



Purposeful Partners: Potential Relationship Quality and Sense of Purpose

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Abstract

Studies have shown that people with a higher sense of purpose are more satisfied with, committed to, and invested in their romantic relationships (Pfund et al., 2020). However, the mechanisms between positive relationship outcomes and sense of purpose are still unclear. To better understand the role sense of purpose may play in providing satisfaction in a relationship, the current study investigated whether the level of sense of purpose of a dating partner affects participants' rating of potential romantic quality with the dating partner. Furthermore, the research examined if their purpose orientation, the content or subject matter of one's sense of purpose, also contributes to perceived romantic quality with a potential partner. Undergraduate participants ($N=119$) read different dating profiles which described individuals with either a high or low sense of purpose. Each of the high purpose dating profiles have a purpose orientation associated with either prosocial orientation, relationship orientation, financial orientation, or creative orientation. After reading each dating profile, participants rated their level of potential relationship quality with the dating profiles. Paired samples t-tests revealed that dating profiles that espoused prosocial, relationship, or creative purpose orientations were rated as having higher potential relationship quality than the low purpose profile. The financial purpose orientation profile did not differ from the low purpose profile in level of potential relationship quality. Correlations showed that the more a participant identified with a certain purpose orientation, the higher they rated potential relationship quality of dating profiles with the same orientation. Results provide insight into the role sense of purpose and purpose orientation plays in perceived potential relationship quality and attraction.

Keywords Sense of purpose · Purpose orientation · Commitment · Intimacy · Passion

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1 Introduction

Past work suggests that individuals with a higher sense of purpose tend to report more positive romantic relationship qualities, such as relationship satisfaction, commitment, and investment (Pfund et al., 2020). Furthermore, one study with adults found that a greater sense of purpose predicted relationship maintenance, and, for adults in romantic relationships, increases in relationship quality were related to increases in sense of purpose (Pfund & Hill, 2022). Considering the relationship between sense of purpose and positive relationship outcomes, sense of purpose may be a useful trait for examining how one judges the qualities of a prospective partner. Moreover, given that purpose can be distinguished into how purposeful someone feels as well as their broader purpose in life (Pfund, 2020), it would be valuable to consider an individual's purpose orientation. The current study aims to understand if sense of purpose plays a role in the perception of relationship quality with potential relationship partners. Additionally, the study investigates how the levels of sense of purpose and the purpose orientation of an online dating profiles may predict how participants perceive the potential romantic relationship quality of the profile. We predict that participants will report higher positive relationship quality evaluations for dating profiles with (1) a higher sense of purpose in general, and (2) the same purpose orientation as their own.

1.1 Purpose and Romantic Relationships

A high sense of purpose is defined as having goals and direction in life and believing that life has meaning (Ryff, 1989). People may desire to be in relationships with individuals with high senses of purpose for various reasons. To maintain a relationship, both partners have to put in effort to engage with each other and solve conflict. Considering the association between purpose in life and motivation (Lewis, 2020), people may positively perceive individuals with a higher sense of purpose because their high motivation provides the drive to resolve disagreements and sustain their healthy relationship. By contrast, people with a lower sense of purpose may not take the necessary steps to maintain a healthy relationship, like creating time for quality engagement, due to a lack of motivation. Moreover, sense of purpose is related to having certain traits that aid in emotion regulation and conflict. People with a high sense of purpose report less negative affect than people with a low sense of purpose during stressful days (Hill et al., 2018). College students with a higher sense of purpose are more likely to use better emotion regulation strategies, like problem solving, rather than rumination or experiential avoidance (Lohani et al., 2022). Reduced emotional reactivity and the use of adaptive self-regulation strategies may provide people with a higher sense of purpose with an enhanced ability to better handle conflict in relationships by working through difficult issues without feeling overwhelmed. Lastly, purposeful people may be more able to allocate time and resources to support

their goals (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). This enhanced allocation capability may provide purposeful people with the time management skills to support the needs of their relationship.

While sense of purpose measures the broad sense that life has meaning and direction, considering an individual's purpose orientation narrows the scope by defining the types of broader goals and aims people hope to pursue (i.e., their purpose orientation). Past work (Hill et al., 2010) has identified at least four different purpose orientations people may espouse: prosocial, financial, creative, and personal recognition. Participants with prosocial purpose orientations identified community service and helping those in need as important life-goals. The participants with financial purpose orientations valued creating their own businesses and becoming well-off. Those with creative purpose orientations rated creating original and artistic work as being important. Participants with personal recognition purpose orientations found creating a contribution to science and becoming highly ranked in their field important. It is important to measure purpose orientation in addition to sense of purpose because, even if a potential romantic prospect has a higher sense of purpose, a person may not be attracted to them due to their differences in life goals. For example, someone who is passionate about fostering a familial unit may not desire to be in a relationship with someone who is preoccupied with achieving their own individual creative goals as their aims for life do not align.

