

# The personal and interpersonal rewards of communal orientation

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## Abstract

People high in communal orientation care for the welfare of others based on others' needs and desire similar care for themselves. The current study investigates the personal and interpersonal rewards associated with individual differences in communal orientation. We hypothesized that communally oriented people experience rewards from the positive emotion they feel from caring for others. Results from a 4-week daily experience study ( $N = 232$ ) indicated that communally oriented people experienced greater self-esteem, greater satisfaction and love in their relationships, and greater love for humanity in daily life. These associations were mediated by greater daily positive emotion and the results were unique to tendencies to give care rather than the desire to receive it. We discuss implications for prosociality and well-being in close relationships and beyond.

## Keywords

Communal orientation, love, positive emotion, relationships, well-being

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It is well understood that receiving care is good for the self. However, a growing body of research is beginning to show that giving care to others can paradoxically be rewarding for the person who provides care (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker, Olivier, & Nuer, 2009; Kogan et al., 2010; Piferi & Lawler, 2006; Williamson & Clark, 1992). Individuals with a *communal orientation* are dispositionally inclined to give care to people ranging from those within their close relationships to strangers (Bryan, Hammer, & Fisher, 2000; Clark, Oullette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987; Williamson & Schulz, 1990). As a consequence of these inclinations, there are many instances in which communally oriented people give communal care without expecting to receive anything in return; in fact, communally motivated people actually *avoid* tracking the given and received inputs in their relationships (Clark, 1984), which brings to question what the personal and interpersonal consequences are of being inclined to give communal care to others.

Research on communal orientation has largely focused on the care that communally oriented people give to others, highlighting their selfless nature, and neglecting how they may experience positive outcomes themselves (Clark, 2011). The current study sought to examine an understudied aspect of communal orientation: How does an orientation for caring influence the *self*? To supplement the focus on communal orientation and *giving* care, the current study sought to examine how communally oriented people experience *rewards* – or positive outcomes that are not directly reciprocated to them by an interaction partner (Clark & Mills, 1993) – as a function of their caregiving tendencies. We draw upon research showing the resilience and relationship-sustaining qualities that communally oriented people exhibit (Clark & Finkel, 2005; McCall, 1995; Medvene, Volk, & Meissen, 1997; Thompson & DeHarpport, 1998; VanYperen, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1992; Williamson & Schulz, 1990) to posit that communally oriented people experience many personal and interpersonal rewards in their daily lives. Furthermore, we draw upon research indicating that giving care prompts caregivers to feel positive emotion (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; Kogan et al., 2010; Williamson & Clark, 1992) and to explain how positive emotion contributes to the experience of a broad set of personal and interpersonal rewards (Fredrickson, 2001).

## **The personal and interpersonal rewards of caring**

Within the context of caregiving, communally oriented people exhibit psychological resilience in response to negative outcomes and stressors that have typically been associated with caring for others. For instance, self-help leaders and nurses who are highly communally oriented experience less burnout in their occupations when compared with their noncommunal counterparts (Medvene et al., 1997; VanYperen et al., 1992) and caregivers of patients with Alzheimer's disease report lower depression when they are communally oriented (Williamson & Schulz, 1990). Thus, communally oriented people demonstrate a sort of resilience that protects them against some of the potential negative outcomes of providing sustained care to others. However, research has also recently revealed that caring for others can promote personal well-being. For instance, providing care for others has been shown to be associated with greater self-efficacy and self-esteem (Crocker, 2008; Piferi & Lawler, 2006). Thus, communally oriented people,

who are inclined to care for others, are likely to experience enhanced well-being along with being protected from experiencing negative outcomes associated with caregiving. However, while existing research in the scientific literature has identified possible protective qualities of providing communal care, work has yet to examine the possible personal *rewards* of having a communal orientation, such as greater personal well-being. Thus, building upon the existing literature on the personal rewards of giving care, our first hypothesis in this investigation was that communally oriented people would experience greater personal rewards in enhanced self-esteem in their daily lives.

