation to ultimate concerns and to the overall purpose of humanity. This process of positioning could well be related to theories of identity and self-concept (Slocum-Bradley, 2010; Schwab, 2013). Such a relationship between the construction of purpose and self-concept needs to be researched further and could shed additional light on the connection between religion and identity, and by extension also the role of self-concept in meaning making processes. As of yet there are no theoretical perspectives which can adequately conceptualise this relationship, but the combination of meaning system theory and narrative theory does hold some promise in this area.

A further area of promise is closely related and possibly interconnect to the above suggestion. The direct relationship between beliefs and self-definition, and the impact that beliefs can have on self-definition, merits a more thorough investigation in future studies. The importance of beliefs that impact self-definition also posits a link to ultimate concerns. These three elements and the dynamics between them could be studied with the aim of understanding how beliefs and their importance are perceived in relation to self-definition. The connection between conviction and ultimate concerns intimates a relationship between conviction and importance of certain beliefs to the individual. This relationship could also be connected to self-definition, furthering the argument for the need for research on the psychological processes involved in conviction, the perception of importance and the construction of self-definition.

Other possible paths of further research arising from this study is anything related to the study of the general relationships between the elements of meaning systems. This study has shown some interesting relationship between these elements and purpose in life, but more research could be undertaken to study other relationships in a meaning system. Among them is the relationship between beliefs and values, and the relationship between ultimate concerns, overall purpose and everyday goals.

Another area of further study could be the research on meaning system coherence and sense of meaning in life. The data in this study show that a coherent, stable meaning system facilitates the creation of purpose, while a fragmented meaning system influenced by a variety of beliefs, both religious and otherwise, seemingly adds confusion to the understanding of purpose. Research on the coherence of meaning systems could yield useful results in several areas of psychology, and has already been explored in research on coping and psychopathology. The study of how religion and religious beliefs contribute to a coherent meaning system will most likely be able to shed light on how a coherent meaning system is constructed. Religious meaning systems are often very explicit regarding their meanings, which are often transmitted through holy scriptures and teachings. This explicit display could facilitate the general study of meaning systems, because of its transparency and clarity regarding meanings.

Based on Baumeister’s theory of meaning, it would be interesting to study the impact of value bases on a person’s meaning system, and how a change in value base (e.g. after a religious conversion) impacts the meaning system of an individual. In conjunction with this, it would also be interesting to study the inferential aspects of meaning making processes. Which beliefs are most fruitful in creating health-promoting inferences? Could certain worldviews and beliefs lead to a higher level of psychological health than others, and what are the characteristics of such worldviews? The association between religious meaning systems and psychological health has been researched in the area of coping and psychopathology, but could well be approached from a salutogenic perspective, or in relation to concepts of quality of life. Lastly, this study could well be replicated with a larger sample and more resources to include
Christians from different denominations. Larger samples could provide data that could be tested with more variables and more nuanced differentiations between groups. As well as a replication of this study, there is also a great avenue for developing the research on beliefs and meaning. A highly interesting path of research would be to study beliefs other than religious ones, and see how these correlate with various elements of meaning. For example, one could develop an instrument with more general beliefs, creating the possibility of including individuals from a wide range of religious faiths and even atheistic belief systems and researching how their beliefs impact their creation of meaning in life.
7. Summary

The purpose of this study was to research the connection between specific religious beliefs and a sense of purpose in life by using a meaning system theory framework. Previous research has shown that religion and meaning are associated with each other, but the complexity of both phenomena and the lack of adequate theoretical models have hampered efforts at a deeper understanding of the relationship. The specific aspects of religion and meaning which were explored in this study were religious beliefs (an aspect of religion) and a sense of purpose in life (an aspect of meaning). This was achieved through testing one hypothesis: There is a significant, positive correlation between the strength of religious belief and purpose in life, and answering two research questions: 1. What specific religious beliefs show a significant correlation to purpose in life?, and 2. How are religious beliefs used in a meaning system for the construction of purpose in life?