In the current study, dating profiles that reflect individuals with different purpose orientations were created to explore whether participants would evaluate people with their same purpose orientation as providing positive potential relationship quality. Considering that romantic partners spend much of their time together, participants may favor people who have similar goals to them and who engage in similar activities. According to the Transactive Goal Dynamics Theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015), people in relationships collaborate on goal achievements in such a way that they constitute a larger self-regulating system, called a transactive goal system. Couples that focus on similar goals and align their means of pursuing the goals, are more capable of having goal coordination. Therefore, couples are more likely to reap the positive benefits of being in a transactive goal system when they share similar or complementary goals. People may more positively assess potential romantic partners with their same purpose orientation because they would be able to increase their own ability to complete goals that are in-line with their purpose in life. Moreover, shared goals with a partner may benefit couple affect as well as goal achievement. In support, one study found that married individuals felt closest to their partners and felt reported higher affective well-being when engaged in activities that meet the goals of both partners, relative to activities that meet one or neither of their goals (Gere et al., 2011). For example, if one partner has a goal to be more active and the other has a goal to connect to nature, walking in a forest would be a highly enjoyable activity that could garner a sense of closeness because the activity meets the goals of both partners. These findings suggest that participants may desire to be in relationships with dating profiles of similar purpose orientations to them to partake in endeavors that they will find mutually satisfying.

1.2 The Importance of Dating App Profiles

With the increased use of dating apps (Tu et al., 2021), dating profile introductions present a naturalistic way to describe the qualities and behaviors of a potential partner. This method is especially appropriate for young adults whose dating app usage is considerably higher than older age groups (Cadge et al., 2019; Vogels, 2020). College educated individuals in particular are more likely to attend a date and form a committed relationship with someone they have met on a dating app than same-aged adults with a high school education (Anderson et al., 2020). Additionally, individuals with a bachelors or advanced degree are more likely to believe that relationships initiated through online dating apps are just as successful as relationships that began in person, as compared to those with a high school education or less (Anderson et al., 2020). For this reason, undergraduate college students are a particularly relevant sample for understanding attraction because of their propensity to transition from an online match to an in-person date and their success.

Previous research on dating apps have found a number of dating profile qualities to be related to attraction (Fiore et al., 2008). One of the strongest predictors of the romantic perception of dating profiles is the physical attractiveness of the profile photo (Fiore et al., 2008; Sritharan et al., 2010). Because physical attractiveness plays a big role in how people evaluate their attraction to a whole dating profile (van der Zanden et al., 2021), the current study did not include images to focused on these additional elements tied to perceived relationship quality on a dating app. However, there are many other important elements that people evaluate on dating apps to assess the potential match of an individual beyond their physical appearance. The written portion of a profile is also important for participants evaluating the appeal of a profile (Taylor et al., 2010).

Studies on dating profiles found that individuals viewed originality (van der Zanden et al., 2022), ambition (Sritharan et al., 2010) and confidence (Brand et al., 2012) as attractive features. With past research highlighting the ties between sense of purpose and actual relationship quality (Pfund & Hill, 2022; Pfund et al., 2020), this work explores the role that sense of purpose may play in perceived relationship quality; for instance, people who are more purposeful may be seen as more ambitions and confident in their future progress.

Dating apps provide a practical method of expressing the sense of purpose and purpose orientations of strangers to potential partners because people may often include self-disclosing statements about who they are (Van Der Zanden et al., 2022). Dating profiles may share personal interests and hobbies that reflect their sense of purpose and purpose orientation. In fact, researchers suggest that people may become frustrated with dating apps when there is a lack of personal qualities of the dating profile shared, because singles place a high value on personal qualities when choosing to date someone (Frost et al., 2008).

When studying the perception of individual qualities of dating profiles, it is important to understand how individuals, and in this case, written descriptions are perceived online. Some researchers have argued that computer-mediated communication would never compare to face-to-face interactions (Best & Delmege, 2012), because of the removal of important expressive cues that are

facilitated through in-person interactions, such as tone, facial expressions, and body language. Despite the loss of nonverbal cues, people are able to correctly identify characteristics about others through computer-mediated communication (Sandy, 2013). Several studies have shown that people can identify traits from online text post, such as openness to experience (Borkenau et al., 2016), agreeableness, and neuroticism (Qiu et al., 2012). The accuracy of people's ratings on the target's personality traits varies by trait (Qiu et al., 2012; Tong et al., 2020). To ensure that the dating profiles were perceived as intended, we will conduct a pilot study and evaluate how the participants perceived the profiles.

1.3 Potential Relationship Quality and Attraction

The current study is interested in how people view sense of purpose in the context of a potential romantic relationship. Feelings of attraction typically occur in early interactions with an individual to whom the actor has no previous relationship to (Gerlach & Reinhard, 2018). Previous studies have used online profiles to measure participants' attraction to several qualities (Brand et al., 2012; Fiore et al., 2008; Sritharan et al., 2010). However, dispositional factors do not reliably predict attraction (Joel et al., 2017). Furthermore, initial attraction to a partner does not predict whether the relationship will continue (Eastwick et al., 2018). Short-term romantic relationships begin with levels of romantic interest that are similar to those in long-term romantic relationships (Eastwick et al., 2018). Therefore, to move beyond the more physical-oriented components of dating profiles and onto the more personalized aspects of them, sense of purpose may be better suited to understanding how one perceived someone as a potential partner rather than how attractive they find them to be. Measuring the attractiveness of dating profiles may not provide suitable information to help interpret how sense of purpose plays a role in relationship satisfaction in long-term relationships. As such, the current study focused on individuals evaluating perceived potential relationship quality of a potential partner based on their levels of sense of purpose and purpose orientations.

