

Attachment, Social Goals, and Meaning in Life

Elizabeth N. Blake, Andrew A. Abeyta, Ph.D.

Introduction

- Meaning in life is a fundamental psychological need (Zika & Chamberlain, 1987)
- Insecure attachment orientations are associated with deficits in meaning in life (Reizer, Dahan, & Shaver, 2013)
- People can pursue relationships with a growth-orientation, aimed at gaining belonging, or a deficit-reduction orientation, aimed at minimizing lack of belonging (Lavigne, Vallerand, & Crevier-Braud, 2011)
- Growth-orientation is associated with positive relational outcomes, whereas deficit-reduction orientation is associated with negative relational outcomes (Lavigne et al., 2011).
- Could social goal orientations help explain the relationship between attachment and meaning in life outcomes?

Hypotheses:

- Greater deficit-reduction social goal orientation will help explain the positive association between attachment-related anxiety search for meaning.
- Greater deficit-reduction social goal orientation will help explain the inverse association between attachment-related anxiety and presence of meaning.
- Lower growth goal orientation will help explain the inverse association between attachment-related avoidance and presence of meaning.

Method

Participants

- 433 undergraduate psychology students from Rutgers-Camden (297 female, 130 male, $M_{age} = 19.81$, $SD_{age} = 4.23$)

Procedure

- Online survey
- Participants completed the Experiences in Close Relationships-Short Form scale (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007), the Belongingness Orientation Scale (BOS; Lavigne et al., 2011), and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006)

Materials

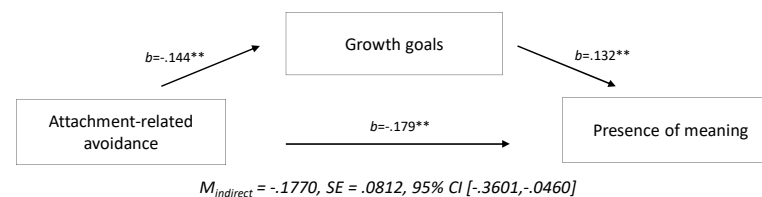
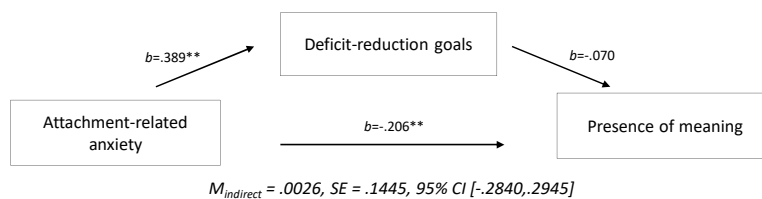
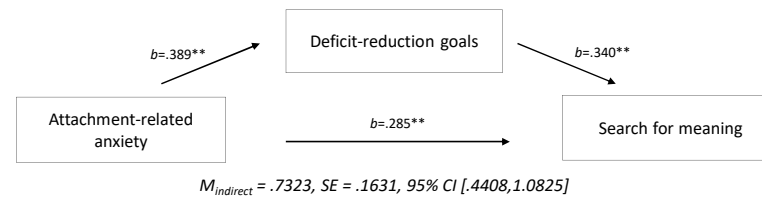
- **12-Item Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Short Form** (Wei et al., 2007)
 - *Anxiety subscale*: "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner." (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.998$; $\alpha = .677$)
 - *Avoidance subscale*: "I try to avoid getting too close to my partner." (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.956$; $\alpha = .737$)

Method (cont.)

Materials (cont.)

- **10-Item Belongingness Orientation Scale** (Lavigne et al., 2011)
 - *Growth Orientation subscale*: "My relationships are important to me because I have a sincere interest in other people." (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; $M = 4.64$, $SD = 0.97$; $\alpha = .879$)
 - *Deficit-Reduction Orientation subscale*: "My relationships are important to me because they fill a void in my life." (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; $M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.02$; $\alpha = .768$)
- **10-Item Meaning in Life Questionnaire** (Steger et al., 2006)
 - *Presence subscale*: "My life has a clear sense of purpose." (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.28$; $\alpha = .846$)
 - *Search subscale*: "I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life." (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.31$; $\alpha = .873$)

Results



Note: $p < .001^{**}$, $p < .05^*$

Discussion

Hypotheses A and C supported:

- Attachment-related anxiety was associated with greater search for meaning via greater commitment to deficit-reduction social goals
- Attachment-related avoidance was associated with lower presence of meaning via less commitment to growth social goals
- Provides partial support for social goals as an explanation for why insecure attachment is associated with deficits in meaning
- Individuals high in attachment-related anxiety may be more likely to adopt deficit-reduction oriented goals, and individuals high in attachment-related avoidance may be less likely to adopt growth oriented goals
 - Through these differences in goal pursuit, individuals may approach their relationships differently and this may impact the meaning they derive from their relationships
- Future research may seek to:
 - Use alternate methodologies to the online format, such as a longitudinal design to assess temporal order of the relationship
 - Investigate whether the demonstrated increase in search for meaning in individuals high in attachment-related anxiety is a positive or negative outcome
 - Collect a more representative sample

- **Key Take-Home:** Social goal orientations can help to explain why insecurely attached individuals may experience deficits in meaning in life.

References

- Lavigne, G.L., Vallerand, R. J., Crevier-Braud, L. (2011). The fundamental need to belong: On the distinction between growth and deficit-reduction orientations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(9), 1185-1201.
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