The target population of the study were members of Christian congregations, aged 25-40. This population was selected because of a relatively low amount of studies conducted on individuals in this age-range, and psychosocial developmental factors. The population was limited to Christians, because the methodological and temporal resources required to include adherents to other faiths were too great to fit within the scope of this study.

The study used a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, consisting of two phases. In phase 1, quantitative data were gathered and analysed. The data were gathered through a survey consisting of 36 items which measured purpose in life and specific religious beliefs. In phase 2, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The data from phase 1 informed the data gathering in phase 2, and the weighting of the data in the research design was on the quantitative data. The two phases were used in a complementary fashion, where the data from phase 1 were explored in phase 2.

The theoretical foundation of the study was a meaning system theory framework proposed by Paloutzian (2005), with the addition of narrative theory and methods in phase 2. Meaning system theory postulates a relationship between beliefs and a sense of purpose in life, but no research has yet been undertaken to study this relationship in-depth.

A total of 40 individuals participated in phase 1, from a frame population of 252 individuals whom were contacted through two Christian congregations in Stockholm and its surrounding areas. From the 40 participants in phase 1, 9 respondents were interviewed for phase 2, for the purpose of gathering of qualitative data.

The results of phase 1 of the study showed that purpose in life was positively and significantly correlated to a belief that God is an all pervading presence ($tau = 0.35, p<0.05$), belief in forces for evil in the universe ($tau = 0.40, p<0.01$), belief that human physical contact can be a spiritual experience ($tau = 0.27, p<0.05$), belief in life after death ($tau = 0.31, p<0.05$), belief that one’s life has been planned out ($tau = 0.33, p<0.05$), belief that there is a heaven ($tau = 0.30, p<0.05$), belief that the human spirit is immortal ($tau = 0.30, p<0.05$), and belief that there is a God ($tau = 0.32, p<0.05$). Purpose in life was also positively correlated to a composite measure of religious belief ($tau = 0.34, p<0.01$).

The qualitative analysis showed that religious beliefs are used to construct purpose in a meaning making process consisting of three elements. Beliefs regarding what is ultimately good (ultimate concerns) and beliefs regarding the purpose and role of humanity (overall purpose) provides a foundation for the construction of purpose in life for the individual. The individual constructs purpose by locating themselves (self-definition) in relation to ultimate concerns and overall purpose. The results of phase 2 also showed that both the content and conviction of religious beliefs influence their use in the construction of purpose in life.
The joint analysis of phase 1 and 2 showed that the results from phase 2 supported the results from phase 1, both regarding the beliefs involved in the construction of purpose in life and the importance of both content and conviction in meaning making processes.

Suggestions for further research include additional research on the connections between the various elements of a meaning system, research on the connection between religious beliefs, purpose and the development of self-definition, as well as further theoretical developments of meaning system theory, and harmonisation of meaning system theory with other, complementary theoretical perspectives.
8. References


### 9. Appendices

#### 9.1. Appendix 1 - Summary of literature search using digital sources

Table 4

*Summary of literature search using digital sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Hits</th>
<th>Articles included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JSTOR</td>
<td>Meaning, beliefs</td>
<td>12679</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSTOR</td>
<td>Meaning, beliefs, purpose in life</td>
<td>7234</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSTOR</td>
<td>Meaning, beliefs, narrative</td>
<td>2994</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>JSTOR</td>
<td>Purpose in life, beliefs</td>
<td>10117</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uppsala University Library</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>6242426</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uppsala University Library (Search parameters altered)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>1385544</td>
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<td>Psycinfo</td>
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<td>SAGE Journals</td>
<td>Purpose in life, beliefs</td>
<td>903</td>
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**TOTAL ARTICLES INCLUDED:** 71
9.2. Appendix 2 - Frequency table for gender

Table 5

*Frequency table - Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>62.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Binomial distribution (0.595) sig.  p<0.05
### Appendix 3 - Frequency table for age

**Table 6**  
*Frequency table - Age*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

Normality (Shapiro-Wilk sig.) $p<0.05$
### 9.4. Appendix 4 - Frequency table for marital status

#### Table 7

*Frequency table - Marital Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-habitation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
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</table>
## 9.5. Appendix 5 - Frequency table for education

