

Is a life without meaning satisfying? The moderating role of the search for meaning in satisfaction with life judgments

Michael F. Steger^{a*}, Shigehiro Oishi^b and Selin Kesebir^b

^aDepartment of Psychology, Colorado State University, 1876 Campus Delivery, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1876, USA;

^bDepartment of Psychology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4400, USA

(Final version received 3 March 2011)

Results from two studies revealed that the relation between meaning in life and life satisfaction was moderated by the extent to which the rater was searching for meaning in his or her life. In Studies 1a and 1b, the presence of meaning was more strongly related to life satisfaction for those who were actively searching for meaning in life than for those who were not. Study 2 extended the finding to judgments concerning a fictitious target's life satisfaction based on experimentally manipulated information regarding meaning in life. Thus, the role of meaning in life satisfaction judgments varies across individuals, depending on the level of search for meaning in life. These results suggest that search for meaning behaves like a schema increasing the salience of meaning-relevant information, and provides new ways of understanding people's efforts to establish meaningful lives.

Keywords: meaning in life; purpose in life; life satisfaction; well-being; search for meaning

Introduction

Feeling that one's existence is meaningful, or that one has an important purpose in life, has been seen as a critical component of being human (e.g., Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 1963) and of well-being (e.g., Ryff & Singer, 1998). Lesser attention has been paid to the process through which people presumably find meaning. According to some, in a cosmos devoid of intrinsic meaning, no life can be meaningful, and people should instead seek meaning in experiences that provide them pleasure or stimulation (Camus, 1955). Others view the search for meaning as centrally important, arising from human nature, and expressing something that is uniquely human (Frankl, 1963; Maddi, 1970). Whereas *having* meaning is rather uniformly thought to be beneficial, *searching* for meaning seems more controversial, with some regarding it as essentially natural and human (e.g., Frankl, 1963) and others regarding it as a warning sign that one has lost meaning (e.g., Baumeister, 1991). Previous research has suggested that those who are searching for meaning generally feel like their lives have somewhat less meaning, and they are generally less satisfied with their lives as well (e.g., Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008). The diversity of opinion suggests that the relations between well-being and aspects of meaning in life may not be straightforward. This study sought to explicate how the *experiencing* and *searching* dimensions of meaning

in life may interact to predict life satisfaction judgments.

Empirical research on meaning in life has revealed consistent, positive relations between meaning in life and many measures of well-being (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989), including life satisfaction (Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007; Zika & Chamberlain, 1987). Such findings appear to support the widely held opinion that meaning in life is universally important to experiencing well-being and living a satisfying life (e.g., King & Napa, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Scollon & King, 2004).

However, research points to the possibility that there are individual differences in how central meaning in life is to one's sense of well-being. The determinants of well-being and life satisfaction differ from one person to the next, depending on their value orientations (Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000) and motives (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Graessman, 1998; Emmons, 1991). For example, sensation seekers evaluate their daily well-being based heavily on hedonic markers of well-being such as physical pleasure (Oishi, Schimmack, & Diener, 2001) and the experience of excitement (Oishi, Schimmack, & Colcombe, 2003). These findings suggest, then, that meaning in life might be an important requirement of well-being for some, but not for others. In this regard, it is instructive to note that both Frankl (1963) and Maddi (1970) discussed individual differences in the

*Corresponding author. Email: michael_f_steger@yahoo.com

degree to which people actively search for meaning in life. For some, the search for meaning is palpable and pressing, whereas others may feel little or no drive to seek meaning in their lives. Accordingly, the search for meaning has been regarded as an important dimension of human motivation (Maddi, 1970), and thus may moderate the determinants of SWB like other motives (Brunstein et al., 1998; Emmons, 1991). We believe that it is important to consider individual differences in the search for meaning to better understand the components of well-being.

