

Communal values and perceived self-other similarity

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Introduction

People with stronger communal values place more importance on sharing mutual support and connection and less importance on maintaining boundaries. I hypothesized that people with stronger communal values might also tend to describe themselves and others as sharing traits in common. In two studies, I had undergraduates rate themselves and others on desirable and undesirable traits. I used the Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Values (CSIV; Locke, 2000) to assess communal values. The CSIV measures the importance respondents place on experiencing each octant of the interpersonal circumplex. Sample high and low communion items are “it is important that I feel connected to them” and “it is important that they keep their distance from me”. Study 1 used a 32-item (4 items per octant) short form and Study 2 used a 16-item (2 items per octant) short form of the CSIV.

Analyzing Similarity

I decomposed overall self-other similarity (which most studies compute as the correlation between self-ratings and other-ratings) into two components: *desirability similarity* (similarity in the social desirability of individuals' attributes) and *attribute similarity* (similarity controlling for desirability) using the following procedure:

1. Compute each person's *desirability coefficient* as the correlation between the desirability of each attribute and the rating that person received on each attribute.
2. Compute *desirability similarity* as the product of the desirability coefficients for self and other. Thus, desirability similarity will be positive if either both self and other have positive desirability coefficients or both have

negative coefficients, and negative if one person has a positive coefficient and the other has a negative coefficient.

3. Compute *attribute similarity* as the partial correlation between ratings of self and other controlling for desirability similarity.

The following table shows examples of positive (red) attributes and negative (blue) attributes used in my studies, along with a hypothetical respondent's ratings of her spouse, a friend, and herself.

Attribute	Spouse	Self	Friend
Cultured	1	2	1
Down-to-earth	2	1	-1
Self-disciplined	2	2	1
Spirited	1	1	-1
Snobbish	-1	-1	1
Coarse	-2	-2	-1
Rigid	-2	-1	1
Temperamental	-1	-2	-1

Because the spouse and the self were described in equally desirable terms (desirability coefficients = .95), but the *particular* desirable or undesirable attributes differed for spouse and self, their desirability similarity = 0.9, but their attribute similarity = 0. Because the friend is described as neutral in desirability, but the particular desirable or undesirable attributes that were relatively high or low were the same for self and friend, their desirability similarity = 0 and their attribute similarity = 1.

Study 1

University of Idaho undergraduates (230 females, 152 males) rated how well a set of 10 desirable and 10 undesirable traits described themselves, two liked others, and two disliked others on *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* scales.

Stronger communal values predicted considerably more desirability similarity with liked others ($r = .31, p < .001$), slightly more attribute similarity with both liked and disliked others (both $r_s = .11, p_s = .03$), and marginally less desirability similarity with disliked others ($r = -.09, p < .07$).

Study 2

Undergraduates (217 US citizens attending University of Idaho and 224 South Korean citizens attending Hansung University; 60.1% female) rated how well a set of 22 desirable and 22 undesirable traits described themselves, University of Idaho students, and Hansung University students on *very untrue* to *very true* scales. Korean students received all materials in Korean. Country did not moderate the effects, so I combined the data from America and Korea. Greater communal values predicted considerably greater desirability similarity with both ingroup (own university) and outgroup (foreign) students ($r_s = .36$ and $.38$), and somewhat greater attribute similarity with both the ingroup and outgroup ($r_s = .19$ and $.16$), $p_s \leq .001$.

I also assessed *perceived compatibility* with ingroup or outgroup members by having participants judge the likelihood of their becoming best friends or falling in love with someone at the American or Korean university (if they were to be studying there during the next 6 months). Communal values predicted perceived compatibility with ingroup members ($r = .14, p < .005$), but not outgroup members ($r = .02$). Ingroup compatibility also was related to self-ingroup desirability similarity ($r = .27$) and, to a lesser extent, self-ingroup *attribute* similarity ($r = .14$), $p_s \leq .005$. The effect of communal values on ingroup compatibility was eliminated by controlling for self-ingroup *desirability* similarity (*partial* $r = .05, ns$), but not by controlling for self-ingroup *attribute* similarity (*partial* $r = .12, p = .01$).

Conclusions

People who value communion tend to describe themselves and others as sharing similar traits (i.e., greater attribute similarity between the self and liked, disliked, ingroup, and outgroup others; and greater desirability similarity between the self and everyone except disliked others). Two explanations are that for people who value communion (1) sharing qualities with others is more rewarding (Locke, 2003) and (2) there are more overlaps in the underlying cognitive representations of self and others (Cross et al., 2002). Future research could assess these potential mechanisms by including measures of affect or implicit associations.

Desirability similarity and attribute similarity may both be psychologically meaningful, but may have different causes and consequences. For example, Study 2 found that desirability similarity—but not attribute similarity—mediated the effect of communal values on anticipated compatibility with other students at one's university. My studies demonstrate a procedure for distinguishing desirability similarity and attribute similarity that can be used in any study that compares profiles of ratings of attributes varying in desirability.

Literature cited

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