

# Meaning as Magnetic Force: Evidence That Meaning in Life Promotes Interpersonal Appeal

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## Abstract

The authors report on data indicating that having a strong sense of meaning in life makes people more appealing social interactants. In Study 1, participants were videotaped while conversing with a friend, and the interactions were subsequently rated by independent evaluators. Participants who had reported a strong sense of meaning in life were rated as desirable friends. In Study 2, participants made 10-s videotaped introductions of themselves that were subsequently evaluated by independent raters. Those who reported a strong sense of meaning in life were rated as more likeable, better potential friends, and more desirable conversation partners. The effect of meaning in life was beyond that of several other variables, including self-esteem, happiness, extraversion, and agreeableness. Study 2 also found an interaction between physical attractiveness and meaning in life, with more meaning in life contributing to greater interpersonal appeal for those of low and average physical attractiveness.

## Keywords

meaning, thin slices, social perception, impression formation, leadership

One of the central ideas advanced by Viktor Frankl (1946/1963, 1969) was that people are driven to find meaning in life. He called this motivation *will to meaning*. The idea that people have a deeply rooted need to find meaning in life has been echoed by several subsequent researchers and thinkers (e.g., Baumeister, 1991; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Johnson, 1987; Joske, 1981; Klinger, in press). Does the search for meaning have implications for interpersonal relationships? In the current work, we explored the idea that meaning in life serves to promote the formation of interpersonal bonds. In particular, we tested the hypothesis that people seek to affiliate with those who have a strong sense of meaning in life, at least in part to satisfy the drive to find meaning.

## Interpersonal Appeal

The colloquial term *magnetic personality* refers to individuals with whom others seek affiliation and social interaction. People also use words such as *charismatic* and *charming* to refer to people who have a certain kind of social appeal. It seems likely that most people are acquainted with at least one person to whom many people are readily drawn. Presumably, most people are also familiar with the experience of being distinctly unenthusiastic about the prospect of future interactions on meeting someone for the first time. We use the term *interpersonal appeal* to refer to individual differences in how desirable one is as a social interactant. Although some people may

become more (or less) interesting and enjoyable social interactants over months and years, our interest was in how appealing (or unappealing) people are at zero acquaintance. In particular, we predicted that having meaning in life would have very broad interpersonal appeal.

## Meaning in Life

There is no single definition of meaning in life, but it is generally understood that a meaningful life is one that makes sense to the individual and includes a purpose (Baumeister, 1991; Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Accordingly, meaning in life is most often assessed by self-report (e.g., Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Mascaro & Rosen, 2006). For instance, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) asks participants to rate their agreement with statements such as “I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful” (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). In the present investigation, we understand meaning in

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life to refer to the subjective self-evaluation of how meaningful one's life is.

### *Interpersonal Relationships Promote Meaning in Life*

What is it that makes life seem meaningful? Certainly there are many varied constituents of meaning in life, but several recent findings point to interpersonal relationships as crucial to finding life meaningful. In one study, participants were asked to "pick the one thing that makes life most meaningful for you" (Lambert et al., in press). Of participants, 68% described family as the most important source of meaning and 14% mentioned friends. In total, personal relationships were the primary source of meaning in life for 82% of respondents. Recent cross-cultural research has demonstrated that close relationships (especially family relationships) are the single most important source of meaning in life in seven countries and across three continents (Fave & Coppa, 2009). In short, close relationships are a powerful source of meaningfulness, and this seems to be the case cross-culturally.

Conversely, the absence of warm interpersonal relationships has been associated with low levels of meaning. Williams (1997, 2002) theorized that social rejection thwarts several psychological needs, including the need for a meaningful existence. Evidence has supported Williams's view, as people see the moments of social exclusion as lacking in meaning (e.g., van Beest & Williams, 2006; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000; Zadro, Boland, & Richardson, 2006). Researchers recently conducted a rigorous test of Williams's hypothesis (Stillman et al., 2009). In two correlational studies, loneliness was found to be a robust and independent predictor of the view that life has little meaning. Furthermore, in two experimental studies, participants who were led to believe that they were unwanted as social interactants were more likely to express the view that life was utterly meaningless. In sum, close relationships are an important source of meaning, and an absence of interpersonal connection causes a decrease in meaning.

