

Egoistic versus altruistic concerns in communal relationships

Journal of Social and
Personal Relationships
28(3) 315–335

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DOI: 10.1177/0265407510382178

spr.sagepub.com



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Abstract

Although communal relationships are seemingly characterized by altruistic concern for others, individuals may differ in their degree of egoistic versus altruistic concerns in communal relationships. In the present research, we developed a measure to assess egoistic versus altruistic concerns underlying a communal relationship orientation. These concerns were empirically distinct and predicted personal and interpersonal functioning. In Study 1, altruistic concerns predicted increased relatedness, empathy, and decreased anger, hostility, and aggression, whereas egoistic concerns predicted decreased relatedness, empathy, and increased anger, hostility, and aggression. In Study 2, altruistic concerns predicted more other-oriented (e.g., community) goals; egoistic concerns predicted more self-oriented (e.g., image) goals and depressive symptoms. Together, these findings highlight the importance of examining distinct concerns underlying a communal relationship orientation.

Keywords

altruistic, communal orientation, communal relationship, egoistic, motivation

A hallmark of psychological well-being is possessing close, mutually caring social relationships. Having close relationships promotes a wide array of positive personal and interpersonal outcomes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). One way to facilitate the development of close social bonds is to adopt a communal relationship orientation – to show concern for others by giving benefits non-contingently in

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response to others' needs without expecting specific or immediate benefits in return (Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986). Although some social contexts (e.g., interactions between acquaintances) involve prosocial acts that are motivated by self-interest, communally oriented relationships are marked by a seemingly selfless desire to enhance others' welfare (Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989; Maner & Gailliot, 2007).

Even within the context of close, communal relationships, however, there may be different reasons for engaging in communal behavior. One reason involves *altruistic concerns*, in which people are genuinely attentive and responsive to others' needs without concern over whether they will receive benefits in return. Indeed, this is the classic conceptualization of a communal relationship orientation (Clark et al., 1989). A second, and perhaps less obvious reason, reflects *egoistic concerns*: people attend and respond to others' needs because of a desire to have their own needs met in communal relationships. Although this motivation seems inconsistent with the presence of a communal orientation, it is not. People can give to others in communal relationships not because they expect to receive any specific or immediate benefits, but rather, because they expect to reap interpersonal benefits of the relationship over the long term (e.g., having their needs for emotional dependency met).

In the present research, we tested the hypothesis that, even within communal relationships, individuals differ in the degree to which they are egoistically versus altruistically motivated. We developed a scale to distinguish between egoistic versus altruistic concerns underlying a communal relationship orientation and examined the degree to which individual differences in these concerns predicted various personal and interpersonal variables. In particular, we hypothesized that differences in egoistic versus altruistic concerns in communal relationships would have implications for relationship quality, goal pursuit, and well-being.

Egoistic versus altruistic concerns underlying communal behavior

The question of behavior being egoistically or altruistically motivated has been at the center of debates about the nature of prosocial behavior (Batson, 1997; Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Maner et al., 2002). Many researchers have sought to address the question of whether or not altruism truly exists. However, attempts to answer this question have been hindered by conceptual and methodological pitfalls rendering clear conclusions about the nature of altruism difficult to find (see Batson, 1997). Our goal in the present research was not to determine whether true selflessness or altruism exists, but to identify specific concerns underlying a communal relationship orientation, to see whether such concerns differentially predict indices of personal and interpersonal functioning.

Although reasons for prosocial behavior vary across situations and different types of relationships, they also vary across individuals. Some people are more inclined than others to adopt a communal orientation. Compared to individuals who lack a communal orientation, those with a communal orientation are likely to keep track of others' needs (Clark et al., 1989), to help others based on those needs (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987), and to be genuinely concerned about others' welfare (Clark & Mills,

1979). Having a communal orientation may therefore reflect a tendency to be attentive and responsive to others, without being excessively concerned about whether one's own needs will be immediately met in return.

However, communal relationships are also characterized by a norm of mutual responsiveness; although people do not expect immediate reciprocation of specific benefits in communal relationships, they may behave communally toward others with the tacit expectation that others will be concerned and responsive to their needs if and when such needs arise in the course of the long-term relationship. Thus, people may have different concerns underlying their communal orientation. Indeed, existing theories present differing perspectives on how people in communal relationships might be motivated by either a genuine desire to enhance another's welfare or by a desire to reap immediate benefits. According to selective investment theory (Brown & Brown, 2006), individuals suppress self-interest and behave with others' interests in mind when social bonds are activated. Other research has shown that both compassionate goals and self-image goals shape the quality of people's psychological and relational experiences (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Batson (1993), too, argued that communal relationships may be motivated not only by altruistic concerns of helping others, but also by self-interested concerns, such as seeking to ingratiate oneself or to obtain interpersonal benefits over time. Similarly, from an interdependence perspective (Kelley, 1983), romantic partners who resist immediate self-interest and act on the basis of more interdependent goals experience positive outcomes for the self, such as greater relationship satisfaction (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Together, these theories suggest that communal behavior in relationships may be motivated by different underlying concerns.