Search for meaning has been defined as 'the strength, intensity, and activity of people's desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives' (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, et al., 2008, p. 200, italics in original). This definition is in line with empirical findings that having meaning and searching for meaning are only modestly, negatively correlated (Crumbaugh, 1977; Reker & Cousins, 1979; Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, et al., 2008). Thus, although most people searching for meaning currently feel their lives are at least a little meaningless, many feel they are full of meaning. Search for meaning is positively related to rumination and depression, and negatively related to relatedness, self-acceptance, but also positively related to inquisitive constructs like openmindedness, drive, and absorption (Steger et al., 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, et al., 2008). Generally speaking, search for meaning seems to relate to tendencies to engage with negative thinking about one's self and past as well as to engage in potentially novel aspects of one's present circumstances.

In some ways, these findings suggest that search for meaning might function similarly to a schema, identifying and organizing information relevant to meaning in life judgments (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987). Of course, the most relevant information to someone searching for meaning would be evidence of meaning in life. Two studies provide some support for this idea. In an early study, people searching for meaning seemed to prosper marginally more from meaning in life-focused therapeutic interventions than those not seeking meaning (Crumbaugh, 1977). More recently, search for meaning moderated the relation between presence of meaning and life satisfaction such that there was a stronger relation between the two variables among Americans searching for meaning in life (Steger, Kawabata, Shimai, & Otake, 2008).

Although the search for meaning *in life* and the search for meaning *in adverse events* are different constructs, there is an impressive body of research in coping research regarding event-related search for meaning. Across a number of studies, searching for meaning in traumatic events ranging from sexual abuse (Silver, Boon, & Stones, 1983) to bereavement

(Schwartzberg & Janoff-Bulman, 1991) and strokes (Thompson, 1991) has been associated with greater distress, particularly if people are not able to find meaning in that event. Of course, this type of search for meaning refers specifically to the meaning of an event, rather than meaning in one's overall life (see also Park & Folkman, 1997).

In one compelling analysis of this research, Davis, Wortman, Lehman, and Silver (2000) reported that (a) not everyone sought meaning in their traumatic event, and (b) even among those who did search for meaning, finding a meaning in the trauma did not lead to abatement in their search. However, those that searched for, and found, meaning were better off than those who searched and did not find. Although their use of meaning refers explicitly to 'an explanation for an event' (Davis et al., 2000, p. 498, Footnote 1), it nonetheless suggests some basis to predict individual differences in the propensity to search for meaning in life overall, as well as individual differences in the effect of the presence of meaning on general life satisfaction.

The present research

There is conceptual, and some empirical support for the idea that search for meaning functions like a schema, highlighting the attention paid to, and the importance to well-being of, meaning in life-relevant information. If this is true, search for meaning, would also factor into well-being judgments. In the Crumbaugh (1977) study, people searching for meaning appeared to respond better to the meaning in life-focused therapy in terms of therapeutic outcomes. In the other study (Steger, Kawabata, et al., 2008), the interaction of search for meaning and people's experience of meaning in life predicted life satisfaction judgments. Given the paucity of previous research, it is difficult to say whether search for meaning really does prioritize the use of meaning in life-relevant information when people make well-being judgments, or whether the role of search for meaning extends beyond self-judgments to influence judgments of others as well. Therefore, two studies were conducted to address limitations of previous research on meaning and well-being.

Based on the notion of the search for meaning as an individual difference in motivation (e.g., Maddi, 1970), and the findings that determinants of SWB differ according to individuals' motives (e.g., Brunstein et al., 1998; Emmons, 1991), we hypothesized that the search for meaning would moderate the link between the presence of meaning and life satisfaction ratings, such that the presence of meaning in one's life would be more strongly related to judgments of life satisfaction among those who are actively searching for meaning

than among those who are not. As noted above, this effect has been noted in one previous study (Steger, Kawabata, et al., 2008). The focus of that study was on cultural dimensions of meaning in life, and it is unclear whether that finding would replicate in other samples. The first of the two studies examined, and replicated, the relations among meaning in life, the search for meaning, and life satisfaction in participants' own lives. Study 2 examined the role of search for meaning in judging the life satisfaction of others. The examination of these hypotheses sheds a new light on the relation between meaning and life satisfaction, and helps elucidate the role that search for meaning might play in this link (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Study 1a

Method

Participants and procedure

One-hundred and twenty-two undergraduate students were recruited from introductory psychology classes (mean age = 19.8, SD = 3.4). Participants were 70% female, and were mostly Caucasian (83%), followed by Asian (5%), African-American (3%), and Asian-American (3%), with one participant each of Native American and Hispanic ethnicity. Participants completed a short self-report packet in small to large groups in exchange for extra credit.