### *Does Meaning in Life Promote Interpersonal Relationships?*

As noted previously, people have a need to find meaning in life (e.g., Frankl, 1946/1963, 1969). In principle, people might satisfy the need for meaning in solitude. However, it seems more likely that people would seek to fulfill the need for meaning through their relationships with other people, just as many other human needs are met (Baumeister, 2005). In other words, a natural extension of the idea that people have a drive to find meaning in life is that people will seek to affiliate with those who have a strong sense of meaning, presumably as a means of satisfying the need for meaning.

The hypothesis that meaning in life promotes the formation of interpersonal relationships was anticipated by Stillman and colleagues (2009). In particular, the authors proposed that the relationship between meaning and social relationships might be bidirectional, with good interpersonal relationships

promoting meaning in life and a stronger sense of meaning in life facilitating the formation of interpersonal relationships. The present investigation is a formal test of the latter proposition.

One might consider meaning in life as strictly an inner, intrapsychic process, with little bearing on interpersonal relationships. However, Tice and Baumeister (2001) argued that researchers often ignore the strong interpersonal aspects of many seemingly inner processes. For example, guilt, self-deception, morality, self-control, and self-esteem are often considered to be strictly inner processes, but in fact these have strong implications for the formation, maintenance, or dissolution of interpersonal relationships. They suggest that many seemingly intrapsychic processes (perhaps including meaning in life) actually serve interpersonal functions. Thus, an apparently intrapsychic process such as meaning in life might have important interpersonal implications.

Research using the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006) is consistent with the notion that a strong sense of meaning in life promotes interpersonal relationships. In particular, people who agreed with items on the MLQ (e.g., "I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful") were likely to assert that they were well liked (e.g., "Most people see me as loving and affectionate"; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2009). Furthermore, people who scored high on the MLQ reported that they put forth more time and effort into maintaining close relationships (e.g., "I listened closely to another's point of view") relative to those with low MLQ scores (Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008).

One can also point to research on charismatic personalities as supportive of the notion that meaning has interpersonal consequences. Charismatic people are often those with whom people seek to be socially connected, and charismatic leaders are those who imbue in followers a desire to be connected with the leader. An examination of the 2008 U.S. presidential election noted that one essential element in leadership is the capacity to make events meaningful to followers (Bligh & Kohles, 2009). Thus, political leaders who are able to communicate the meaning of important events (e.g., Barack Obama, according to Bligh & Kohles, 2009) are in a good position to garner supporters.

An analysis of revolutionary religious leaders reached a similar conclusion: Developing a personal mission in life was crucial in gaining religious followers (Oakes, 1997). In other words, perceiving oneself as having an important mission in life was associated with garnering adherents and followers, at least among religious people. Our expectation was that having a strong sense of meaning in one's life assists political and religious leaders in gaining followers but that ordinary people who find their own lives meaningful make more desirable and appealing social partners than those who do not.

### *Alternative Predictors of Interpersonal Appeal*

It is possible that meaning in life might demonstrate only a modest relationship with interpersonal appeal, relative to other constructs. It is also possible that any effect of meaning in life

on interpersonal appeal might be attributable to a third variable, such as self-esteem. The measurement of alternative predictors of interpersonal appeal would shed light on the relative strength of the relationship between meaning in life and interpersonal appeal, and it would also help to determine whether the expected effects of meaning were attributable to a related construct. Our interest was in the effects of meaning on interpersonal appeal at zero acquaintance, so we briefly describe some notable alternative predictors that might contribute to interpersonal appeal, with an emphasis on variables that could be readily discerned in strangers.

**Extraversion.** Extraversion contributes to social connection (Lee, Dean & Jung, 2008; Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996), and there is evidence that people can quickly identify individual differences in extraversion (Albright, Kenny, & Mallow, 1988; Borkenau, Brecke, Möttig, & Paelecke, 2009). Thus, one likely predictor of interpersonal appeal is extraversion, though we expected the effects of meaning would be independent of it.

**Self-esteem.** Believing that one's life is meaningful is a positive self-evaluation and any connection between higher meaningfulness and interpersonal appeal could simply be a function of people thinking well of themselves. We thought not and predicted the expected effects would be independent of self-esteem.

**Religiosity.** Religion and spirituality contribute to the sense that life has meaning (Emmons, 2005; Fletcher, 2004), and researchers have found that some of the beneficial effects of religion on health and happiness are mediated by meaning in life (Steger & Frazier, 2005). It seemed plausible that the anticipated effects of meaning on interpersonal appeal could depend in part on religiosity.