In the current paper, potential relationship quality was evaluated through the lens of the triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986), which suggests that comprehensive love is made up of three components: intimacy, passion, commitment. Intimacy is characterized by the feeling of closeness and warmth in a relationship. Passion describes physical and sexual attraction. Commitment refers to decision and desire to love a partner for the long term. In order to have a desirable love and a fulfilling relationship, all three components are required. Past work has shown that participants who report higher levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment in their relationships report higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Madey & Rodgers, 2009; Tung, 2007). Using the triangular theory of love should provide insight into how participants perceive future relationship quality and whether this differs based on a dating profile's level of purpose and purpose orientation.

1.4 The Current Study

The current study aims to determine whether sense of purpose and purpose orientation congruence are related to the potential relationship quality ratings of dating profiles. Potential relationship quality will be measured by participants reports to be committed to, intimate with, and passionate with the dating profile. College students were employed as a population because of their increased proclivity to use dating apps as compared to other populations (Anderson et al., 2020). The two main hypotheses are as follows:

H₁: Participants will report higher potential relationship quality for and desire to be more intimate with, passionate to, as well as committed to the dating profiles with high senses of purpose than the dating profile with a low sense of purpose.

H₂: Participants will report higher potential relationship quality for and desire to be more intimate with, passionate with, as well as committed to the dating profile with their same purpose orientation.

2 Methods

2.1 Participants and Procedure

Following a pilot study described in more detail below ($N=27$), participants ($N=119$) were collected through the university's psychology participation website. The age of the participants ranged from 18–22 with an average age of 19.43 years. In regard to gender, 63.6% of participants identified as female, 33.9% as male, 1.7% as genderqueer, neither exclusively male nor female, and 0.8% chose "prefer not to answer". The participants were predominantly White, Caucasian (38.7%), Asian or Pacific Islander (30.3%), Black, African-American (10.1%), and Hispanic or Latinx (5%). The other racial categories were endorsed by less than 5% of participants. Most participants had only high school/GED education (47.1%) or some post-high-school training (46.2%) and 98.3% were currently working on attaining a bachelor's degree. Participants were mostly students (52.1% student, 25.2% part-time employment, 21% currently unemployed, 1.7% full time employment).

The study used online questionnaires administered through Qualtrics to collect data. Participants read a brief description of the study. Participants then read one of the dating profile vignettes and responded to the relationship quality items for the dating profile. This step was repeated eight more times with the remaining dating profiles. Then, participants completed the sense of purpose questionnaire, the purpose orientation questionnaire, and questions on demographics. Participants took approximately 20 min to complete the survey.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Dating Profile Vignettes

Participants read nine different dating profiles vignettes that had been previously validated through a pilot study described below (see Appendix A). Each profile included two to four sentences that described the individual in the first person, two to three words reflecting their passions, and a sentence that mimics prompts found on dating apps. Of the nine profiles, four reflected people with high senses of purpose. The high sense of purpose profiles described people with the following four different purpose orientations: prosocial orientation, relationship orientation, financial orientation, and creative orientation. The prosocial orientation dating profile represented an individual involved in community engagement and activism. The relationship orientation profile conveyed a person interested in relationships with their family and close friends. The profile for financial orientation described a person focused on obtaining financial success. The creative orientation profile portrayed an individual passionate about creativity and originality. The purpose orientations were adapted from Hill et al. (2010), and a relationship orientation was added to distinguish passion for love towards family and friends versus a love centered around the larger community as represented by the prosocial orientation. Personal recognition purpose orientation was identified in the original study and was not used to create a dating profile. The multifaceted nature of the orientation made it difficult to create a matching dating profile. The orientation is related to a wide range of items such as “becoming an authority in my field” and “making a theoretical contribution to science”. The other five dating profiles described people with low senses of purpose with no specific orientation. The order of presentation of the dating profile vignettes was randomized to control for order effects.

Before data collection, a pilot study was performed to ensure that the dating profiles were perceived correctly based on their sense of purpose levels and their purpose orientations. Participants read a dating profile and answered to what extent they found the profile to be purposeful. Participants reported to what extent they found the dating profile to be “sociable” (characteristic for the relationship profile), “financially inclined”, “creative” and “community-oriented” (characteristic for the prosocial profile). Participants responded to the prompt on a scale of 1 (*Strongly agree*) to 5 (*Strongly disagree*). This step was completed for each of the nine dating profiles. The order of the dating profiles was randomized. Participants of the pilot study were not allowed to participate in the main study. The pilot study provided confidence that our “low purpose” profiles were being viewed as such: The mean scores for the purposefulness of the low purpose profiles ranged from 2.33 ($SD = 1.07$) to 2.98 ($SD = 1.19$) relative to the high purpose profiles scoring at least an average of 4.19. For the main study, we included the low purpose profile with the lowest perceived purposefulness. The data of the other four low purpose dating profiles were not included in the main data analyses. However, we included them in the main study to ensure that participants did not notice that the low purpose profile was notably different than the high purpose profiles and then make inferences on the study’s aim. The means and standard deviations for scores on purpose, community

orientation, sociability, financial inclination, and creativity for the four high purpose profiles and the lowest-purpose low purpose profile are shown in Table 1.

