



Antecedents and Implications of Communion among Emerging Adults

Amanda M. Montgomery & Jordan A. Booker

Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri



Introduction

- ❖ Communion is a fundamental motivation in humans involving the formation and maintenance of relationships with others (Bakan, 1966).
- ❖ Emerging adulthood is a cultural phenomenon and period of transition for 18-to-29-year-olds. This period involves the ways young adults tend to delay ”traditional” adult roles like marriage and first full-time employment relative to previous generations (Arnett, 2000).
- ❖ Communion is important during emerging adulthood, as adults build intimate relationships and move into new communities.
 - ❖ It is important to understand what personal factors may shape individual differences in communion.
 - ❖ It is important to understand how communion informs adjustment among emerging adults.
- ❖ Narratives of life events provide rich opportunities to address the salience of communion among individuals.
- ❖ **Research Questions:**
 1. Do demographics, (i.e., age, gender) inform differences in communion?
 2. Do displays of communion inform reports of adjustment?
 3. Does communion function differently when expressed in positive life events versus when expressed in negative life events?

Method

- ❖ **Participants.** As part of a larger project, 300 participants between the ages of 18- and 29-years old ($M_{age} = 24.29$ years, $SD = 2.67$ years; 60% women) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a series of online computerized tasks.
- ❖ **Procedures.** Participants completed consent and all measures through the Qualtrics survey system. Participants answered a series of demographic questions, measures of well-being, and two narrative prompts regarding significant positive and negative life events. Participants were given 90 minutes to complete the survey and were compensated \$1 for completing the questionnaire.
- ❖ **Measures.** Participants responded to two autobiographical narrative prompts: one regarding a high-point, positive life event and the other involving a low-point, negative life event.
 - ❖ These life events were coded on a 4-point scale that indicated increasing displays of communion and positive emphasis on intimate relationships, based on Grysman and colleagues (2017).
- ❖ Participants also completed measures of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985), and recent stress (Cohen et al., 1983).

Results

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Positive Event Communion	1.93	1.08	.00	3.00
Negative Event Communion	1.87	.79	.00	3.00
Psychological Well-Being	76.36	11.66	41.00	104.00
Life Satisfaction	22.20	7.02	5.00	35.00
Perceived Stress	17.43	7.80	.00	35.00

<i>Bivariate Correlations</i>	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Age	-.04	.28**	.12*	.07	.05	.04	.04	-.05
2. Gender	--	-.03	.06	.17**	.10	.15**	-.01	.06
3. Income Level		--	.18**	-.01	.06	.23**	.20**	-.16**
4. Education Level			--	-.05	.10	.12*	.13*	-.10
5. Positive Event Communion				--	.22**	.07	.01	.04
6. Negative Event Communion					--	.24**	.17**	-.15*
7. Psychological Well-Being						--	.61**	-.57**
8. Life Satisfaction							--	-.61**
9. Perceived Stress								--

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. For Gender, women received the higher value

<i>Hierarchical Regressions</i>	<u>Psych. Well-Being</u>		<u>Life Satisfaction</u>		<u>Perceived Stress</u>	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.08**		.05**		.03	
Age		-.03		-.04		.00
Gender		.14*		-.03		.06
Income Level		.23**		.19**		-.15*
Education Level		.06		.12*		-.06
Step 2	.04**		.02*		.02*	
Positive Event Communion		.02		-.02		.06
Negative Event Communion		.20**		.15**		-.16**
$F(6, 283)$	6.48		3.90		2.79	
Model sig.	.000		.000		.012	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p \leq .01$. For Gender, women received the higher value.

In summary:

- ❖ Women displayed greater levels of communion in recollections of positive life events than did men.
- ❖ Age, income level, and education level were *not* associated with communion.
- ❖ Displays of communion in *negative*, but not positive, life events were significantly associated with multiple, optimal reports of well-being.

Discussion

The current **findings partially supported our hypotheses**. For **question 1**, we expected to see differences among participants with different demographic backgrounds. Women demonstrated higher levels of communion in recollections of positive life events than men. However, income level, education, and age were not associated with communion. These are in line with past research regarding differences in behavior between men and women due to gender socialization (Eagly, 2013). However, they suggest that other demographics may be more relevant for other motivations like agency and personal mastery (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996), rather than relationship-building.

For **question 2**, we expected communion to be positively associated with adjustment. We saw positive associations between communion and adjustment, in line with past research (Helgeson, 1994). However, it was only displays of communion in negative, but not positive, life events that was associated with reports of adjustment. This also informed **question 3** on the possible importance of event valence. These findings fit with previous theories that autobiographical reminiscing and narrating in response to *negative* life experiences can provide opportunities to re-evaluate the self in important ways (Habermas & Köber, 2015).

Results suggest that communion plays an important role in emerging adults’ ability to cope with significant life events. Higher levels of communion, particularly during challenging life events, suggest more optimal reports of psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and perceived stress.

Further research may consider looking at scores of communion among emerging adults across multiple time points to better address change within adults and possible bidirectional influences between communion and adjustment.

References

- ❖ Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469–480.
- ❖ Bakan, D. (1966). *The duality of human existence: An essay on psychology and religion*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.
- ❖ Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 385–396.
- ❖ Diener, E. (1985). Satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71–75.
- ❖ Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- ❖ Habermas, T., & Köber, C. (2014). Autobiographical reasoning is constitutive for narrative identity: The role of the life story for personal continuity. In K. C. McLean & M. Syed (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of identity development* (p. 149–165). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Helgeson, V. S. (1994). Relation of agency and communion to well-being: Evidence and potential explanations. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116, 412–428.
- ❖ McAdams, D. P., Hoffman, B. J., Day, R., & Mansfield, E. D. (1996). Themes of agency and communion in significant autobiographical scenes. *Journal of Personality*, 64, 339–377.
- ❖ Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 719–727.