Communal concerns and personality covariates

We expect egoistic and altruistic concerns to be differentially related to feelings of insecurity versus security in one's communal relationships. Specifically, having altruistic concerns may be associated with markers of interpersonal security, such as a secure attachment style and high self-esteem. In contrast, having egoistic concerns may be associated with markers of interpersonal insecurity, such as an insecure attachment style, low self-esteem, and rejection sensitivity. To examine whether egoistic and altruistic concerns had unique predictive validity over and above these other constructs, we controlled for the following variables in our analyses.

Attachment styles. From an early age, children seek attachments with their caregivers in order to satisfy basic needs for safety and security (Bowlby, 1969). The quality of attachment in childhood, in turn, affects support seeking and caregiving in adulthood (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2006). Given their attachment history, secure individuals already feel as if they have received benefits (e.g., their needs have been met) in relationships; thus, they may not be excessively concerned about whether or not they will receive benefits in their relationships. Accordingly, we predicted an association between having a secure attachment style and having altruistic concerns in communal relationships – i.e., being responsive toward others based on genuine concern for others' needs, without worrying about whether one will receive immediate benefits in return.

In contrast, people who feel insecure in their relationships doubt others' responsiveness and may therefore focus more on satisfying their own needs in communal relationships.

Self-esteem. Whereas people with high self-esteem (HSEs) view themselves favorably and believe that they are liked and accepted; people with low self-esteem (LSEs) possess less favorable self-views and are chronically concerned about rejection (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Because HSEs feel interpersonally secure, they may be more likely than LSEs to have altruistic concerns in their relationships – i.e., to be responsive toward others without being concerned about whether others will be responsive toward them in return. On the other hand, LSEs do not feel accepted and doubt whether others will be responsive to their needs. Accordingly, having low self-esteem should be associated with egoistic concerns in communal relationships.

Rejection sensitivity. People with high rejection sensitivity are concerned about how they might be evaluated by others and feel uncertain about whether others will accept them; indeed, rejection sensitivity is related to low self-esteem and to insecure attachment styles (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Because egoistic concerns are theorized to be tied to feelings of interpersonal insecurity, we expected that rejection sensitivity would also be related to having egoistic concerns in communal relationships.

Hypothesized consequences of communal concerns

In the present studies, egoistic versus altruistic concerns within communal relationships were expected to differentially predict personal and interpersonal variables, specifically, indices of relationship quality, goal pursuit, and psychological well-being. Being motivated by altruistic concerns was expected to predict variables indicative of positive functioning, consistent with research showing that concern for others is linked to positive mood and subjective well-being (Clark et al., 1986, 1987). In contrast, being motivated by egoistic concerns was expected to predict variables reflecting suboptimal functioning, because preoccupation with one's own needs may be tied to feelings of interpersonal insecurity and undermine feelings of closeness and belonging. That is, the excessive self-focus that accompanies egoistic concerns may undermine well-being and strain relationships. Thus, our first hypothesis was that altruistic concerns would predict increased feelings of relatedness, whereas egoistic concerns would predict less relatedness.

Our second hypothesis was that, whereas altruistic concerns would predict greater empathy toward others, egoistic concerns would predict less empathy and perspective taking. Individuals displaying altruistic concerns for prosocial behavior may be particularly attentive to the needs of others. Understanding the needs of others is a key component of empathic concern and is facilitated by the ability to take another person's perspective. Thus, in attending to the needs of others, people with altruistic concerns for communal behavior might display increased empathy and perspective taking. Such findings would be consistent with research showing that a secure attachment style and high self-esteem – two hypothesized correlates of altruistic concerns – are associated with compassion, empathic concern, and perspective taking (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005). In contrast, because people with egoistic concerns are

focused primarily on having their own needs met, having egoistic concerns was expected to relate to lower levels of empathy and perspective taking. This finding would be consistent with research showing that individuals who are motivated by a desire to alleviate personal feelings of distress are less likely to show concern or to take another's perspective than those who are empathically motivated (Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983).

Third, whereas altruistic concerns were expected to predict lower levels of anger, hostility, and aggression, we expected egoistic concerns to predict greater feelings of anger, hostility, and aggression. If egoistic concerns are associated with feelings of interpersonal insecurity, then people with egoistic concerns may frequently perceive that others are not as available or responsive as they would like them to be and thus experience frustration and negative feelings toward others. Such responses would be consistent with research showing that rejection sensitivity – a hypothesized correlate of egoistic concerns – is associated with interpersonal negativity, anger, and hostility (Ayduk, Downey, Testa, Yen & Shoda, 1999). In contrast, we expected altruistic concerns to be linked to less anger and hostility, because other-oriented concerns are rooted in feelings of interpersonal security.