To ensure that the dating profile vignettes were perceived as intended, several analyses were performed with the pilot study data. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to assess the relationship between the dating profiles and their perceived qualities. For the ANOVAs with significant results, Tukey HSD tests were run to identify which dating profiles differed from each other. There were significant differences between the purposefulness ratings of the dating profiles ($F(4, 130) = 48.25, p < 0.001$). The low purpose profile was reported as significantly less purposeful than the prosocial profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-2.41, -1.29]$), the relationship profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-2.78, -1.66]$), the financial profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-3.01, -1.88]$), and the creative profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-2.75, -1.62]$). Additionally, the community orientation ratings of the profiles differed significantly ($F(4, 130) = 35.53, p < 0.001$). The prosocial dating profile was viewed as more community oriented than the financial profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-2.57, -1.21]$), the creative profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-2.02, -0.65]$), and the low purpose profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-2.50, -1.13]$). There were no significant differences in community orientation ratings between the prosocial dating profile and the relationship profile ($p = 0.66, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-1.02, 0.35]$). There were significant differences between the sociability scores of the profiles ($F(4, 130) = 14.41, p < 0.001$). The relationship dating profile was rated as more sociable than the financial profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-1.81, -0.42]$) and the low purpose profile ($p < 0.01, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-1.58, -0.19]$). There were no significant differences between the sociability of score of the relationship profile as compared to the prosocial profile ($p = 0.18, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-0.14, 1.25]$) and the creative profile ($p = 0.40, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-1.14, 0.25]$). The financial inclination scores were statistically different among the dating profiles ($F(4, 130) = 41.22, p < 0.001$). The financial profile was seen as more financially inclined than the prosocial profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [1.61, 2.32]$), the relationship profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [1.50, 2.65]$), the creative profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-2.36, -1.20]$), and the low purpose profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [-3.06, -1.90]$). The creativity scores of the dating profiles differed significantly ($F(4, 130) = 31.8, p < 0.001$). The creative dating profile scored higher in creativity as compared to the prosocial profile ($p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [0.97, 2.21]$),

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for purpose, sociability, community orientation, financial inclination and creativity for the dating profiles

Profile purpose	Purpose <i>M (SD)</i>	Community Orientation <i>M (SD)</i>	Sociability <i>M (SD)</i>	Financial Inclination <i>M (SD)</i>	Creativity <i>M (SD)</i>
Prosocial Profile	4.56 (0.85)	4.74 (0.59)	4.22 (0.75)	2.70 (0.99)	3.52 (0.70)
Relationship Profile	4.19 (0.62)	4.41 (0.75)	4.78 (0.58)	3.04 (0.76)	3.30 (0.78)
Financial Profile	4.78 (0.42)	2.52 (1.16)	3.11 (1.12)	4.78 (0.51)	2.56 (1.12)
Creative Profile	4.52 (0.58)	3.07 (0.78)	3.78 (0.89)	3.00 (0.78)	4.89 (0.32)
Low Purpose Profile	2.33 (1.07)	2.59 (1.12)	3.33 (1.14)	2.30 (0.72)	2.93 (0.96)

the relationship profile ($p < 0.001$, 95% C.I. = [0.75, 1.99]), the financial profile ($p < 0.001$, 95% C.I. = [1.72, 2.95]), and the low purpose profile ($p < 0.001$, 95% C.I. = [-2.58, -1.35]).

2.2.2 Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory

The Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) inventory was adapted from Fletcher et al. (2000). The scale was used to measure the level of attraction the participants felt towards each profile. The full scale identifies six relationship quality components, but for the purposes of the study, only the three components related to the triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) were used: commitment, intimacy, and passion. The original scale has three questions per relationship quality component. The scale was reduced to two questions per component to prevent participant fatigue. Additionally, the original scale asked about participants' current relationships. Because the current study is studying the potential relationship quality to dating profiles, the questions were adjusted to ask how participants imagine they would feel in a relationship to the person described in the dating profile.

Participants were asked to "Imagine that you are in a relationship with this person. How would you respond to the questions below?" followed by the six PRQC inventory questions. The two questions on commitment asked participants about how devoted they would be in a perceived relationship with the dating profile ("How dedicated would you be to your relationship?" and "How committed would you be to your relationship?"). The two questions on intimacy inquired about participants' imagined closeness to the dating profile ("How connected would you be to your partner?" and "How intimate would you be in your relationship?"). The two questions addressing passion asked participants about their sexual desire for the dating profile ("How lustful would you be in your relationship?" and "How passionate would you be in your relationship?"). Participants responded to the PRQC inventory on a scale of 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extremely*). The global measure of potential relationship quality was measured as the composite answers for the six individual items. Results from the main study found that the prosocial profile ($\alpha = 0.85\text{--}0.95$), the relationship profile ($\alpha = 0.76\text{--}0.93$), the financial profile ($\alpha = 0.83\text{--}0.96$), the creative profile ($\alpha = 0.85\text{--}0.94$), and the low purpose profile ($\alpha = 0.88\text{--}0.96$) all had acceptable internal consistency.

2.2.3 Purpose in Life (PIL) Questionnaire

The Purpose in Life subscale from Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale was used to measure the sense of purpose of the participants ($\alpha = 0.83$). Participants rated their agreement to each statement on a scale of 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). There were seven statements on purpose to respond to ("I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality") with higher scores representing a higher sense of purpose.

