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Communal Motivation

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In close relationships, people's outcomes become highly intertwined, or interdependent, over time and across contexts (Clark and Mills 2011; Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult and Van Lange 2003). For example, as they grow and develop, young children rely on care from their parents and as the children become older themselves, they often provide care and companionship to their aging parents. Friends provide emotional support to one another in times of need and share in one another's joys in times of accomplishment. Romantic partners provide affection and physical intimacy to each other in ways unmatched by other relationship partners. Given that people rely on their relationship partners to meet many of their needs and desires, *communal motivation*, or care for the welfare of others, is an important component of personal well-being and satisfying relationships (Le et al. 2018). This entry reviews the history of communal motivation research, describes the role of communal motivation in building and maintaining relationships, and explains the emotional expressions and reactions linked to communal motivation.

History and Definitions

Theories on communal motivation in relationships arose in the 1970s when Margaret Clark and Judson Mills (1979) argued that the norms that govern behavior could vary by relationship context. At this time, many theories of behavior were economic or equity based. However, Clark and Mills (1979) proposed that relationships can be either communal or exchange in nature. They posited that communal relationships are characterized by providing benefits to partners based on need, whereas exchange relationships are characterized by providing benefits in a tit-for-tat, or one-for-one, fashion. This distinction set the bedrock for research that has gone on to show how communal, versus exchange, norms for providing benefits predict greater interpersonal attraction, intimacy, and satisfaction when a close relationship is desired (Clark and Mills 2011).

Given the relative benefits of communal, relative to exchange, approaches to relationships, researchers began to focus on individual variability in communal orientations, as well as implications for personal and relationship outcomes. First, researchers showed how communal orientation—or the motivation to care for the welfare of others and the desire for reciprocal care—predicts helping strangers in need (Clark et al. 1987). Furthermore, communal strength—or the motivation to care for a specific person through investment of time, effort, or money—predicts receiving and providing help amongst friends and more satisfying marital relationships (Mills et al. 2004).

Table 1. Forms and definitions of communal motivation

Form of Communal Motivation	Definition	Target of Care	Measurement
General	Care for the welfare of others and desired care for the self	Others generally	Communal Orientation Scale (Clark et al. 1987)
Partner-Specific	Care for the welfare of a specific relationship partner	A specific relationship partner, such as a child, friend, romantic partner, parent, or coworker	Communal Strength Scale (Mills et al. 2004)
Unmitigated	Care for the welfare of others which is devoid of agency and acknowledgment of personal needs	Others generally	Unmitigated Communion Scale (Fritz and Helgeson 1998)

Note: For an updated and more reliable measure of partner-specific communal motivation by Lemay and Neal 2013, see Appendix A of Le et al. 2018. Partner-specific communal motivation can also be assessed in specific domains such as sexuality (see Muise et al. 2013). Unmitigated communal motivation, although usually assessed for others generally (Fritz and Helgeson 1998), can be adapted to target specific partners and domains (see Muise et al. 2017).

SOURCE: Courtesy of Bonnie M. Le.

Communal Motivation

As the field of close relationships grew during the second half of the twentieth century (Berscheid 1999; Reis 2007), so have theories of communal motivation. A recent review sought to integrate theory on different forms of communal motivation (Le et al. 2018). As shown in Table 1, communal motivation can vary based on a number of aspects. First, people may be communally motivated for others generally or for specific relationship partners, such as a friend, romantic partner, parent, or child (Le and Impett 2015; Mills et al. 2004). That is, people may be motivated to care for others indiscriminately, or they may target or reserve their care for specific people. People may also be communally motivated in ways that account for their own desires and needs (Clark and Mills 2011; Clark et al. 1987) or in ways that neglect them (Helgeson and Fritz 1998). In other words, people may care for others while desiring mutual care, or they may provide care in ways that are devoid of agency and concern for their own needs. More recently, research has shown that people may also be communally motivated in specific relationship domains, such as sexuality (Muise et al. 2013; Muise and Impett 2016). Importantly, these different forms of communal motivation have unique personal and relationship implications, which are discussed below.

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Communal motivation can help build relationships. For instance, when desiring a close relationship, people are more attracted to others who provide benefits based on needs rather than those who provide benefits only in direct exchange for the ones they receive (Clark and Mills 1979). General communal motivation may also prompt people to help strangers, which in turn contributes to close relationship initiation (Clark et al. 1987). In addition, communally motivated people can be biased in ways that help build their relationships. More specifically, people who are highly communally motivated construct satisfying relationships by projecting their own communal motivation onto their partners (Lemay and Clark 2008; Lemay, Clark, and Feeney 2007). In turn, they engage in more self-disclosure, evaluate their partners more positively, and perceive their partners to also be communally motivated and supportive; thus, communally motivated people show high communal motivation to their partners over time and experience more satisfying relationships (Lemay and Clark 2008; Lemay, Clark, and Feeney 2007).