Fourth, we hypothesized that individuals with egoistic versus altruistic concerns would pursue different types of goals, with implications for well-being. According to self-determination theory, when people feel deficient in their fundamental needs, they engage in compensatory strategies to satisfy their needs. Because individuals with egoistic concerns are theorized to lack feelings of relatedness with others, they may try to satisfy this deficit by pursuing self-oriented goals (e.g., seeking to enhance their external image) in order to obtain others' approval or validation. Ironically, the more people pursue such goals, the less likely they may be to directly satisfy their need for relatedness, resulting in lowered well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996). Thus, we expected that people with egoistic concerns would not only pursue self-oriented goals, but might also experience more depressive symptoms as well.

In contrast, people with altruistic concerns are hypothesized to be secure in their relationships and should therefore be less inclined to want to validate their external image to feel a sense of security. Instead of pursuing self-oriented goals, they may adopt other-oriented goals, such as seeking to help others and make meaningful contributions to their community. For example, research has shown that people with a secure attachment style are likely to adopt self-transcendent values aimed at helping others (Mikulincer et al., 2005). Given the hypothesized link between altruistic concerns and secure attachment, having altruistic concerns was expected to promote other-oriented goals, such as community-oriented goals.

Finally, we note that there may be limits to the benefits of adopting other-oriented concerns in relationships. When focusing on others' needs becomes excessive to the point of neglecting one's own needs, this seemingly altruistic focus might actually undermine well-being and relationship quality. Along these lines, Fritz and Helgeson (1998) have distinguished between communion versus unmitigated communion in relationships. Communion is characterized by a balanced focus between oneself and others – being attentive to others' needs without neglecting one's own needs, whereas unmitigated communion is characterized by an unbalanced focus between the self and

others; people with an unmitigated communion orientation are perceived to be overly self-sacrificing and intrusive. Although our concept of altruistic motives involves an “other-orientation”, we view these motives to be associated with feelings of security, rather than insecurity, and they should therefore promote beneficial outcomes for the self and for others. To test whether our conceptualization of altruistic concerns differed from unmitigated communion, we controlled for unmitigated communion in Study 2.

Overview of research

The present research was guided by two overarching questions: (a) are there individual differences in egoistic versus altruistic concerns underlying a communal relationship orientation; and (b) are these concerns differentially and uniquely predictive of personal and interpersonal functioning? In Study 1, we sought to provide evidence for an empirical distinction between egoistic and altruistic concerns underlying a communal orientation. We then examined the relation of egoistic and altruistic concerns to indices of personal and interpersonal functioning, controlling for relevant personality variables, to provide evidence of construct, convergent, and discriminant validity of the scale in relation to existing personality measures.

Specifically, we hypothesized that whereas altruistic concerns would be associated with greater relatedness, empathy, and less anger, hostility, and aggression, egoistic concerns would be associated with less relatedness, empathy, and more anger, hostility, and aggression. In Study 2, we hypothesized that altruistic concerns would be linked to goals focused on helping others (e.g., community goals), whereas egoistic concerns would be linked to goals focused on oneself (e.g., image goals) and to decreased well-being (e.g., more depressive symptoms).

Study 1: Method

Participants and procedure

A total of 300 college students (186 women, 114 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.39$, $SD = 2.67$) at the University at Buffalo participated in exchange for psychology course credit. The participants arrived at the lab and were seated at cubicles where they completed a series of computerized questionnaires. Shortened versions of scales were used to keep the study to a reasonable length.

Measures

Communal Orientation Scale. The participants completed a seven-item version of Clark et al.'s (1987) Communal Orientation Scale (e.g., “I often go out of my way to help another person”; “I expect people I know to be responsive to my needs and feelings”; $\alpha = .68$) on a scale from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*).

Communal Concerns Scale. Ten items were developed to measure egoistic and altruistic concerns underlying a communal orientation. The items were modeled after Clark et al.'s

Table 1. Factor loadings for communal concerns scale ($N = 300$)

Item	Factor 1 Egoistic concerns	Factor 2 Altruistic concerns
1. I worry that others will not be attentive to my needs and feelings.	.85	.13
2. I am fearful that others won't take my needs and feelings into consideration when making a decision.	.80	-.07
3. When my needs aren't taken into consideration by others I am hurt.	.72	-.01
4. I feel fearful that others will not be attentive to my needs and feelings.	.66	.08
5. I often find myself worrying that others will put someone else's needs before mine.	.61	-.13
6. I am willing to sacrifice my interests for the well-being of other people.	-.08	.71
7. I enjoy helping people.	-.03	.65
8. Witnessing other people's misfortunes makes me feel sad.	.05	.56
9. I usually put my own interest before others' needs (reverse).	.09	.49
10. I often take other people's needs and feelings into account when making a decision.	-.09	.38
Egoistic concern items		
Mean and std dev	2.88 (.83)	
Mdn	3.00	
Min and max	1.00–4.80	
Cronbach's alpha	.85	
Altruistic concern items		
Mean and std dev	3.97 (.61)	
Mdn	4.00	
Min and max	2.00–5.00	
Cronbach's alpha	.69	

(1987) Communal Orientation Scale, but were designed to reflect the presence of distinct egoistic and altruistic concerns (see Table 1). The participants responded to each statement on a scale from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Trait self-esteem was assessed using the widely used and well-validated 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Participants indicated how much they agreed (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with statements such as, "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" ($\alpha = .90$).

