

# Looking for love? Try finding purpose as well

January 31 2024

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The world of online dating can be overwhelming with the dizzying array of options for attracting a partner but new research from Washington University in St. Louis shows that those looking for love may have more

success if they also seek a sense of purpose in life.

Researcher Isabella D'Ottone, in the lab of Patrick Hill, associate professor of psychological and [brain sciences](#) in Arts & Sciences, published a study about how that sense of purpose can affect how others may rate dating app profiles. Those whose profiles show a sense of purpose were rated higher on various scales for attractiveness compared with profiles that indicated no sense of purpose.

"In general we found people with a higher purpose were considered to be more romantically attractive," said Isabella D'Ottone, co-author of the study with Hill and Gabrielle Pfund that was published in the *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*.

D'Ottone, who completed the research as an undergraduate in Hill's lab, did the study to build on Pfund's previous research on how a sense of purpose also aligns with maintaining better long-term relationships. D'Ottone earned a bachelor's degree and Pfund a Ph.D. from WashU, both in 2022.

For this study, they focused on four categories of "sense of purpose" and created four dating profiles to match each category, along with five control profiles that indicated no sense of purpose. The researchers set up a study with 119 participants who each read and ranked the nine fake profiles on various measures of attractiveness.

The four "purpose" categories were prosocial orientation, relationship orientation, financial orientation and creative orientation. Prosocial means someone with goals related to helping others; relationship orientation means goals are centered around family and finding a [romantic partner](#); financial orientation are goals related to [financial security](#); and creative orientation are goals focused on creativity and originality.

In addition to rating the purpose-driven profiles higher than those lacking purpose, participants also rated profiles higher if they shared the same purpose orientation. For example, people with a creative purpose will be drawn to others with creative focus and so on. One caveat to sense of purpose appeal: The financially focused profiles did not rate as high compared with the other categories of purpose except when ranked by study participants who also found themselves to be financially motivated.

In other words, having your focus being on financial success could be a turn-off for people unless they too find purpose in financial goals.

"In general, looking at all the purpose profiles, people were not as attracted to the financially oriented person," said D'Ottone, who is a research associate at the University of Miami.

Hill noted that this study was a "phenomenal" project for an undergraduate to take on and it builds on the lab's work on why sense of purpose is connected to better relationships.

It's not just about physical attraction, Hill said, but also about recognizing someone who has direction in life.

"When it comes to attraction, knowing someone has a direction matters," he said.

D'Ottone's work speaks to how people are picking up on sense of purpose and factoring that into how they are attracted to others, whether they are aware of that or not, he added.

"We actually seek out people with a purpose," he said.

This research could also be helpful in designing dating apps, Hill said.

The current roster of dating apps includes prompts and ice breakers to get conversations started, but sites could include a purpose-driven component to those prompts.

D'Ottone noted that this isn't about faking a passion for something but, maybe finding love where you don't expect it. Chasing a special someone may end with a mismatch, "but chasing your passions, you might find that person along the way," she said.

**More information:** Isabella C. D'Ottone et al, Purposeful Partners: Potential Relationship Quality and Sense of Purpose, *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s41042-023-00136-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-023-00136-z)

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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