### Table 8

*Frequency table - Education*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
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<td>Tertiary</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### 9.6. Appendix 6 - Frequency table for education

Table 9

*Frequency table - Income/month*

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<thead>
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<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-15000 SEK</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>15001-30000 SEK</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>30001-45000 SEK</td>
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<td>45001-60000 SEK</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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</table>

Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</table>
9.7. Appendix 7 - Frequency table for congregational involvement

Table 10

*Frequency table - Congregational Involvement*

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Once per week or more</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. once per month</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. once per year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.8. Appendix 8 - Survey

Enkät om syfte i livet (Survey on purpose in life)

Hej och tack för att du tar dig tid att medverka i denna studie! Du fyller helt enkelt i enkäten enligt de instruktioner som finns vid varje fråga. De flesta frågorna besvaras på en skala, välj det alternativ som bäst beskriver din tro och attityd.

Enkäten kommer att vara öppen till och med 23/11-2014, så vänligen svara innan dess. Återigen stort tack för din medverkan!

(Hello and thank you for taking the time to participate in this study! Simply fill in the survey according to the instructions for each question. Most questions are answered on a scale, choose the alternative that best describes you beliefs and attitudes.

The survey will be open until the 23rd of November 2014, please provide your answers before this date. Once again, thank you for your participation!)

*Obligatorisk

Information om respondent (Personal Information)

Här ger du information om dig själv, såsom kön, civilstånd etc. Detta gör att vi kan få fram tydligare forskningsresultat för mänskror från olika situationer i livet.

(Here you will provide information about yourself, such as gender, marital status, etc. This makes it possible to get clearer results for people in different situations in life.)

1. Kön (Gender) *
   Markera endast en oval.
   - Kvinna (Female)
   - Man (Male)

2. Namn (Name) *
   Observera att ditt namn aldrig och under inga omständigheter kommer att användas i publicerade dokument om studien. Du kommer att vara helt anonym och dina uppgifter kommer inte att gå att upskälla. (Please observe that your name will never and under no circumstances be used in published documents of the study. You will be completely anonymous and your information will not be connectable to you.)

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
3. **Email-adress (Email address)** *
   Observera att din email-adress aldrig och under inga omständigheter kommer att användas i publicerade dokument om studien. Du kommer att vara helt anonym och dina uppgifter kommer inte att gå att urskilja. *(Please observe that your email address will never and under no circumstances be used in published documents of the study. You will be completely anonymous and your information will not be connectable to you.)*

4. **Födelsedag (Birthday)** *
   *Exempel: den 15 december 2012*

5. **Har varit troende... (I have been a believer for...)** *
   Hur länge har du varit troende? *(How long have you been a believer?)* *Markera endast en oval.*
   - Mindre än sex månader *(Less than six months)*
   - Mer än sex månader *(More than six months)*

6. **Civilstånd (Marital status)** *
   *Markera endast en oval.*
   - Singel (Single)
   - Gift (Married)
   - Sambo (Co-habitation)
   - Fränskild (Divorced)
   - Änka/änkling (Widowed)

7. **Utbildning (Educational level)** *
   *Markera endast en oval.*
   - Grundskola (Primary)
   - Gymnasium (Secondary)
   - Folkhögskola/yrkesutbildning (Vocational)
   - Universitet/högskola (Tertiary)

8. **Inkomst (Income)** *
   Hur stor är din inkomst varje månad? *(How big is your income each month?)* *Markera endast en oval.*
   - 0 - 15000 SEK
   - 15001 - 30000 SEK
   - 30001 - 45000 SEK
   - 45001 - 60000 SEK
   - 60000 SEK eller mer
## 9. Församling (Congregation) *
Vilken församling är du medlem i? (Which congregation are you a member of?)

Markera endast en oval.

- Korskyrkan Stockholm
- Filadelfiakyrkan Stockholm
- Södernalmskyrkan
- Pingstkyrkan Jönköping
- Life Center Västerås
- Immanuelskyrkan Stockholm
- Annan församling (Other)

## 10. Om annan församling, vilken? (If other, which congregation?) *

---------------------------------------------------------------------------

## 11. Hur ofta har du varit engagerad i församlingen under det senaste året, genom att gå på gudstjänster, utföra socialt arbete och andra aktiviteter? (How often have you been involved in congregational activities in the last year, through church services, social work or other activities?) *

Markera endast en oval.