Materials

Meaning in life. Participants completed the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006), a 10-item scale which measures the presence of meaning (e.g., 'I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful', 'My life has a clear sense of purpose', 'I understand my life's meaning', 'I have discovered a satisfying life purpose') and the search for meaning (e.g., 'I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life', 'I am always searching for something that makes my life feel meaningful', 'I am searching for meaning in my life', 'I am always looking to find my life's purpose') using five items each. Items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true), thus scores could range from 5 to 35 on each subscale. The alpha coefficients in the present sample were 0.88 for both subscales. The two-factor structure has been replicated through confirmatory factor analysis in three independent samples, and a multitrait-multimethod matrix has established convergent and discriminant validity (see Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007; for more psychometric information).

Life satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is

a widely used and well-validated measure of life satisfaction. Five items (e.g., 'In most ways my life is close to the ideal') are rated from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true). The alpha coefficient for the SWLS in the present sample was 0.83.

Results and discussion

The mean scores were 24.1 (SD = 6.2) on the MLQ-Presence subscale, 23.5 (SD = 6.4) on the MLQ-Search subscale, and 24.9 (SD = 5.3) on the SWLS. Presence of and search for meaning were marginally, inversely related ($r = -0.16$, $p < 0.10$). As expected, presence of meaning and SWLS were positively correlated ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$), and search for meaning and SWLS were negatively correlated ($r = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$). Despite the use of a meaning in life scale that explicitly eliminated item overlap with life satisfaction, the correlation between meaning and life satisfaction was large in size (using Cohen's 1992 conventions). As in previous work (Steger et al., 2006), the presence and search scales were largely independent. This small relation means that some people who feel the presence of meaning in their lives are still apparently seeking deeper meaning, or a deeper understanding of that which already gives them meaning.

To assess the main hypothesis that search for meaning moderated the relation between the presence of meaning and life satisfaction judgments, a hierarchical multiple regression was performed, following Baron and Kenny (1986), in which presence and search scores were entered in the first step. These predictor variables were first standardized to avoid problems associated with multicollinearity (J. Cohen, P. Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). An interaction term was created from the standardized scores and entered in the second step. As can be seen in Table 1, both of the MLQ subscales demonstrated significant relations with life satisfaction, accounting for a significant amount of variance ($R^2 = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, the interaction term was significant, and accounted for significant additional variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $\Delta F = 5.07$, $p < 0.05$).¹

To explore the significant interaction, we plotted the relation between presence of meaning and life satisfaction for high (1 SD above mean) and low (1 SD below mean) levels of search for meaning. As shown in Figure 1, presence of meaning was positively related to life satisfaction. However, the relation was stronger for those high in search ($\beta = 0.68$) than for those low in search ($\beta = 0.42$). Thus, although life satisfaction was lower for those with less meaning in life, it was much lower for those who were actively searching for meaning. This relation implies that the importance to well-being of experiencing meaning in life increases in conjunction with a person's search for meaning. In sum, Study 1a provided support for our main

Table 1. Multiple regression of life satisfaction onto MLQ-P, MLQ-S in Study 1a.

DV = SWLS (life satisfaction)	<i>b</i>	SE _{<i>b</i>}	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.37***	
Presence	0.58	0.08	0.55***		
Search	-0.28	0.08	-0.26***		
Step 2				0.39*	0.03*
Presence × Search	0.14	0.06	0.16*		

Notes: All *R*²s are adjusted *R*²s.
N = 121, **p* < 0.05, ****p* < 0.001.