Attachment styles. Attachment style was measured using Bartholomew's (1990) four-category conceptualization of attachment. Participants rated four paragraphs on a scale from 1 (*doesn't describe me at all*) to 7 (*describes me very well*) reflecting secure

attachment (“It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others”); preoccupied attachment (“I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like”); fearful attachment (“I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them”); and dismissing attachment (“I am comfortable without close emotional relationships”).

Rejection sensitivity. The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ; Downey & Feldman, 1996) measures the extent to which people anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to rejection across various interpersonal scenarios. The eight-item version ($\alpha = .72$) of the RSQ was administered to examine its relation to egoistic and altruistic concerns.

Relatedness. Participants completed Deci and Ryan’s (2000) scale assessing satisfaction of basic psychological needs (http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/measures/bpns_scale.php). Of particular interest was the degree to which people reported feeling relatedness with others (e.g., “People in my life care about me”; 8 items, $\alpha = .86$) on a scale from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*).

Empathy. Participants completed the empathic concern and perspective-taking subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1996) on a scale from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). Sample items were: “I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me” and “When I’m upset at someone, I usually try to ‘put myself in his shoes’ for a while”. A composite score was computed by averaging across all 14 items ($\alpha = .82$).

Anger, hostility, and aggression. The aggression questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992) was used to assess anger (e.g., “I sometimes feel like a powder keg ready to explode”; seven items, $\alpha = .81$), hostility (e.g., “Other people always seem to get the breaks”; eight items, $\alpha = .78$), physical aggression (e.g., “Given enough provocation, I may hit another person”; seven items, $\alpha = .83$), and verbal aggression (e.g., “My friends say that I’m somewhat argumentative”; five items, $\alpha = .70$). Because these subscales were highly correlated, a composite score was created by averaging across all items ($\alpha = .91$).

Results

Data analytic strategy. First, a factor analysis was conducted on the Communal Concerns Scale items to determine whether egoistic and altruistic concerns could be empirically distinguished from each other. Next, we examined zero-order correlations to evaluate the associations among egoistic and altruistic concerns, Clark et al.’s (1987) measure of Communal Orientation, personality covariates, and measures of interpersonal functioning. Finally, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses to evaluate the unique ability of egoistic versus altruistic concerns to predict aspects of interpersonal functioning. Because we sought to examine unique relationships between altruistic and egoistic concerns and interpersonal functioning, we controlled for responses to Clark et al.’s (1987) Communal Orientation Scale along with other personality variables.

By analyzing the data in this way, we were able to ascertain whether relationships were due to specific altruistic or egoistic concerns, rather than being concomitant with an overall communal orientation or with emotionally valenced personality constructs.

Factor analysis and descriptive statistics. A factor analysis was conducted on the Communal Concerns Scale items using principal axis factoring and oblique rotation to test the hypothesized presence of two distinct factors. The results revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for approximately 32% and 22% of the variance, respectively. Table 1 presents the factor loadings of the items for each factor. The first factor, “Egoistic Concerns”, contains five items ($\alpha = .85$) and reflects concerns about having one’s own needs met in relationships. The second factor, “Altruistic Concerns”, contains five items and reflects concerns about attending to others’ needs ($\alpha = .68$).

Table 2 presents zero-order correlations among egoistic and altruistic concerns, the personality covariates, and measures of interpersonal functioning. Although both egoistic and altruistic concerns were related to having a communal orientation, they were not significantly correlated with each other ($r = -.09$). Furthermore, egoistic and altruistic concerns were correlated with the variables of interest in the directions we had hypothesized.

Unique predictive ability of egoistic versus altruistic concerns. Next, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test the unique role of communal concerns in predicting selected indices of interpersonal functioning. At Step 1, gender (coded as $-1 = \text{male}$; $1 = \text{female}$), self-esteem, attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and Clark et al.’s (1987) communal orientation measure were entered into the regression equation. At Step 2, egoistic and altruistic concern scores were entered into the equation. We did not find significant interactions between egoistic and altruistic concerns in predicting any measures across studies.

Relatedness. The results revealed significant effects of altruistic concerns and egoistic concerns, controlling for all other variables (see Table 3). Consistent with predictions, having altruistic concerns predicted greater feelings of relatedness, whereas having egoistic concerns predicted less feelings of relatedness.

Empathy. The results revealed significant effects of altruistic concerns and egoistic concerns, controlling for all other variables (see Table 3). As expected, having altruistic concerns predicted greater empathy and perspective taking toward others, whereas having egoistic concerns predicted less empathy and perspective taking.

Anger, hostility, and aggression. Finally, as predicted, significant effects were found for altruistic concerns and egoistic concerns, controlling for all other variables (see Table 3). Specifically, having altruistic concerns predicted less anger, hostility, and verbal or physical aggression, whereas egoistic concerns predicted greater anger, hostility, and aggression.