- 1 gång/vecka eller mer (once/week or more)
- Ungefär 1 gång/månad (Approx. once/month)
- Ungefär 1 gång/halvår (Approx. once/6 months)
- Ungefär 1 gång/år (Approx. once/year)
- Aldrig (Never)

## 12. Medgivande till intervju (Consent to be contacted for interview) *

Medgivande till att bli intervjuad om dina svar på denna enkät för uppföljning och fördjupning (Consent to be interviewed regarding your answers to this survey for follow up and additional information.)

Markera endast en oval.

- Ja (Yes)
- Nej (No)

---

### WHO Quality of Life - Spirituality, Religiosity and Personal Belief subscale

WHO:s livskvalitetsenkät med fokus på andlighet, religiositet och personlig tro. (WHO's quality of life survey with a focus on spirituality, religiosity and personal beliefs.)

Graderingen på frågorna är följande:
1. Inte alls, 2. Lite, 3. Måttligt, 4. I hög utsträckning, 5. I extremt hög utsträckning

(The grading of the questions are the following:
1. Not at all, 2. A bit, 3. Moderately, 4. To a large extent, 5. To a very high extent)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1vzWUXHtEDqj_DV5Luy6nykFDRAEEpT Ec5v/0SpqEprintform
13. **WHO1. I vilken utsträckning hjälper du av kontakt med andlig dimension till att komma igenom svåra tider?**
   (To what extent are you helped by contact with a spiritual dimension to get through hard times?)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   ```
   1 2 3 4 5
   ```
   Inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I extremt hög utsträckning

14. **WHO2. Hur mycket hjälper andlig styrka dig till att leva ett bättre liv?**
   (To what extent does spiritual strength help you to live a better life?)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   ```
   1 2 3 4 5
   ```
   Inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I extremt hög utsträckning

15. **WHO3. I vilken utsträckning kan din tro/uppfattning ge dig tröst/lättnad i vardagen?**
   (To what extent does your faith/beliefs give you comfort in your daily life?)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   ```
   1 2 3 4 5
   ```
   Inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I extremt hög utsträckning

16. **WHO4. I vilken utsträckning är du hopfull inför ditt liv?**
   (To what extent are you hopeful regarding your life?)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   ```
   1 2 3 4 5
   ```
   Inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I extremt hög utsträckning

17. **WHO5. I vilken utsträckning har du inre frid?**
   (To what extent do you have inner peace?)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   ```
   1 2 3 4 5
   ```
   Inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I extremt hög utsträckning

18. **WHO6. Hur nöjd är du med den balans du har mellan kropp, psyke och själ?**
   (How satisfied are you with the balance you have between body, mind and soul?)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   ```
   1 2 3 4 5
   ```
   Inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I extremt hög utsträckning
19. WHO7. I vilken utsträckning kan du känna förundran över din omgivning? (t ex natur, konst, musik)
(To what extent can you feel a sense of wonder regarding your environment (e.g. nature, art, music)?)
Markera endast en oval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inte alls I extremt hög utsträckning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. WHO8. I vilken utsträckning känner du att ditt liv har ett syfte?
(To what extent do you have a sense of purpose in life?)
Markera endast en oval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inte alls I extremt hög utsträckning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Life Attitude Profile - Revised**

Välj det svar som bäst beskriver din syn på varje påstående om ditt liv.
Välj den siffra som bäst motsvarar din attityd till påståendena.

(Choose the answer that best describes your view of each statements in relation to your life.
Choose the number that best corresponds to your attitude to the statements.)