Table 2. Multiple regression of life satisfaction onto MLQ-P, MLQ-S in Study 1b.

DV = SWLS (life satisfaction)	<i>b</i>	SE _{<i>b</i>}	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.13***	
Presence	0.33	0.03	0.29***		
Search	-0.27	0.10	-0.24**		
Step 2				0.16*	0.03*
Presence × Search	0.18	0.08	0.20*		

Notes: All *R*²s are adjusted *R*²s.
N = 150, **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001.

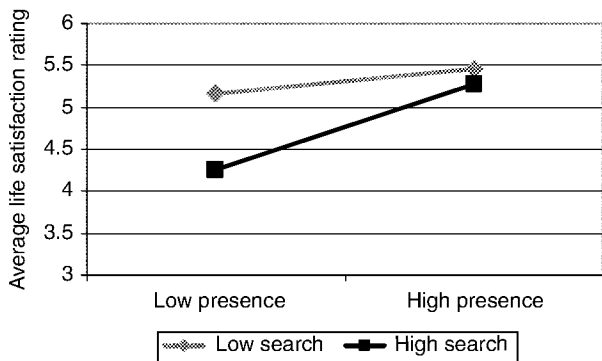


Figure 1. Moderation of the relation between presence of meaning and life satisfaction by level of search for meaning in Study 1b.

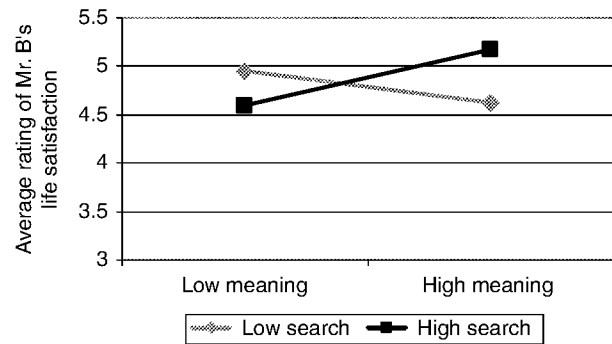


Figure 2. Interaction between self-reported search for meaning and the meaning condition of the vignette to predict judgments of the life satisfaction of the vignette target in Study 2.

hypotheses concerning the moderating role of search for meaning in the relation between presence of meaning and life satisfaction. Study 1b was conducted to test whether these findings would replicate in an independent sample of college students.

Study 1b

Method

One-hundred and fifty-one undergraduate students were recruited from introductory psychology classes to participate in the present study in exchange for extra credit (mean age = 19.6, SD = 2.2). Participants were 56% female and 33% male, with 17 participants failing to indicate sex. Participants were mostly Caucasian (65%), followed by Asian (9%), Asian-American (7%), and African-American (5%), with 2% of participants endorsing 'other', and 19 withholding response. Scores on the MLQ-P, MLQ-S, and SWLS were not related to age, nor did they differ across racial groups or sex. Participants completed the MLQ and SWLS to provide self-report data for the replication of Study 1a.

Results and discussion

The mean scores were 24.7 (SD = 6.1) on the MLQ-Presence subscale, 24.3 (SD = 6.4) on

the MLQ-Search subscale, and 24.9 (SD = 5.3) on the SWLS. Presence and search were inversely related (*r* = -0.23, *p* < 0.01). Replicating Study 1, Presence and SWLS were positively correlated (*r* = 0.35, *p* < 0.001), whereas search and SWLS were negatively correlated (*r* = -0.22, *p* < 0.01).

As can be seen in Table 2, once again, presence and search accounted for significant life satisfaction variance in the first step (*R*² = 0.14, *p* < 0.001). Also as in Study 1, the interaction between search and presence was significant ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $\Delta F = 5.57$, *p* < 0.05). As seen in Figure 2, the relation between presence of meaning and life satisfaction was stronger among those high in search for meaning ($\beta = 0.45$) than among those low in search ($\beta = 0.13$). In sum, Study 1b replicated all of the findings of Study 1a in an independent sample, lending additional support to the idea that search for meaning moderates the association between presence of meaning in life and life satisfaction.