**Happiness.** Meaning in life is a measure of well-being, and any effects of meaning on interpersonal appeal might simply be a reflection of the fact that people enjoy the company of well-adjusted and happy people (e.g., Johnson, 1991). Again, however, we expected the effects of meaning to be independent of happiness.

**Physical attractiveness.** Physical attractiveness is an (almost) instantly identifiable characteristic that has long been known to have sweeping and positive effects on interpersonal evaluations (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Thorndike, 1920). People simply like attractive people and seek them as friends and romantic partners. Of course, attractiveness is qualitatively different from the other predictors of interpersonal appeal heretofore discussed, as it is not an internal mechanism and is readily apparent. Still, any analysis of traits predictive of interpersonal appeal would be incomplete without including physical attractiveness.

## Current Investigation

In the current work, we tested the hypothesis that people seek to affiliate with those who have a strong sense of meaning in life. Our expectation was that perceivers would quickly identify people with a strong sense of meaning in life as interpersonally appealing. In Study 1, independent observers watched participants interact with a friend for 5 min and rated how appealing participants were as social interactants. We predicted that participants who reported finding life as meaningful would receive positive evaluations. In Study 2, participants made a 10-s videotaped introduction, and again we predicted that independent observers would want to affiliate with those reporting a strong sense of meaning in life.

We also sought to determine how meaning in life compared to competing predictors of interpersonal appeal. In Study 1, we included a measure of self-esteem. In Study 2, we included the Big Five (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism), intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, happiness, and physical attractiveness.

## Study 1

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 70 undergraduates (55 female) who participated in exchange for course credit. They completed questionnaires and were subsequently videotaped as they interacted with a friend. The videotaped interactions were later evaluated by independent raters to measure participants' interpersonal appeal.

### Measures

The MLQ was used to assess the extent to which participants viewed their lives as having meaning ( $\alpha = .86$ ; Steger et al., 2006). The 5-item Presence subscale, which served as our main independent variable, assesses the extent to which one perceives meaning to be present in one's life (e.g., "I understand my life's meaning"). (The other subscale does not bear on the current hypothesis.) We used Rosenberg's (1989) 10-item scale to measure self-esteem. Reliability was high ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### Videotaped Interactions

**Stimulus creation.** After completing the questionnaires, participants were seated in a room with a friend who had accompanied the participant to the study. The experimenter asked them to discuss their friendship for approximately 5 min, and the interaction was recorded unobtrusively. Participants were later debriefed.

**Stimulus evaluation.** Five trained raters (all female) watched and evaluated the interactions. They responded to the question "How much would you like to be friends with this person?" for the participant in each interaction. Ratings were from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). There was broad agreement among raters regarding who was appealing as a social interactant and who was not, though of course individual preferences diverged to

some degree. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for the five raters was .59. All raters were blind to study aims.

## Results and Discussion

As expected, a stronger sense of meaning in life was associated with interpersonal appeal ( $\beta = .30, p = .01$ ), whereas self-esteem had no effect ( $\beta = .05, p = .69$ ). The effect of meaning on interpersonal appeal was not diminished when controlling for self-esteem ( $\beta = .36, p = .01$ ). These findings provide initial support for the hypothesis that a stronger sense of meaning corresponds to more interpersonal appeal and suggest that the effect is not simply a matter of people wanting to affiliate with those who think well of themselves.

## Study 2

There were three main shortcomings to Study 1 that we sought to address in Study 2. First, there are a number of other variables that could plausibly account for the relationship between meaning and interpersonal appeal. For instance, it is possible that a general sense of unhappiness was responsible for both a low sense of meaning in life and being evaluated as interpersonally unappealing. Study 2 sought to address this shortcoming by measuring a number of competing variables. Second, our measure of interpersonal appeal was just a single rating, so in Study 2 we evaluated people on multiple dimensions to provide a more robust measure of interpersonal appeal. Third, our expectation was that higher levels of meaning would quickly and readily affect evaluations of interpersonal appeal. In Study 1, raters had approximately 5 min to judge the interpersonal appeal of the participants. However, a growing body of literature has found that people can make surprisingly insightful judgments of strangers in a matter of seconds (Ambady, 2009; Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1995; Stillman & Maner, 2009). In Study 2, we sought to determine whether 10 s was sufficient for individual differences in meaning to affect judgments of interpersonal appeal.