1 - Don’t agree at all — 5 - Agree completely

21. LAP-R1. Mina tidigare prestationer har gett mitt liv mening och syfte. *
(My past achievements have given my life meaning and purpose.)
Markera endast en oval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instämmer inte alls Instämmer helt och fullt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. LAP-R2. I mitt liv har jag klara mål och avsikter. *
(In my life I have very clear goals and aims.)
Markera endast en oval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Instämmer inte alls Instämmer helt och fullt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. LAP-R3. Jag har upptäckt ett tillfredsställande syfte i livet. *
(I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.)
Markera endast en oval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instämmer inte alls Instämmer helt och fullt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1VzWU3hHeDjg_DVSroyt4oIFRAEEpT8c5vO9S9E/printform
24. **LAP-R4. I grunden lever jag det typ av liv som jag vill leva.** *
   (Basically, I am living the kind of life I want to live.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   1 2 3 4 5
   Instämmer inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Instämmer helt och fullt

25. **LAP-R5. Jag vet var mitt liv är på väg i framtiden.** *
   (I know where my life is going in the future.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   1 2 3 4 5
   Instämmer inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Instämmer helt och fullt

26. **LAP-R6. När jag har uppnått livsmål har jag känt mig helt tillfredsställd.** *
   (In achieving life’s goals, I have felt completely fulfilled.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   1 2 3 4 5
   Instämmer inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Instämmer helt och fullt

27. **LAP-R7. Jag har ett updrag i livet som ger mig en känsla av riktning.** *
   (I have a mission in life that gives me a sense of direction.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   1 2 3 4 5
   Instämmer inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Instämmer helt och fullt

28. **LAP-R8. Mitt liv flödar över med spännande, bra saker.** *
   (My life is running over with exciting good things.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

   1 2 3 4 5
   Instämmer inte alls ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Instämmer helt och fullt

**Beliefs and Values Scale**

Välj det svar som bäst beskriver din syn på varje påstående om ditt liv. Välj den siffra som bäst motsvarar styrkan i din tro.

(Choose the number that best corresponds to your view of each statement in relation to your life.
Choose the number that best corresponds to the strength of your beliefs.
1 - Don’t agree at all —— 7 - Agree completely)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1vzWU0hEDgj_DVSLuy6bpy4dFRAEEpT Ec5viOShkEjprintform 6/10
29. **BVS1. Jag är en andlig person.**
   (I am a spiritual person.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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   Instämmer inte alls | | | | | | | Instämmer helt och fullt |

30. **BVS2. Jag tror på att jag har en ande eller själ som kan överleva min död.**
   (I believe I have a spirit or soul that can survive my death.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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   Instämmer inte alls | | | | | | | Instämmer helt och fullt |

31. **BVS3. Jag tror på en personlig Gud.**
   (I believe in a personal God.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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   Instämmer inte alls | | | | | | | Instämmer helt och fullt |

32. **BVS4. Jag tror att meditation har en värde.**
   (I believe meditation has value.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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   Instämmer inte alls | | | | | | | Instämmer helt och fullt |

33. **BVS5. Jag tror att Guds närvaro genomsyrar världen.**
   (I believe God is an all pervading presence.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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34. **BVS6. Jag tror att det som händer efter min död bestäms av hur jag har levt mitt liv.**
   (I believe what happens after I die is determined by how I have lived my life.)
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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   Instämmer inte alls | | | | | | | Instämmer helt och fullt |
35. **BVS7. Jag tror att det finns ondskefulla krafter i universum.** *(I believe there are forces for evil in the Universe.)*

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36. **BVS8. Även om jag inte förstår allt, så tror jag att allt händer av en anledning.** *(Although I cannot always Strongly Neither understand, I believe everything happens for a reason.)*

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37. **BVS9. Jag tror att mänsklig fysisk kontakt kan vara en andlig upplevelse.** *(I believe human physical contact can be a spiritual experience.)*

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38. **BVS10. Jag känner mig som mest ett med världen när jag är omgiven av natur.** *(I feel most at one with the world when surrounded by nature.)*

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39. **BVS11. Jag tror på liv efter döden.** *(I believe in life after death.)*

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40. **BVS12. Jag är en religiös person.** *(I am a religious person.)*