Study 2: Search, meaning, and the well-being of others

Study 1 provided support for our main hypothesis that individuals who are actively searching for meaning in life base their own life satisfaction judgments on the presence or absence of meaning in their lives,

whereas those who are not actively searching for meaning in life do not seem to base their life satisfaction judgments as much on the presence or absence of meaning. Part 1 of Study 2 reports another replication of Study 1. Part 2 of Study 2 was designed to extend Study 1 to the well-being judgments of *others*. Participants read a scenario about a fictional person, Mr. B, who was described as either enjoying or not enjoying life, and either having meaning in life or not. We hypothesized that those high in search for meaning in their own lives would base their judgments of Mr. B's life satisfaction on the presence or absence of meaning in Mr. B's life to a greater degree than those low in search for meaning.

Method

Participants and procedure

One-hundred and fifty-one undergraduate students participated in the study in small to large groups, in exchange for extra credit (mean age = 19.8, SD = 3.4). Participants were 64% female, and were mostly Caucasian (76%), followed by Asian (10%), African-American (3%), Native American (3%) and Asian-American (2%), Hispanic (1%), and 10% of participants endorsing 'other'.

Participants completed the MLQ and SWLS to provide self-report data for the replication of Study 1, which constituted Part 1 of Study 2. In addition, participants were given one of four vignettes concerning Mr. B and were instructed to read it carefully (Part 2). We counterbalanced depictions of high and low levels of meaning in life with depictions of high and low levels of pleasure to help control for a competing hypothesis that meaningful lives are perceived as more pleasurable and hence more satisfying. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four scenario conditions: (1) high meaning, high pleasure; (2) high meaning, low pleasure; (3) low meaning, high pleasure; and (4) low meaning, low pleasure. Because we were only interested in testing whether search for meaning interacted with information about meaning, conditions were collapsed across pleasure to form a High Meaning group and a No Meaning group. After reading a scenario, participants were asked to evaluate the target person on a number of manipulation check items pertaining to meaning ('How meaningful would you say Mr. B feels his life is?', 'To what extent do you think Mr. B has broad, overarching goals in his life?', 'How well do you think Mr. B has identified what he wants to accomplish in his life?'), as well as the main dependent variables, life satisfaction and happiness ('How satisfied with his life does Mr. B seem to be?', 'How happy does Mr. B seem to you?').

Table 3. Multiple regression of self-reported life satisfaction onto MLQ-P, MLQ-S in Study 2.

DV = SWLS (life satisfaction)	<i>b</i>	SE _{<i>b</i>}	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.21***	
Presence	0.50	0.08	0.44***		
Search	-0.18	0.08	-0.15*		
Step 2				0.24*	0.03*
Presence × Search	0.17	0.07	0.18*		

Notes: All *R*²s are adjusted *R*²s.
N = 151, **p* < 0.05, ****p* < 0.001.

Results and discussion

Self-reported meaning and life satisfaction

Mean scores were 24.2 (SD = 5.7) on the MLQ-Presence and 22.9 (SD = 6.3) for the MLQ-Search subscales, and 25.4 (SD = 5.7) for the SWLS. MLQ-Presence was positively correlated with SWLS, *r* = 0.45, *p* < 0.001, whereas MLQ-Search was non-significantly negatively associated with SWLS, *r* = -0.12, *p* = 0.14. Again replicating Studies 1a and 1b, the interaction between search and presence was significant, $\beta = 0.18$, *p* < 0.05, $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $\Delta F = 6.00$, *p* < 0.05 (Table 3). Presence of meaning was more strongly associated with life satisfaction among individuals high in search for meaning than those low in search ($\beta = 0.59$ vs. 0.29).