Our hypothesis for this research was derived in part from the conclusion reached by Frankl and others that people have a drive to find meaning. By extension, we predicted that people would seek to affiliate with others who have a strong sense of meaning, in part as a way of adding or maintaining a sense of meaning in their own life. Yet this presupposes that having a strong (or weak) sense of meaning can be perceived by others. In Study 2, we tested whether people who report having a strong sense of meaning appear as though they have a meaningful life, which in turn makes them more appealing as social interactants. In other words, we predicted that *apparent meaning*, or how meaningful one's life appears to be, would mediate the relationship between individual differences in sense of meaning and interpersonal appeal. This would lend credibility to the proposal that people seek relationships with those high in meaning as a means of adding meaning to their own lives.

## Method

**Participants and Procedure.** Participants were 72 undergraduates (38 female) who participated in exchange for course credit. They completed questionnaires and then made videotaped introductions of themselves. The introductions were subsequently evaluated to gauge interpersonal appeal.

**Measures.** We again measured meaning with the MLQ ( $\alpha = .89$ ; Steger et al., 2006). Happiness was assessed with the 4-item Subjective Happiness Scale ( $\alpha = .85$ ; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). We also administered the 44-item Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). Dimensions included extraversion ( $\alpha = .87$ ), agreeableness ( $\alpha = .73$ ), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .70$ ), neuroticism ( $\alpha = .80$ ), and openness ( $\alpha = .77$ ). Participants also completed a 14-item religiosity scale (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), which taps extrinsic ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and intrinsic ( $\alpha = .74$ ) religiosity.

**Stimulus Creation.** After completing the questionnaires, the experimenter gave participants the following instructions: "You will now make a ten-second videotaped introduction. You may want to mention your first name, your major, your hobbies, or anything else you might say when meeting someone for the first time." Introductions were edited to last precisely 10 s. None of the participants referred to finding meaning in life in their introductions, indicating that any potential differences in interpersonal appeal were not from participants directly conveying information about their level of meaning in life.

### Stimulus Evaluation

**Interpersonal appeal.** A total of 11 trained raters (7 female) evaluated the introductions. To avoid ordering effects, the order in which the introductions were presented to the raters was randomized. After watching each introduction, the raters evaluated the participant on three dimensions. The dimensions were *likeability* ("How likeable is this person?"), *friendship appeal* ("How much would you like to be friends with this person?"), and *conversational appeal* ("How much would enjoy a conversation with this person?"). Rating anchors were from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely or very much*). All raters were blind to study aims.

There was agreement among raters regarding who was appealing as a social interactant and who was not (likeability ICC = .79, friendship appeal ICC = .71, and conversational appeal ICC = .71). We combined these three variables together to form a composite measure labeled *overall interpersonal appeal*, which demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

**Apparent meaning.** Raters also assessed the apparent degree of meaning in participants' lives ("How meaningful do you think this person's life is?") from 1 (*not at all meaningful*) to 7 (*very meaningful*). Interrater agreement was good (ICC = .74). We termed this variable *apparent meaning*, and

we expected that it would mediate the effects of self-reports of meaning on interpersonal appeal.

**Physical attractiveness.** We measured physical attractiveness in a manner similar to that used to assess interpersonal appeal and apparent meaning—the consensus of independent raters. We asked four new trained raters (not those who rated interpersonal appeal) to evaluate participants only on attractiveness, as this would not force an artificial connection between attractiveness and interpersonal appeal (see Stillman, Maner, & Baumeister, 2010). Ratings were from 1 (*not at all attractive*) to 7 (*extremely attractive*). Interrater agreement was good ( $ICC = .77$ ). We expected that meaning and attractiveness would interact, such that having a strong sense of meaning in life would be most impactful on people who were relatively less attractive.

## Results and Discussion

**Individual-difference predictors of interpersonal appeal.** As expected, raters considered participants who reported high levels of meaning as more likeable ( $r = .27, p = .02$ ) as well as evincing more friendship appeal ( $r = .28, p = .02$ ) and conversational appeal ( $r = .30, p = .01$ ). Most importantly, high levels of meaning corresponded to more overall interpersonal appeal ( $r = .30, p = .01$ ).