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41. **BVS13. Religiösa ceremonier är viktiga för mig.** *(Religious ceremonies are important to me.)*
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42. **BVS14. Jag tror att livet har planerats för mig.** *(I believe life is planned out for me.)*
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43. **BVS15. Jag tror att Gud är en livskraft.** *(I believe God is a life force.)*
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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44. **BVS16. Åtminstone en gång i livet har jag haft en intensiv andlig upplevelse.** *(At least once in my life, I have had an intense spiritual experience.)*
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45. **BVS17. Jag tror att det finns en himmel.** *(I believe that there is a heaven.)*
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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46. **BVS18. Jag tror att den mänskliga anden är odödlig.** *(I believe the human spirit is immortal.)*
   *Markera endast en oval.*

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47. **BVS19. Jag tror bön har ett värde.***
(I believe prayer has value.)
*Markera endast en oval.*

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<tr>
<td>Instämmer inte alls</td>
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48. **BVS20. Jag tror att det finns en Gud.***
(I believe there is a God.)
*Markera endast en oval.*

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<tr>
<td>Instämmer inte alls</td>
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9.9. Appendix 9 - Interview Schedule

Questions (In Swedish. English translation in parentheses)


(Can you please tell me your life story, as you see it? You have no rules or restrictions regarding the topics or themes you bring up, you are completely free to tell me what you want.)

2. Kan du berätta din livsberättelse med fokus på din tro? Hur har den påverkat ditt liv och hur har den utvecklats?

(Can you tell me your life story, focusing on your religious beliefs? How have they affected your life and developed through your life?)

3. Hur påverkar din tro din känsla av syfte i livet?

(How do your religious beliefs affect your sense of purpose in life?)

4. Hur påverkar din tro på X din känsla av syfte i livet?

(How does your belief in X affect your sense of purpose in life?)

5. Follow up questions for clarification or further information on the previous questions.
Table 11
Correlation matrix - Purpose in life and religious beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose in life</th>
<th>BV51</th>
<th>BV52</th>
<th>BV53</th>
<th>BV54</th>
<th>BV55</th>
<th>BV56</th>
<th>BV57</th>
<th>BV58</th>
<th>BV59</th>
<th>BV510</th>
<th>BV512</th>
<th>BV513</th>
<th>BV514</th>
<th>BV515</th>
<th>BV516</th>
<th>BV517</th>
<th>BV518</th>
<th>BV519</th>
<th>BV520</th>
<th>BV5Composite</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose in life</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0.259</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>0.354**</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>0.298**</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>0.272*</td>
<td>-0.101</td>
<td>0.308*</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.331*</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>0.295*</td>
<td>0.297*</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>0.320*</td>
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<tr>
<td>BV51</td>
<td>0.360**</td>
<td>0.364**</td>
<td>0.401**</td>
<td>0.483**</td>
<td>0.425**</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.401**</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>0.429**</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.213</td>
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<td>0.454**</td>
<td>0.544**</td>
<td>0.442**</td>
<td>0.453**</td>
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<td>0.227</td>
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<td>0.655**</td>
<td>0.266*</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.773**</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.347**</td>
<td>0.362**</td>
<td>0.292*</td>
<td>0.644**</td>
<td>0.559**</td>
<td>0.711**</td>
<td>0.730**</td>
<td>0.547**</td>
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<td>BV53</td>
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<td>0.571**</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.451**</td>
<td>0.247</td>
<td>0.152</td>
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<td>0.371**</td>
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<td>0.261</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>0.419**</td>
<td>0.458**</td>
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<td>0.523**</td>
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<td>BV54</td>
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<td>0.234</td>
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<td>0.394**</td>
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<td>-0.013</td>
<td>0.429**</td>
<td>0.292*</td>
<td>0.260*</td>
<td>0.355**</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.406**</td>
<td>0.512**</td>
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<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.241</td>
<td>0.296*</td>
<td>0.272*</td>
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<td>0.463**</td>
<td>0.515**</td>
<td>0.322*</td>
<td>0.753**</td>
<td>0.570**</td>
<td>0.599**</td>
<td>0.596**</td>
<td>0.665**</td>
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<td>-0.003</td>
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* p < 0.05 (two-tailed)

** p < 0.01 (two-tailed)