Meaning and judging life satisfaction in others

Before testing our central hypothesis, we first conducted independent samples *t*-tests on ratings of Mr. B's meaning in life, over-arching goals, and identification of what Mr. B wants from life as manipulation checks. Significant findings were followed by post-hoc analyses (Least Significant Differences). The manipulation appeared successful, as in the High Meaning conditions Mr. B was rated higher on feeling his life is more meaningful (*t* (149) = 3.67, *p* < 0.001), having broad, over-arching goals (*t* (149) = 2.52, *p* < 0.05) and having identified what he wants to accomplish in his life (*t* (149) = 3.09, *p* < 0.01).

Next, we tested our key hypothesis using two hierarchical regressions assessing whether search for meaning moderated (Baron & Kenny, 1986) the effects of the meaning manipulation on ratings of Mr. B's life satisfaction and happiness. In the first step, condition effects codes and centered MLQ-S scores were added, followed by the interaction term for these two variables in the second step. Consistent with our hypothesis, the interaction between MLQ-Search scores and the levels of the meaning manipulation was significant for the judgment of Mr. B's life satisfaction (Table 4). As seen

Table 4. Moderation of judgments of Mr. B by search for meaning scores of raters.

	<i>b</i>	SE _{<i>b</i>}	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
DV = How would you rate Mr. B's satisfaction with his life?					
Step 1				-0.01	0.01
Condition	0.06	0.11	0.05		
Search	0.05	0.11	0.04		
Step 2				0.02*	0.03*
Condition \times Search	0.26	0.11	0.19*		
DV = How happy would you say Mr. B is?					
Step 1				0.02+	0.03+
Condition	0.29	0.13	0.18*		
Search	0.01	0.13	0.00		
Step 2				0.04*	0.05*
Condition \times Search	0.31	0.13	0.19*		

Notes: Condition is coded 1 = high meaning, -1 = no meaning. All *R*²s are adjusted *R*²s. *N* = 151, +*p* < 0.10, **p* < 0.05.

in Figure 2, individuals high in search for meaning evaluated Mr. B in the high meaning conditions as more satisfied than Mr. B in the low meaning conditions ($\beta = 0.21$), whereas those low in search for meaning evaluated Mr. B in the high meaning conditions as less satisfied than Mr. B in the low meaning conditions ($\beta = -0.12$). Likewise, participants high in search for meaning evaluated Mr. B as being more happy (Table 4).

In short, Part 1 of Study 2 replicated Study 1's findings on judgments of one's own well-being, and Part 2 of Study 2 extended these findings to the evaluation of others' well-being. Namely, the presence or absence of meaning had a larger impact on the various well-being judgments of Mr. B among participants high in search for meaning than among those low in search.

General discussion

The human search for meaning in life has been an enduring concern in humanistic and existential branches of psychology (e.g., Frankl, 1964; Maddi, 1970). Recent improvements in measurement have allowed empirical investigation into this construct, which have revealed some complexities among the relations of search for meaning with experiencing meaning and with well-being (e.g., Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, et al., 2008; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008; Steger, Kawabata, et al., 2008). The present investigation examined one of these complexities, namely the role search for meaning might play in influencing how information about meaning in life may be used in forming judgments of the life satisfaction of one's self

and others. As in previous research, the experience of meaning in life was positively related to life satisfaction. However, as hypothesized, this relation was moderated by search for meaning. In both studies, we found that the presence of meaning in life was particularly strongly associated with life satisfaction among those who are actively searching for meaning in life, whereas it was not as strongly associated with life satisfaction among those who are not actively searching for meaning. In Study 2, this moderating effect was extended such that participant's own levels of search for meaning influenced how they rated the life satisfaction of a fictitious target depending on information they were provided about the meaning he purportedly experienced.