In addition to helping initiate and build relationships, communal motivation may contribute to relationship maintenance by supporting the well-being of both partners. Across relationships, including those between parents and children, friends, and romantic partners, meta-analytic evidence from one hundred studies demonstrated that communal motivation for others generally, as well as for specific relationship partners, is linked to greater personal and relationship well-being for both the self and partners (Le et al. 2018). These findings can be explained by work showing that general and partner-specific communal motivation are linked to increased positive emotions in daily life (Le et al. 2012), greater feelings of authenticity when caring for others (Kogan et al. 2010; Le and Impett 2015), and decreased perceptions of costs involved in caring for a partner (Day et al. 2015). Regarding gender differences, although men may experience barriers, devalue, and have misconceptions about taking on communal roles (Block, Croft, and Schmader 2018; Croft, Schmader, and Block 2015; Van Grootel et al. 2018), the well-being benefits linked to communal motivation are observed in both men and women (Le et al. 2018). Importantly, communal motivation is linked to greater personal well-being for the self and relationship partners only to the extent that people do not lose sight of their own needs. Indeed, while communal motivation that is unmitigated by self-concern is linked to more satisfying relationships through high degrees of care, it compromises personal well-being through feelings of distress, self-neglect, and over-involvement in others' problems (Fritz and Helgeson 1998).

Emotional Expressions and Reactions

In order to provide support, relationship partners must understand when the other person is in need and express care accordingly. An important avenue for doing so is through emotional expression, often in order to show a need, and emotional reaction, in order to respond to a need. Communally motivated individuals express and react to emotions in ways that help facilitate the communication of, and response to, personal and relationship needs.

In regard to emotional expression, people are more likely to express emotions when they are communally motivated and perceive their partners to be communal (Clark et al. 2017; Clark and Finkel 2005; Clark and Taraban 1991; Von Culin, Hirsch, and Clark 2018). In particular, people are comfortable expressing a range of emotions to a perceived communal partner that may communicate their needs and desires—including happiness sadness, disgust, and anger (Clark and Taraban 1991; Von Culin, Hirsch, and Clark 2018). In addition, when people are communally motivated themselves, they are more comfortable expressing emotions that signal vulnerability, or the need for support, including hurt, guilt, fear, and anxiety, especially when they perceive their partner to be communal (Clark and Finkel 2005; Von Culin, Hirsch, and Clark 2018).

People also react more positively to another person's emotional expressions when they are communally

motivated. For instance, those who desire a communal relationship prefer to talk about emotional topics and like a partner more when this partner expresses happiness, sadness, or irritability (Clark and Taraban 1991). Furthermore, communally motivated people respond in supportive ways when observing emotional expressions in a partner. They are more likely to empathize with and feel similar emotions as their partner, such as feeling sadness when a partner is sad or sharing in a partner's joys and accomplishments (Clark et al. 2017; Mills and Clark 2001). Communally motivated people may also support their partners by helping them regulate their emotions (Clark et al. 2017). Finally, communal motivation is not always linked to relationally adaptive emotional responses. When a person's communal care is not mitigated by a sense of concern for his or her own needs, his or her emotional reactions to others can be personally draining. For instance, they are more likely to experience personal distress from a partner's troubles (Fritz and Helgeson 1998) and have difficulty accepting support from others, undermining the benefits they may receive through interpersonal regulation (Fritz and Helgeson 1998).

Conclusion

In interdependent relationships, people rely on one another for support and fulfillment. Since the 1970s, research has uncovered how communal motivation to care for the welfare of others can serve as the foundation for constructing supportive relationships. Communal motivation to care for others, especially when it is accompanied by self-oriented concern, can help initiate relationships, promote responsive behaviors, sustain the well-being of both partners, and facilitate emotionally expressive and enriching relationships

SEE ALSO *Equity Theory; Mutuality/Reciprocity; Relationship Initiation and Development; Relationship Maintenance; Social Exchange Theory.*

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Communication

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Communication is the process of creating shared meaning through the use of verbal and/or nonverbal messages and is essential to human existence. The study of communication dynamics transcends the boundaries of other social sciences, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. For example, scholars may discuss the role that communication plays in teaching shared expectations and norms among diverse groups of people or focus on how culture influences the communication behaviors adopted by its members. It is essential to distinguish communication among individuals from the study of the technology used to exchange messages. Communication (singular) is typically used to refer to human interactions. The use of mediated channels to exchange messages (e.g., television, radio) is typically referred to as "communications" (plural).

Communication as a Process

Inherent in its definition is the *process* involved in communication. To understand the role of humans in communication and how meanings are created and exchanged, scholars have proposed and expanded on a variety of models to describe the function of critical elements. Harold Lasswell (1948) created one of the earliest models to depict variables in the communication process. Whereas his model proposed core elements essential to creating shared meaning (source, message, channel, receiver, and effect), subsequent models identified additional variables that influence the effectiveness of message exchange.

One of the most widely cited models in communication studies is Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's (1949) linear transmission model, which highlights the dynamics of messages shared via radio and telephone technology. David Berlo (1960) expanded this representation of the communication process by introducing the source-message-channel-receiver model. These early models captured the core facets involved in message exchange, but they neglected to address the role of feedback as part of the continuous process in evaluating the effectiveness of interactions.

Transactional models were created to depict additional influential variables in the communication process, such as context, noise, and feedback (Barnlund 1970). The distinction between source and receiver is blurred in these models, as both source and receiver provide