In contrast, neither intrinsic nor extrinsic religiosity was a significant predictor of overall interpersonal appeal ( $r_s < .13, p_s > .28$ ). Likewise, happiness was unrelated to interpersonal appeal ( $r = .16, p = .18$ ). Of the Big Five personality dimensions, higher extraversion predicted more interpersonal appeal ( $r = .26, p = .03$ ), but the other dimensions were unrelated ( $r_s < .16, p_s > .18$ ).

We conducted a hierarchical linear regression to determine whether meaning in life predicted interpersonal appeal over and above the other variables. In the first step, we entered all the predictors except meaning. Extraversion emerged as the only significant predictor in this step ( $\beta = .26, p = .03$ ). In the next step we entered meaning, which emerged as the only significant predictor ( $\beta = .25, p = .03$ ). (Extraversion was no longer significant,  $p = .09$ .)

**Physical attractiveness.** We tested whether physical attractiveness and self-reported meaning interacted. Interpersonal appeal was regressed on physical attractiveness and meaning in the first step and their centered interaction in the second step. Results indicated a robust simple effect for physical attractiveness, with attractive people considered more appealing ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ). The simple effect for meaning was nonsignificant ( $\beta = .18, p = .09$ ), though the trend was that a stronger sense of meaning corresponded to more interpersonal appeal. The interaction was significant ( $\beta = .25, p = .01$ ).

We measured the effect of meaning on interpersonal appeal at high, average, and low levels of attractiveness to interpret the interaction. A stronger sense of meaning corresponded to more interpersonal appeal for participants low in physical attractiveness ( $-1\ SD; t = 3.35, p = .001$ ) and for participants of average

physical attractiveness ( $t = 1.96, p = .05$ ). For highly attractive participants, meaning did not have an effect on interpersonal appeal ( $+1\ SD; t < 1, ns$ ). In short, having a strong sense of meaning makes people more appealing social interactants, except for the highly attractive—who are considered appealing social interactants to begin with. Put another way, there may be a ceiling effect such that having a meaningful life does not further enhance the already high social appeal of physically attractive persons.

**All predictors.** We examined both individual-difference predictors of interpersonal appeal (including meaning) and physical attractiveness together in a stepwise regression. Results of Model 1 indicated that attractiveness was the best predictor of interpersonal appeal ( $\beta = .54, p < .001$ ). Model 2 included the only other significant predictor of interpersonal appeal, which was meaning ( $\beta = .20, p = .047$ ).

**Moderated mediation analysis.** We sought to shed light on the means by which self-reported meaning increased interpersonal appeal. Our expectation was that a strong sense of (self-reported) meaning would lead to people being perceived as having a meaningful life, or demonstrating high levels of apparent meaning. Apparent meaning, in turn, was expected to result in a person being esteemed as interpersonally appealing. Rather than conducting a standard mediation analysis, however, we wanted to understand better the role of physical attractiveness, as it was shown to moderate the effects of self-reported sense of meaning on interpersonal appeal. Hence, we conducted a test of moderated mediation using macros written by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). Moderated mediation clarifies the conditions under which a proposed mediator (in this case, apparent meaning) mediates the relationship between the independent variable (self-reported sense of meaning) and the dependent variable (interpersonal appeal).

Results indicated that self-reported meaning had a significant positive effect on apparent meaning (a path; coefficient = 2.29,  $SE = 0.52, p < .001$ ), such that participants who reported a strong sense of meaning in life were perceived as having high levels of meaning in life. The effect of apparent meaning on interpersonal appeal was moderated by physical attractiveness (b path; interaction coefficient = 0.38,  $SE = 0.20, p = .058$ ), although the effect was marginal. Analysis of the moderated mediation effect revealed that higher apparent meaning contributed to interpersonal appeal for all but extremely attractive participants. Specifically, apparent meaning increased the appeal of the least attractive participants in our sample ( $-1.75\ SD; boot\ z = 3.32, p < .001$ ), those of average attractiveness ( $boot\ z = 3.50, p < .001$ ), and those who were moderately attractive ( $+1.92\ SD; boot\ z = 1.97, p = .049$ ). However, for the most attractive participants (those scoring above 1.92  $SDs$ ), apparent meaningfulness did not make them more interpersonally appealing. Thus, a stronger sense of meaning (measured by self-report) contributes to perceptions that a person has a meaningful life, which in turn makes a person more appealing as a social

interactant. Yet the benefits of higher apparent meaning do not extend to the most attractive people, as they are found to be appealing social interactants regardless.