These findings are consistent with the value-as-a-moderator hypothesis (Oishi et al., 1999) and other moderator models of well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000), as well as with the view of search for meaning as having schema-like properties (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987) in directing attention to meaning-relevant information and promoting the use of such information in life satisfaction judgments. In these studies, people were very satisfied with their lives if they were actively searching for meaning and had already found meaning in their own lives, whereas people were not satisfied with their lives if they were actively searching for meaning and had not yet found meaning in their own lives (see Figure 1). This suggests that individuals low in meaning in life are better off if they are not actively searching for meaning in life, at least in the short run. Such people might narrowly focus on pursuits such as their work or having fun, and would not necessarily care whether their lives had meaning or not. This, in turn, poses intriguing questions. For instance, although people low in meaning and high in search were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their lives, would their search for meaning ultimately bear fruit, resulting in meaning and satisfaction in the long run? Conversely, would those low in both search and meaning remain relatively dissatisfied in the future? One possibility is that the interplay of search for meaning and presence of meaning reflects, or at least parallels, developmental crises that are a normal, healthy part of maturation. Elsewhere we have suggested that search for meaning may function along the lines of *identity exploration*, and that presence of meaning may function along the lines of *identity commitment* (Steger et al., 2006; Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). Understanding the role that search and presence play in life satisfaction over time requires longitudinal investigation.

Study 2 showed that the moderating role of search for meaning goes beyond the judgments of one's own well-being: namely, the presence or absence of meaning in life plays a larger role in the evaluation of others' well-being for individuals actively searching for

meaning than for individuals who do not. This suggests that the category 'meaning' might be chronically more accessible for those actively searching for meaning than for others who are not, and that the moderating role of search for meaning could be explained by accessibility (cf. Oishi et al., 2003). It is important in the future to examine whether the role of meaning in well-being judgments can be amplified or attenuated by making the category 'meaning' temporarily accessible or inaccessible.

Our findings, however, should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. First, all of our samples consisted of college students. Meaning in life might play a larger and more gratifying role among older populations than among younger populations (Steger et al., 2009; Wong, 1998). Further investigation in older adult samples is necessary to validate this possibility. Second, our samples consisted of American college students. There are indications that the relations among searching for meaning, experiencing meaning, and happiness differ across different cultures (Steger, Kawabata, et al., 2008). Third, our measurement of search for meaning and life satisfaction was restricted to only two scales, and other ways of measuring people's quest for meaning and their happiness, satisfaction, or well-being may reveal different relations. It might be interesting to look at how different people construe meaning differently, or even how they search for meaning in different aspects of their lives. For example, research on sources of meaning have revealed some fairly stable tendencies for people to view relationships, work, and other domains of life as contributing largely to their sense of meaning. How might these findings differ for someone who thinks that the essence of meaning is appreciating art versus one who thinks meaning is all about bringing people together into a tight social network? It is possible that inquiry along these lines could reveal something new, but one way of viewing the present findings is that across people, regardless of how they construe meaning or where they are searching for it, being more concerned with searching for meaning in life seems to highlight the importance of meaning-relevant information. Fourth, we measured participants' meaning and life satisfaction at a single point in time. Thus, it is an empirical question whether the moderating role of search for meaning in the relation between presence of meaning and life satisfaction would hold in the long-term.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the current research extends the previous literature on meaning and well-being by addressing the lack of research attention to the search for meaning in life. Across two studies, our results clearly indicate that further investigation of specifically the search for meaning in life is warranted within the domain of well-being research. Experiencing meaning in life was important to life

satisfaction in all cases. In particular, the interaction between the presence of and search for meaning, two distinct dimensions, appears especially important to understanding individuals' well-being judgments. Furthermore, this previously unexplored interaction significantly predicted not only judgments of one's own life satisfaction, but also the life satisfaction of an unknown other. Thus, the search for meaning appears to elevate the significance of meaning-relevant information to human well-being.

Note

1. One potential explanation for this interaction would be an absence of individuals who are either high in presence and high in search or those who are low in presence and low in search. In concordance with the low correlation between presence and search, cross-tabs analysis using median splits of the two variables revealed that although there were more people in the high presence/low search ($N=38$) and low presence/high search pairs ($N=39$) than the high/high ($N=22$) and low/low ($N=23$) pairs, no cells were empty. This was the most uneven distribution among the three samples. Additionally, there was nearly equal variance in presence scores among high ($SD=5.94$) and low ($SD=6.19$) search groups.

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