2.2.4 Purpose Orientation Scale

The purpose orientation scale (Hill et al., 2010) was used to determine the purpose orientation of the participants. The original scale identified the four purpose orientations as prosocial, financial, creative, and personal recognition. Because the personal recognition orientation was not used to create a dating profile, it was removed from the scale. The version of the scale used in this study listed 12 goals, 4 goals for each purpose orientation measured. Participants responded to the question “To what extent are the following goals important to you?” on a scale of 1 (*Not important*) to 4 (*Essential*). The prosocial orientation subscale ($\alpha=0.72$), the financial orientation subscale ($\alpha=0.67$), and the creative orientation subscale ($\alpha=.71$) showed acceptable reliability.

2.3 Analytic Plan

To test for the first hypothesis (H_1), a series of paired samples *t*-tests were performed comparing people’s average potential relationship quality ratings for the high purpose dating profiles versus the low purpose dating profiles. Additional paired samples *t*-tests were performed to evaluate whether there were mean level differences in intimacy, commitment, and passion based on the high versus low purpose profiles. To test for the second hypothesis (H_2), correlations were calculated between the participants’ personal purpose orientations and their ratings of potential relationship quality for the various dating profiles. Further correlations were calculated to observe if the participants’ ratings on being committed to, passionate with, and intimate with the dating profiles were differentially associated with participant’s purpose orientation scores.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The ratings of commitment, intimacy, and passion were averaged for every profile to identify how participants viewed the profiles. Participants on average rated the potential relationship quality highest for the relationship profile, followed by the creative profile, the prosocial profile, and the low purpose profile. Participants rated the potential relationship quality lowest for the financial profile. The means and standard deviations for potential relationship quality, commitment, intimacy, and passion for each of the dating profile types can be found in Table 2.

3.2 Paired Samples T-Tests

Paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to evaluate whether there were mean-level differences in participants ratings of potential relationship quality based on the

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for potential relationship quality, commitment, intimacy, and passion based on dating profiles

	Potential Relationship Quality	Commitment	Intimacy	Passion
Profile purpose	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Prosocial Profile	4.50 (1.48)	4.84 (1.54)	4.43 (1.54)	4.24 (1.58)
Relationship Profile	5.48 (1.25)	5.72 (1.21)	5.56 (1.34)	5.17 (1.41)
Financial Profile	3.69 (1.72)	4.07 (1.90)	3.51 (1.76)	3.50 (1.74)
Creative Profile	4.60 (1.55)	4.66 (1.70)	4.57 (1.65)	4.58 (1.63)
Low Purpose Profile	3.82 (1.73)	3.85 (1.89)	3.96 (1.81)	3.66 (1.78)

high or low purpose dating profiles. Cohen's d was calculated as a measure of effect size. Participants gave higher potential relationship quality scores to the relationship dating profile ($t(216.12)=9.57$, $p<0.001$, $d=1.21$), the creative dating profile ($t(232.72)=4.17$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.54$), and the prosocial dating profile ($t(230.48)=3.69$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.47$) as compared to the low purpose profile. There was no significant difference between the potential relationship quality scores for the financial dating profile and the low purpose profile ($t(235.96)=-0.67$, $p=0.50$, $d=-0.09$).

Additional paired samples t -tests using Bonferroni adjusted alpha levels of 0.016667 (0.05/3) were conducted to assess the mean-level differences between the high purpose profiles and the low purpose profile in relation to scores on commitment, intimacy, and passion. Participants rated themselves as being able to be more committed to ($t(228.27)=5.06$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.67$), intimate with ($t(231.01)=2.44$, $p=0.015$, $d=0.32$), and passionate with ($t(232.34)=2.99$, $p=0.003$, $d=0.39$) the prosocial purpose dating profile than the low purpose dating profile. Participants rated themselves as being able to be more committed to ($t(207.79)=10.25$, $p<0.001$, $d=1.34$), intimate with ($t(220.66)=8.72$, $p<0.001$, $d=1.13$), and passionate with ($t(224.22)=8.18$, $p<0.001$, $d=1.06$) the relationship purpose dating profile than the low purpose dating profile. Participants rated themselves as being able to be more intimate with the low purpose dating profile than the financial purpose dating profile ($t(235.9)=-2.20$, $p=0.028$). There was no difference on how participants rated the financial purpose dating profile and the low purpose dating profile in regards to commitment ($t(235.99)=1.04$, $p=0.300$, $d=0.14$) or passion ($t(235.89)=-0.83$, $p=0.405$, $d=-0.11$). Participants rated themselves as being able to be more committed to ($t(233.52)=3.98$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.53$), intimate with ($t(233.66)=3.10$, $p=0.002$, $d=0.41$), and passionate with ($t(233.96)=4.72$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.62$) the creative purpose dating profile than the low purpose dating profile.

3.3 Zero-Order Correlations

Broader correlations were calculated to examine associations between participant's purpose orientation scores and their potential relationship quality scores for the

different dating profiles. The associations were conducted to determine if participants were more likely to positively rate the potential relationship quality score for dating profiles with the same purpose orientation as their own. Additionally, r -to- Z tests were run to compare the correlations. Correlations were not completed for the relationship purpose profile because the purpose orientation scale, used to identify the purpose orientation scores of the participants, does not include items for a relationship purpose. The results of the zero-order correlations are represented in Table 3.