Table 2. Correlations among egoistic and altruistic concerns, personality covariates, and dependent measures (Study 1; $N = 300$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Egoistic concerns	–											
2 Altruistic concerns	-.09	–										
3 Communal orientation	.46***	.30***	–									
4 Self-esteem	-.33***	.15*	.04	–								
5 Secure attachment	-.07	.12*	.19**	.28***	–							
6 Dismissing attachment	-.10	-.18**	-.27***	-.03	-.25***	–						
7 Preoccupied Attachment	.34***	.01	.21***	-.20**	.04	-.20***	–					
8 Fearful attachment	.21***	-.03	-.01	-.37***	-.40***	.12*	.24***	–				
9 Rejection sensitivity	.24***	-.09	-.05	-.53***	-.27***	.07	.21***	.32***	–			
10 Relatedness	-.24***	.34***	.26***	.53***	.36***	-.17**	-.16**	-.32***	-.42***	–		
11 Empathy	-.10	.54***	.29***	.22***	.12*	-.08	-.00	-.06	-.19**	.34***	–	
12 Anger, hostility, and aggression	.32***	-.35***	-.01	-.32***	-.18**	.12*	.17**	.27***	.28***	-.43***	-.35***	–

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 3. Results of hierarchical regression analyses (Study 1)

	Betas predicting relatedness		Betas predicting empathy		Betas predicting anger, hostility, aggression	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
	Gender	.07	.11*	-.01	.04	-.14*
Self-esteem	.38***	.31***	.17*	.08	-.21**	-.11
Dismissing attachment	-.07	-.04	.02	.06	.10	.05
Secure attachment	.14**	.12**	.02	-.01	-.03	.00
Preoccupied attachment	-.10*	-.05	-.03	.04	.07	-.01
Fearful attachment	-.06	-.07	.05	.02	.13*	.14*
Rejection sensitivity	-.13*	-.11*	-.09	-.09	.11	.09
Communal orientation	.20***	.22***	.29***	.21**	.07	.05
Egoistic concerns		-.19**		-.13*		.25***
Altruistic concerns		.17***		.46***		-.29***
	Step 1 $R^2 = .41$, $F(8, 291) = 24.71$ ***	Step 1 $R^2 = .14$, $F(8, 291) = 5.76$ ***	Step 1 $R^2 = .17$, $F(8, 291) = 7.50$ ***		Step 1 $R^2 = .17$, $F(8, 291) = 7.50$ ***	
	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $\Delta F(2, 289) = 15.38$ ***	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .22$, $\Delta F(2, 289) = 47.99$ ***	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .14$, $\Delta F(2, 289) = 47.99$ ***		Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .14$, $\Delta F(2, 289) = 28.27$ ***	

Betas represent standardized beta coefficients. Gender was coded as 1 = female, -1 = male.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Although both egoistic and altruistic concerns were related to a communal orientation (as measured by Clark et al.'s (1987) original scale), these concerns emerged as distinct constructs that were differentially related to personality variables and predicted different interpersonal variables. Whereas altruistic concerns were related to having a secure attachment style and high self-esteem – indicators of interpersonal security – egoistic concerns were related to indicators of interpersonal insecurity – insecure attachment styles, low self-esteem, and rejection sensitivity. Moreover, whereas altruistic concerns predicted increased feelings of relatedness and empathy and less anger, hostility, and aggression, egoistic concerns predicted decreased relatedness and empathy, and increased anger, hostility, and aggression. These findings were observed even after controlling for gender, self-esteem, attachment styles, and rejection sensitivity. We also controlled for Clark et al.'s (1987) Communal Orientation Scale; thus, the observed relationships were unique to altruistic and egoistic concerns, rather than being redundant with a more general communal orientation. This study therefore provides evidence that egoistic versus altruistic concerns underlying a communal orientation are empirically distinct and have unique predictive validity.

Limitations of this study deserve mention. First, we used a shortened, seven-item version of Clark et al.'s (1987) Communal Orientation Scale, rather than the full 14-item version. To strengthen our claim that the Communal Concerns Scale has predictive validity above and beyond Clark et al.'s (1987) scale, it would be important to include the original scale in its entirety. A second limitation is that participants were not asked to think about a close relationship when responding to the items on the Communal Concerns Scale, so our findings may not be specific to close, communal relationships. Finally, we did not control for unmitigated communion and were therefore unable to distinguish between having an excessive other-orientation and having other-oriented concerns that do not involve self-neglect.

Study 2

Study 2 extended and improved upon Study 1 by controlling for unmitigated communion and using Clark's et al.'s (1987) full Communal Orientation Scale, and by explicitly asking participants to think of a close relationship when completing the Communal Concerns Scale. A further aim of Study 2 was to examine goal pursuit and psychological well-being. Specifically, we examined the nature of people's goal pursuits and their level of depressive symptoms. We predicted that people with altruistic concerns would be less interested in self-oriented goals (e.g., image goals) and more interested in pursuing other-oriented goals (e.g., community goals). In contrast, people with egoistic concerns were expected to pursue self-oriented goals aimed at enhancing their own image and to display increased depressive symptoms.