The effect of self-rated meaning on apparent meaning was not moderated by physical attractiveness (coefficient = 1.28,  $SE = 0.81$ ,  $p = .12$ ). Thus, physical attractiveness does not interfere with the impact of sense of meaning on apparent meaning, although attractiveness does affect how apparent meaning affects interpersonal appeal.

## General Discussion

Researchers and philosophers have concluded that people have a deeply rooted drive to find meaning in life (e.g., Frankl, 1946/1963, 1969). In the present work, we found that this search for meaning has important implications for the formation of social relationships. Namely, people who have a strong sense of meaning in life are desired social interactants. That is, people tend to avoid individuals who have found little purpose to their lives, and they seek to affiliate with those who believe they have found meaning in life.

One alternative explanation is that people simply want to affiliate with well-adjusted people. However, the effects of meaning were over and above self-esteem (Study 1), happiness (Study 2), and all dimensions of the Big Five (Study 2). This suggests that meaning in life is not simply a proxy for adjustment. Alternatively, research has found that some of the beneficial effects of religion (on self-esteem, life satisfaction, well-being, and optimism) are mediated by meaning in life (Steger & Frazier, 2005), so it was important to determine whether the observed results were simply a function of religiosity. Results demonstrated that the effect of meaning on interpersonal appeal was independent of both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. Meaning in life even predicted interpersonal appeal over and above a potent predictor of positive impression formation: extraversion. We conclude that meaning is a powerful and independent predictor of interpersonal appeal, and people seek interpersonal connections with those who have found meaning in life.

The effects of meaning in life on interpersonal appeal were evident in two different social contexts. In Study 1, participants were unobtrusively observed interacting with a friend in a natural manner, which is analogous to seeing a stranger at a social event. In Study 2, participants made a videotaped introduction of themselves, which is analogous to a face-to-face encounter. Based only on Study 2, one might argue that meaning simply improves self-presentation. Yet the results of Study 1 contradict that interpretation, insofar as meaning predicted interpersonal appeal among participants who were observed naturally interacting with a friend, a circumstance in which self-presentational motives are either diminished or radically changed (see Tice, Butler, Stillwell, & Muraven, 1995). Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 indicate that the effects of meaning on interpersonal appeal are not specific to one narrow social situation and may be broadly applicable.

A 10-s introduction (Study 2) was sufficient for independent raters to form differential attitudes toward participants based on how meaningful participants found life to be; people who reported high levels of meaning in life were readily viewed as more likeable and were more desired as conversation partners and friends. Mediation analysis revealed that participants who reported having a strong sense of meaning in life were perceived as having more meaning in life, which in turn led to people expressing a strong desire to affiliate with them. That is, the effect that meaning had on interpersonal appeal was from perceivers responding favorably to people who appeared to have a sense of meaning and purpose. This fits with our expectation that the human need to find meaning in life would lead people to seek affiliation with those who appeared to have a strong sense of meaning, presumably as a way to increase meaning in one's own life.

The effect of meaning on interpersonal appeal depended on attractiveness. Participants found attractive people appealing social interactants. Yet for participants who were of average or below average attractiveness, having a strong sense of meaning made them significantly more appealing social interactants. There may be a cultural dimension to this finding, as perceivers in the current sample were Americans, where exquisitely manicured celebrities and athletes readily attract crowds, despite no apparent sense of deeper meaning in life.

## Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the current work is that it is nonexperimental. Future research may seek ways to manipulate meaning experimentally, with the expectation that high levels of meaning would be associated with greater interpersonal appeal. A second limitation is that we did not include a measure of intelligence. People who are highly intelligent might be more likely to have found a strong sense of meaning in life (or, possibly, intelligent people may be more likely to conclude that life is utterly meaningless). Future research on the relationship between meaning and interpersonal appeal would benefit from assessing intelligence.

## Conclusion

Although research on meaning in life has become popular in recent years, little attention has been paid to what meaning *does*. In the current investigation, we found evidence that people want to form relationships with those who have a strong sense of meaning in life, which is consistent with the notion that one function of meaning in life is the formation of interpersonal relationships.

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