Participants who scored highly on prosocial purpose orientation reported higher potential relationship quality scores for the prosocial purpose dating profile. However, higher scores on prosocial purpose orientation were not associated with potential relationship quality scores to the relationship profile, the financial profile, the creative profile, or the low purpose profile. Participants who scored highly on financial purpose orientation reported higher potential relationship quality scores for the financial dating profile. Scores on financial purpose orientation were not

Table 3 Zero-Order correlations and Z scores of the participant's purpose orientations and their potential relationship quality scores for the dating profiles

Dating Profile Purpose	Participant Purpose Orientation		
	Prosocial Orientation $r(Z)$	Financial Orientation $r(Z)$	Creative Orientation $r(Z)$
Potential Relationship Quality			
Prosocial Profile	0.47*** (0.52)	-0.02 (-0.02)	-0.18 (-0.18)
Relationship Profile	0.08 (0.08)	0.11 (0.11)	-0.16 (-0.16)
Financial Profile	0.09 (0.09)	0.27** (0.28)	0.00 (0.00)
Creative Profile	0.08 (0.08)	0.05 (0.05)	0.30*** (0.31)
Low Purpose Profile	-0.17 (-0.17)	-0.23* (-0.23)	0.05 (0.05)
Commitment			
Prosocial Profile	0.40*** (0.43)	–	–
Financial Profile	–	0.24** (0.24)	–
Creative Profile	–	–	0.25** (0.25)
Low Purpose Profile	-0.18 (-0.18)	-0.27** (-0.28)	0.01 (0.01)
Intimacy			
Prosocial Profile	0.46*** (0.50)	–	–
Financial Profile	–	0.27** (0.27)	–
Creative Profile	–	–	0.33*** (0.34)
Low Purpose Profile	-0.15 (-0.15)	-0.23* (-0.23)	0.07 (0.07)
Passion			
Prosocial Profile	0.48*** (0.53)	–	–
Financial Profile	–	0.26** (0.27)	–
Creative Profile	–	–	0.27** (0.27)
Low Purpose Profile	-0.16 (-0.16)	-0.14 (-0.14)	0.08 (0.08)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

significantly correlated with potential relationship quality scores for the prosocial profile, the relationship profile, or the creative profile, but were negatively associated with potential relationship quality ratings for the low purpose profile. Participants who scored highly on creative purpose orientation reported higher potential relationship quality scores for the creative dating profile. Higher scores for creative purpose orientation were not significantly correlated potential relationship quality scores for the prosocial profile, the relationship profile, the financial profile, or the low purpose profile.

Next, we examined the associations between participant's purpose orientation score with the individual potential relationship quality components, commitment, intimacy, and passion, evaluating magnitudes based on effect size standard for psychological sciences (Funder & Ozer, 2019). Participants who scored highly on the prosocial purpose orientation reported wanting to be more committed to, intimate with, and passionate with the prosocial dating profile. Prosocial purpose orientation scores were not significantly correlated with a desire to be committed to, intimate with or passionate with the low purpose dating profile. Participants who scored highly on the financial purpose orientation reported being more willing to be committed to, intimate with, and passionate with the financial dating profile. Scores on financial purpose orientation were negatively associated with a desire to commit to or be intimate with the low purpose dating profile. Financial purpose orientation scores showed no correlation with a desire to be passionate with the low purpose dating profile. Participants who scored highly on creative purpose orientation were more willing to be committed to and passionate towards the creative dating profile. Additionally, creative purpose orientation scores had a large positive correlation with the desire to be intimate with the creative profile. Creative purpose orientation scores were not significantly associated with a desire to commit to, be intimate with, or passionate with the low purpose dating profile.

4 Discussion

The current study examined whether a target's perceived sense of purpose predicted higher potential relationship quality scores, and if purpose orientation congruence was related to potential relationship quality. With the exception of the financial purpose dating profile, people rated the high purpose profiles as having higher potential relationship quality than the low purpose profile. The purpose orientations of individuals predicted higher potential relationship quality scores for dating profiles with their same orientation. The potential relationship quality findings did not greatly differ when looking at the individual subcomponents of intimacy, passion, and commitment, suggesting that purpose orientations are related to relationship quality indicators fairly consistently.

Most people found purposeful individuals to elicit higher potential relationship quality ratings than those with a low sense of purpose. However, contrary to the hypothesis, the financial purpose orientation profile was found to have similar potential relationship quality to the low purpose profile. The financial dating profile differed from the other profiles in a few key aspects that may have made it less

attractive as a romantic prospect. The first key difference was that it was the only dating profile that did not mention a connection to others, which may have been an aversive quality because people tend to seek mates who score higher on agreeableness (Figueredo et al., 2006). The prosocial and relationship profiles were firmly centered around relationships with others. The creative profile mentioned understanding people's different perspectives and the low purpose profile expressed the desire to want to spend time with a partner. The purpose orientations that promoted connection to others were seen as having better potential relationship quality, likely because romantic relationships require emotional bonding which involves an ability to understand others (Mercado & Hibel, 2017). A person with strong financial goals may be seen as having a low potential relationship quality because they prioritize financial gains over connection with their partner. Moreover, the commonly held belief that "money doesn't buy happiness" may have played a role in how the financial profile was perceived. People may have felt less connected to the financial profile knowing that financial aspirations likely do not provide the same deep fulfillment as other life goals. Previous research supports this possibility, showing that people with goals centered around others are more likely to have greater well-being (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). Additionally, the financial purpose orientation may have been perceived differently among students who were not primarily studying psychology. For instance, students from a business school may have found the financial profile more appealing. That said, Eastwick et al. (2014) argues that status may be perceived as attractive because of its relationship to physical attractiveness. Hence, alternative findings may occur in studies including photos and measures of physical attractiveness. Overall, despite their high sense of purpose, a financially oriented person may not be desirable as a romantic partner due to having self-oriented goals and the negative emotional outcomes associated with those goals.