Method

Participants and procedure. A total of 201 college students (125 women, 76 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.21$, $SD = 2.65$) participated in the study for psychology course credit. The participants came to the lab and completed a series of computerized questionnaires. The

participants completed the same questionnaires as in Study 1. In addition, participants completed the full, 14-item version of Clark et al.'s (1987) Communal Orientation Scale ($\alpha = .75$), as well as a measure of unmitigated communion. To make close relationships salient to participants, they were given the following instructions before completing the Communal Concerns Scale: "For the next set of questions, please answer them in relation to a close relationship that you currently have (e.g., with a significant other, family member, or close friend)".

Unmitigated communion scale. Unmitigated communion was assessed with the Revised Unmitigated Communion Scale (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). This scale reflects a tendency to place others' needs before one's own and distress over concern for others. Participants indicated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) with statements such as: "For me to be happy, I need others to be happy" and "I always place the needs of others above my own" (nine items, $\alpha = .75$). Research has shown that this scale has acceptable internal reliability, ranging from .70 to .80, and high test-retest reliability (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998).

Aspiration index. Grouzet et al.'s (2005) aspiration index was used to assess the importance participants placed on attaining various goals. Of particular interest were domains that were relatively self-oriented, such as *image goals* (e.g., "My image will be one other's find appealing"; five items, $\alpha = .81$) and other-oriented goals, such as *community goals* (e.g., "The things I do will make other people's lives better"; three items, $\alpha = .73$).

Depressive symptoms. The participants completed the Center for Epidemiological Studies–Depression Inventory (Radloff, 1977) to assess depressive symptoms over the past week, on a scale from 1 (*rarely/none of the time*) to 4 (*most or all of the time*). Sample items were: "I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me" and "I felt depressed" (20 items, $\alpha = .90$).

Results

Table 4 presents zero-order correlations among egoistic and altruistic concerns, the personality covariates, and measures of interest (i.e., goals, depressive symptoms). Next, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the unique ability of communal concerns to predict the variables of interest. Scores for egoistic and altruistic concerns were entered into a regression equation, along with gender (coded as before), romantic relationship status (coded as 1 = in a relationship; 0 = not in a relationship), self-esteem, attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, unmitigated communion, and Clark et al.'s (1987) measure of communal orientation.

Image goals. We observed significant effects of altruistic concerns and egoistic concerns, controlling for all other variables (see Table 5). Consistent with predictions, altruistic concerns predicted less pursuit of goals related to image, whereas egoistic concerns predicted greater pursuit of such goals.

Table 4. Correlations among egoistic and altruistic concerns, personality covariates, and dependent measures (Study 2; $N = 201$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Egoistic concerns	—												
2 Altruistic concerns	.17*	—											
3 Communal orientation	.15*	.60***	—										
4 Self-esteem	-.02	.14*	.24***	—									
5 Secure attachment	-.11	-.15*	.25***	.31***	—								
6 Dismissing attachment	.32***	.10	-.23***	.03	-.16*	—							
7 Preoccupied attachment	.04	-.09	.12	-.23***	.04	-.20***	—						
8 Fearful attachment	.23**	-.06	-.13	-.30***	-.39***	.18*	.20**	—					
9 Rejection sensitivity	.11	.38***	-.13	-.44***	-.24***	.00	.17*	.07	—				
10 Unmitigated communion			.30***	-.10	.10	-.08	.07	.03	.06	—			
11 Image goals		-.07	.01	.02	-.13	-.02	-.01	.00	.03	.01	—		
12 Community goals		.46***	.50***	.14*	.19***	-.08	.10	.00	-.18*	.32***	.21**	—	
13 Depressive symptoms		-.09	-.20***	-.61***	-.36***	.09	.10	.31***	.30***	.05	.15*	-.15*	—

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 5. Results of hierarchical regression analyses (Study 2)

	Betas predicting image goals		Betas predicting community goals		Betas predicting depressive symptoms	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Gender	.32***	.25**	.19**	.18**	.03	.00
Relationship status	.01	.04	-.02	-.02	.01	.02
Self-esteem	.13	.18	.07	.07	-.52***	-.50***
Dismissing attachment	-.01	-.02	.06	.06	.06	.06
Secure attachment	-.17*	-.17**	.05	.06	-.16*	-.16*
Preoccupied attachment	.06	-.03	.11	.10	.00	-.03
Fearful attachment	-.08	-.06	.02	.04	.07	.08
Rejection sensitivity	.07	.00	-.10	-.09	.03	.01
Unmitigated communion	.04	.06	.22**	.17*	.03	.03
Communal orientation	-.10	-.04	.33***	.23***	-.03	-.03
Egoistic concerns		.35***		-.01		.14*
Altruistic concerns		-.18*		.20**		-.02
	Step 1 $R^2 = .11$, $F(10, 190) = 2.27^*$	Step 1 $R^2 = .11$, $F(10, 190) = 2.27^*$	Step 1 $R^2 = .33$, $F(10, 190) = 9.37^{***}$	Step 1 $R^2 = .42$, $F(10, 190) = 13.82^{***}$	Step 1 $R^2 = .42$, $F(10, 190) = 13.82^{***}$	Step 1 $R^2 = .42$, $F(10, 190) = 13.82^{***}$
	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .11$, $\Delta F(2, 188) = 12.65^{***}$	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .11$, $\Delta F(2, 188) = 12.65^{***}$	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(2, 188) = 3.53^*$	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(2, 188) = 2.41^+$	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(2, 188) = 2.41^+$	Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(2, 188) = 2.41^+$

Betas represent standardized coefficients. Gender was coded as 1 = female, -1 = male; Relationship status was coded as 1 = in a romantic relationship, 0 = not in a relationship.

⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Community goals. The results revealed a significant effect of altruistic concerns, but no effect of egoistic concerns, controlling for all other variables (see Table 5). As expected, having altruistic concerns predicted greater pursuit of goals related to bettering one's community, whereas there was no relationship between egoistic concerns and community goals.

Depressive symptoms. There was a significant effect of egoistic concerns, such that participants with egoistic concerns showed greater symptoms of depression, controlling for all other variables (see Table 5). No association was found between altruistic concerns and depressive symptoms.

Discussion

The findings from Study 2 provide further evidence that egoistic and altruistic concerns reflect two distinct constructs that differentially relate to goal pursuit and to well-being. Consistent with predictions, participants with egoistic concerns placed greater importance on pursuing self-oriented goals related to image, whereas having altruistic concerns was related to decreased emphasis on image goals and increased pursuit of other-oriented, community goals. Furthermore, having egoistic concerns predicted greater depressive symptoms. Thus, ironically, the more people were concerned about satisfying their own needs, the lower was their psychological well-being.

It is also noteworthy that egoistic and altruistic concerns predicted the measures of interest even after controlling for the original Communal Orientation Scale (Clark et al., 1987) and unmitigated communion. In addition, participants were asked to think of a close other while completing the Communal Concerns Scale, suggesting that even within the context of close, communal relationships, individuals differ in their underlying egoistic versus altruistic concerns.

General discussion

The present research provides new insights into our understanding of egoistic versus altruistic concerns in communal relationships. The findings demonstrate that even within communal relationships, which are often thought of as altruistic and selfless, people can be motivated by relatively egoistic concerns to enhance their own welfare. People may adopt egoistic concerns because they are concerned about having others meet their needs for safety and security. Indeed, whereas having altruistic concerns was related to a secure attachment style and to high self-esteem, having egoistic concerns was related to interpersonal insecurity, specifically, insecure styles, low self-esteem, and high rejection sensitivity.

Moreover, the presence of egoistic versus altruistic concerns was related to personal and interpersonal variables that were of particular interest in the present research. Whereas altruistic concerns predicted greater feelings of relatedness, empathy, and less anger, hostility, and aggression, egoistic concerns predicted less relatedness, empathy, and more negativity toward others. In addition, whereas altruistic concerns predicted less pursuit of self-oriented, image goals and greater pursuit of other-oriented,

community-oriented goals, egoistic concerns predicted greater pursuit of image goals and increased depressive symptoms. Thus, the more people strive to have their own needs met in relationships, the less close and connected they feel with others and the lower their psychological well-being and relationship quality may be.

These findings extend previous research in several ways. First, the results demonstrate a link between attachment styles and communal concerns in relationships. Consistent with past research showing that people with a secure attachment style possess self-transcendent values, such as altruism, empathy, and compassion, the present study found that having a secure attachment style was related to altruistic concerns, but not egoistic concerns. In contrast, insecure attachment styles were related to having egoistic concerns in communal relationships.

Furthermore, the results suggest that egoistic concerns underlying a communal orientation are associated with negative outcomes for the self and for others. Such findings are consistent with research showing that excessive self-focus incurs costs to the self and to relationships. For example, narcissists are highly self-absorbed and concerned about enhancing their own self-esteem; they lack empathy (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) and express anger and aggression when their quest for superiority is hindered (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). In short, when people focus primarily on satisfying their own needs, they may attend less to the needs of others and even behave negatively toward others (see Park & Crocker, 2005). Indeed, in the present research, people with egoistic concerns reported less empathy and more anger, hostility, and aggression toward others, which could be rooted in feelings of interpersonal insecurity and heightened self-focus.

Conversely, people with altruistic concerns experienced relatively positive outcomes for themselves and for others. Specifically, they felt more connected, empathic, and were less angry, hostile, and aggressive toward others. These findings are consistent with research showing that altruism is associated with empathic concern, perspective taking, and the experience of attachment or “we-feeling” (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Research has also shown that people who provide help and social support to others experience more positive mental health (Brown & Brown, 2006; Schwartz, Meisenhelder, Ma, & Reed, 2003). Attending to the needs of others out of altruistic concern, without expectation of benefit to the self, may therefore facilitate well-being and contribute to personal and interpersonal benefits.