This conclusion supports previous research that has found that the directionality of one's purpose can lead to different outcomes (Cross & Markus, 1991; Hill et al., 2010, 2011; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). For instance, past work finds that students who develop prosocial- or financially-oriented purposes will both report greater well-being, but the domain of that well-being increase depends on the orientation (Hill et al., 2011). In that study, changes in prosocial orientation were more linked to personal growth, while financial orientation changes were associated with perceived mastery over one's environment. Paired with the current findings, measuring purpose orientation appears beneficial when studying sense of purpose to show whether an outcome is due to the amount of purpose or the type of purpose one has. Future research should identify other purpose orientations, measure their desirability, and observe what aspects differ between romantically desirable and undesirable purpose orientations.

As predicted, people rated romantic prospects with the same purpose orientation as theirs with a having higher potential relationship quality. Increased feelings of intimacy, passion, and commitment to people with similar passions to oneself supports past findings showing that a person's affect and sense of closeness to a partner relates to how the types of goals they complete (Gere et al., 2011). Considering that one's purpose informs their short-term goals (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009), being with someone of the same purpose orientation means more time enjoying working

towards a shared goal with your partner. People are interested in individuals with their same purpose orientation potentially because they would like to have companionship and comradery while performing tasks they deeply care about. Romantic interest in partners with similar purposes may provide relationship satisfaction later due to the partners being better able to engage in a mutually beneficial transactive goal system (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). Partners who provide action-facilitating support for each other's goals, such as offering advice or skills to help reach a goal, have greater relationship quality and more self-improvement in those goals (Overall et al., 2010). Partners who share purpose orientations can be more supportive of their partner's goals because their knowledge on the subject can provide information support, such as advice on how to achieve their goals, or tangible support, such as performing a task that helps in achieving one's goal. The perceived potential relationship quality participants felt towards dating profiles with their same purpose orientation may lead to better relationship satisfaction down the line.

These findings may be helpful for online dating programs to take into consideration when creating their platforms to help pair suitable couples. Many match-making sites use individual traits to determine partner compatibility, despite the lack of evidence that dyad similarity strongly predicts relationship satisfaction (Finkel et al., 2012). Individual dispositions such as personality traits, attachment style, dating preferences and personal values have not been successful at predicting a participant's desire to be in a relationship with another (Joel et al., 2017). For the dating programs that utilize questionnaires to calculate compatibility between two people, adding a purpose orientation scale to their repertoire could help in finding matches. For the dating apps that rely on user selected matches, it may be useful to provide the option to label one's purpose orientation in the bio or introduction. The current study focused on college students, given they are the primary users of dating apps (Anderson et al., 2020). This helps the current work have more ecological validity in the dating app context. However, future research could benefit from evaluating the current question in other age groups to determine whether these results replicate. For instance, single individuals in middle-to-older adulthood are more likely to be divorced (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Their priorities regarding the ideal qualities of future romantic partners may be informed by their experiences in their previous marriage.

4.1 Limitations and Further Directions

The study had several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, in order for the profiles to measure attraction to one type of purpose orientation, we developed dating profiles that were directly related to their purpose orientations, to avoid any issues with extraneous and unrelated details that would make the profile more or less desirable. This may have made the profiles be perceived as one-dimensional; for instance, the financial dating profile may have been regarded as more attractive if they had presented interests outside of their passion. Second, the types of purpose orientations that were evaluated did not encompass a wide range of purpose orientations. Other possible profiles include civically-oriented purpose (Malin

et al., 2015) or activist-oriented purpose (Wilson & Hill, 2023). Third, there were slight differences in the prompts of the dating profiles. The profiles were written to mimic real dating profiles which allow people to choose certain prewritten prompts. Although this approach supports the ecological validity of the current work by more closely mimicking the experience of dating apps, future studies could avoid any differences in dating profiles that are not directly related to differences of the trait being examined. Fourth, we did not record whether the participants were currently in romantic relationships or single. Partnered people may have found dating profiles that were similar to their own partners more desirable regardless of the general qualities of the dating apps represented. However, it is possible that relationship status did not greatly affect the results. Relationship status for undergraduates varies markedly week to week, as reported by a previous study (Pfund et al., 2021) that investigated a similar sample. As a result, any associations with self-reported relationship status may be difficult to interpret in collegiate samples. Fifth, to evaluate potential relationship quality, we used a shortened and adapted version of the questions in the PRQC scale for commitment, passion and intimacy, to reduce participant burden. Future studies may wish to employ the full version of the measure to increase reliability. Lastly although university students are an important target for understanding attraction to dating apps, the current sample came from a single, private institution in the Midwest United States. While the participant makeup is representative of the assessed institution, the sample was majority female and lacked representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African-American, and Hispanic/Latinx students. Before making strong generalizations, it is important to consider these findings with samples from additional universities that can provide greater sample diversity.