In Study 2, we examined egoistic and altruistic concerns in relation to goal pursuit and well-being. The goals examined in Study 2 – helping one’s community and self-image goals – are goals that could potentially affect relational experiences. For example, wanting to help one’s community could reinforce a desire to help others, which, in turn, could enhance feelings of relatedness and empathy. In contrast, seeking to bolster one’s own self-image might lead people to view others as a means to enhancing their own self-esteem, thus reinforcing a focus on the satisfaction of one’s own needs, which could be detrimental to relationships.

According to self-determination theory, when people are thwarted from meeting their basic psychological needs, they often engage in compensatory strategies aimed at reducing feelings of anxiety and pursue alternative routes to satisfying these needs. Because people with egoistic concerns are unlikely to feel a sense of relatedness (Study 1), one way they may attempt to satisfy this need is by pursuing self-oriented goals to obtain

external validation. Indeed, Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that “a lack of basic need satisfaction can lead people to develop need substitutes, which can in turn have the ill-fated consequence of continuing to interfere with the attainment of the nutrients they really need” (p. 249). Thus, people who lack relatedness may compensate by focusing on external aspects of themselves, such as their image, whereas those who feel relationally secure may be less interested in pursuing such aspirations and place greater emphasis on helping others (e.g., one’s community).

The findings of Study 2 are also consistent with research showing that the pursuit of goals that require external validation is inversely related to vitality and self-actualization and predicts poor mental and physical health (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). The pursuit of self-oriented goals may undermine psychological well-being, because such goals are contingent on the reactions of others and are, therefore, relatively unstable, or out of one’s direct control. In contrast, pursuit of intrinsic goals that rely less on others’ validation and approval are associated with positive psychological outcomes.

An implication of the present findings is that in communal relationships, it may be beneficial to have altruistic concerns, i.e., provide empathy and support without expecting immediate benefits in return, rather than focusing on whether one’s own needs are being met. This research also has implications for predicting when prosocial behavior is more or less likely to occur in communal relationships. Research on helping behavior has shown that having relatively egoistic versus altruistic concern for others can predict whether or not people will engage in prosocial behaviors (Batson et al., 1983; Batson & Shaw, 1991). When people are motivated by egoistic concerns, they may help others only if they expect to benefit, or because they are motivated to reduce their personal feelings of guilt or distress. Being egoistically motivated reduces helping if there is an easy escape from the situation or an opportunity to avoid feeling distressed. In contrast, if people are motivated by altruistic concerns, they are more likely to help, despite potential costs to the self.

A limitation of the current research is its correlational, cross-sectional design. One way to provide support for the causal status of egoistic and altruistic concerns would be to prime these concerns and examine their effects on various outcomes within communal relationships. Another limitation of the present research is that the relations observed between the personality variables and the Communal Concerns Scale could partially reflect variability in emotional valence. For example, whereas the egoistic concern items contained words such as “fear” and “worry”, the altruistic items did not contain such words. However, results of hierarchical regression analyses showed that egoistic and altruistic concerns were uniquely associated with the variables of interest across both studies, even after accounting for shared variance with personality constructs related to anxiety, such as rejection sensitivity, low self-esteem, and insecure attachment styles. Such findings strengthen our confidence that egoistic concerns are not confounded with constructs that connote negative emotional valence per se.

Another limitation of this research is that only self-report measures were used, which may be susceptible to social desirability biases and self-presentational concerns. Future studies could control for social desirability and include more direct measures of prosocial behavior. In addition, given the conceptual overlap between egoistic concerns and anxious attachment and altruistic concerns and agape (selfless) love, future studies could

include stronger measures of anxious attachment than the ones used in the present study, as well as a measure of agape love.

Although the present research examined individual differences in egoistic and altruistic concerns, it is important to note that the way people approach relationships depends on the situation and on the type of relationship. People's relationship orientations are not static—they are influenced by dynamic behaviors enacted between individuals. For example, it is possible that people could score high on both egoistic and altruistic concerns simultaneously, rather than one or the other. Future research would benefit from examining how egoistic versus altruistic concerns affect outcomes within different types of communal relationships (e.g., close friends versus family) and how aspects of the situation or the relative strength of one's egoistic and altruistic concerns differentially affect personal and interpersonal functioning.

Conclusion

Scientists and philosophers have long debated the role of altruism versus egoism in prosocial behavior. The present research suggests that individuals differ in the degree to which they possess egoistic versus altruistic concerns in communal relationships. These constructs were found to be empirically distinct, to differentially relate to personality variables and to measures of interpersonal functioning, goal pursuit, and psychological well-being. Whereas having altruistic concerns predicted generally positive outcomes for the self and for others, having egoistic concerns predicted relatively negative outcomes.

The more people focus on satisfying their own needs in relationships, the less close and connected they feel and the worse their personal and interpersonal functioning may be. In contrast, the more people focus on others, the better their personal and interpersonal outcomes seem to be. Thus, although communal behaviors produced by these motivations may appear similar on the surface, this research shows that individual differences in motivations and concerns underlying communal relationships and behaviors have important implications for personal and interpersonal functioning and well-being.

Conflict of interest statement

The author(s) declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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