This study examined whether sense of purpose and purpose orientation congruency had a relationship with potential relationship quality. However, trying to predict an individual's attraction to a potential partner based on their stated personal dating preferences has proven to be difficult (Joel et al., 2017). Notably, many papers on the subject suggest that while ideal partner preferences can predict participants' attraction to a hypothetical partner with their desired traits, those preferences cannot predict participants' attraction to a partner with those same desired traits in an in-person setting (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Eastwick et al., 2011, 2014). For example, Eastwick et al. (2011) found that participants were interested in potential romantic partners with their ideal partner preferences when examining a written profile; however, when interacting face to face with the potential romantic partner, the partner's described traits no longer predicted romantic interest in the partner. Considering the conclusions of these various studies, future research is needed to understand the role of sense of purpose on perceived potential relationship quality in live interactions.

In addition, further research should consider mechanisms explaining why sense of purpose and purpose orientation may matter in the partner attraction process. Three potential mechanisms were noted earlier in the introduction. First, purposeful people might be perceived as being highly suitable partners because of judgements made about their personality. Second, it may be that purposeful people are perceived as ideal partners to collaborate with on a shared goal. Working on a shared goal with a partner can increase positive affect (Gere et al., 2011). Therefore, the positive evaluation of people with high purpose may be greatly influenced by the promise of

increased affect, camaraderie, and shared goal accomplishment. Third, partners with congruent purpose orientations may have increased goal achievement and goal coordination as per the Transactive Goal Dynamics Theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015); as such, potential partners with a more similar purpose orientation may be more attracted because these partners improve an individual's ability to pursue their own purpose in life. Including sense of purpose in future relationship research focused on relationship onset may help provide more nuance to the mechanisms behind the desirability of sense of purpose. Additionally, research focused on people already in romantic relationships would benefit from not solely considering sense of purpose and taking into account partner's purpose orientations.

4.2 Conclusion

In summary, the current results suggest that having a sense of purpose increases the perception of one's potential relationship quality, but perhaps not for purpose orientations less tied to connection and relationship, like the financial purpose orientation. Moreover, people assign higher potential relationship quality ratings to those who have the same purpose orientation as them. The distinct outcome for the financial profile supports the importance of studying purpose orientations by highlighting that not all people with a sense of purpose are perceived the same. The importance of purpose in romantic relationships has generally been overlooked, but the current work highlights the potential for one's degree of purpose and purpose orientation to be a key component for understanding potential relationship quality.

Appendix A

Dating Profile Vignettes

High Sense of Purpose Profile: Prosocial Orientation

I love community organization and direct action. I believe that volunteering time to help others is vital to keeping a sense of camaraderie and inclusivity alive. I prioritize creating community spaces to connect and aid others.

Passions: Human rights, Environmentalism

You'll normally find me... working for community rights.

High Sense of Purpose Profile: Relationship Orientation

I am very passionate about preserving and nourishing social relationships. I like to set time aside to be with friends and family. Fostering relationships gives me meaning in life.

Passions: Dinner parties, Friendship

What makes a relationship great is... time and effort.

High Sense of Purpose Profile: Financial Orientation

I am interested in working hard to be financially well-off. I have high career goals and would like to move up my company's ladder to secure higher pay grades. I work hard every day to achieve my monetary goals and I prioritize my aspirations.

Passions: Self-made, Entrepreneur

I will never shut up about... the importance of retirement savings.

High Sense of Purpose Profile: Creative Orientation

I value ingenuity and strive to center my life around creativity. In every aspect of my life, I try to innovate and see things from different perspectives. I like to be experimental with my style and life choices. I find fulfillment in original self-expression.

Passions: Fashion, Photography, Art

I get way too excited about... inspiration for new writing projects.

Selected Low Sense of Purpose Profile

I am very relaxed and laid back. I am just looking for someone to chill and hang out with. I am pretty much always free if I am not watching my favorite Netflix show.

Passions: movies, music

My greatest strength is... staying up late for movie marathons.

Piloted Low Sense of Purpose Profile

I am a go with the flow person that lets life take me wherever it may lead. I do not worry too much about the future because I try to take life one day at a time.

Passions: good food, sunsets

My real life super power is... living in the moment.

Piloted Low Sense of Purpose Profile

I have a sweet tooth, and I've yet to meet someone who can make better cupcakes than me. I like playing video games and reading about conspiracy theories.

Passions: gaming, baking

In my free time I like to... read reddit posts.

Piloted Low Sense of Purpose Profile

I mostly go through my day trying to satisfy my mild coffee addiction. My hobbies include waking up late, scrolling through tiktok, and making grilled cheeses. My daily routine involves making a morning latte, going to work, and coming home to play with my cat.

Passions: coffee, comedy

I cannot live without... cats, naps, and snacks.

Piloted Low Sense of Purpose Profile

I am not too optimistic about life, but I am hoping that a partner could change that. I don't really know what I want in the future, so I'm just trying to take it one day at a time.

Passions: cars, Esports

Typical Sunday... means helping with family dinner.

Author's Contribution Isabella D'Ottone, Gabrielle Pfund, and Patrick Hill designed and carried out the study. Gabrielle Pfund performed the data analysis and calculations. Isabella D'Ottone wrote the paper with revisions and input from Gabrielle Pfund and Patrick Hill.

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Data Availability We will gladly make the data available to any interested parties if they contact us, but they need to complete a data access agreement due to restrictions placed by our institution.

Declarations

Ethics Approval Approval of the study was obtained by the Washington University Institutional Review Board.

Consent to Participate Participants provided consent to participate before beginning the study.

Competing Interests The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all the authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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