Existing research also suggests that communally oriented people display qualities that should also promote interpersonal rewards. Communally oriented people exhibit a number of interpersonal qualities that facilitate better social bonds, including being emotionally expressive within close relationships (Clark & Finkel, 2005), behaving cooperatively and sharing with friends (Thompson & DeHarpport, 1998), and making supportive attributions for a partner's performance both when their partner succeeds and fails (McCall, 1995). In addition to these relationship-building processes, other findings have shown that communally oriented people experience greater quality bonds with others, namely with adult seniors reporting greater satisfaction within their best friendships when they are highly communally oriented (Jones & Vaughan, 1990). Alongside the personal qualities communally oriented people exhibit that can promote good relationships, research has also shown that giving care can promote high-quality relationships through greater interpersonal closeness, responsiveness, and social support for the caregiver in their friendships (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker et al., 2009). Thus, communally oriented people exhibit a variety of qualities that promote good relationships and their tendencies to give care should also promote better relationships. However, little empirical work exists that has examined whether a dispositional tendency to care is indeed related to experiencing higher quality relationships across a variety of social bonds such as with family, friends, and romantic partners. Thus, in the current study, we investigated whether communally oriented people do indeed have more satisfying bonds across these different types of interpersonal relationships.

In the current study, we also sought to broaden our understanding of communally oriented people's experiences across a range of relationships by capturing their emotional connection with others. Little research has examined the emotions, beyond general positive and negative emotion, associated with having a communal orientation. We theorized that if communally oriented people do indeed experience more satisfying social bonds, they also likely experience deep feelings of care, or *love*, across the variety of relationships and people toward whom they behave communally. In giving care to others across a variety of relationships, we expect that communally oriented people experience associated feelings of love within their close relationships as well as toward people in general or humanity as a whole. Consistent with research documenting that communally oriented people care for others whom they do not know or have never met, such as with strangers and the homeless (Bryan et al., 2000; Clark et al., 1987), and that people can and do indeed experience deep care for humanity as a whole (McFarland, Webb, & Brown, 2012; Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), we sought to investigate whether communally oriented people experience love not only within their close relationships but also more broadly for the human collective.

## Experiencing rewards through positive emotion

Several lines of research indicate that giving to others – within communal relationships and in short-term interactions – promotes the experience of positive emotion. People who are motivated to behave communally toward their romantic partners feel more intrinsic joy when making sacrifices in the course of daily life (Kogan et al., 2010). Similarly, people who are experimentally made to desire a communal (vs. exchange) relationship with a new interaction partner experience elevated positive emotion when helping the partner, regardless of whether this help was given as a result of personal motivation or out of feelings of obligation (Williamson & Clark, 1992). Other research has shown that spending money on others, rather than on oneself, fosters more happiness for the giver – even when the giver is experimentally assigned to give money to others (Dunn et al., 2008). Taken together, this body of research indicates that giving to others inclines givers to feel greater happiness and joy themselves and that giving should feel particularly good for communally oriented people. Furthermore, the experimental work reveals a direct causal link between giving and increased positive emotion.

Drawing on these findings, we expect that communally oriented people, who are dispositionally inclined to give to others, experience elevated positive emotion, such as feeling happy and uplifted, in their daily lives. To the extent that communally oriented people are inclined to give care to others across a variety of relationships, be it through sacrifice in romantic relationships (Kogan et al., 2010) or care for the homeless (Bryan et al., 2000), it is likely that the greater levels of care that people high in communal orientation are inclined to give, to both close and distant, others in their daily lives prompts them to experience greater positive emotion due to the association between giving to others and feeling positive emotion. Thus, we expect that communally oriented people feel good in daily life as a function of the care they give to others.

Not only this, if communally oriented people do indeed experience greater positive emotion from their inclinations to give care to others, research suggests that the experience of positive emotion contributes to the personal and interpersonal rewards we hypothesize communally oriented people experience. According to the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, positive emotions give rise to beneficial resources by broadening cognitive and behavioral repertoires (Fredrickson, 2001). For instance, the experience of positive emotions results in greater social support and purpose in life (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Furthermore, positive emotions are also associated with feeling close to friends (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006), cooperating with others (Forgas, 1998), relationship satisfaction (Harker & Keltner, 2001; Impett et al., 2010), personal success (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), and longevity (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001). Thus, the rewards of positive emotion reach far beyond simply “feeling good” – they pervade many life domains, bringing people an abundance of rewards both personally and interpersonally. In conjunction with these findings and our prediction that communally oriented people experience greater positive emotion in their daily lives, we further hypothesized that positive emotion provides one mechanism by which communally oriented people experience a host of rewards. That is, we predicted that communally oriented people

experience personal and interpersonal rewards through the positive emotion associated with their tendencies to care for others across a variety of relationships in daily life. Specifically, we expect that the experience of positive emotion will lead to personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001) for the communally oriented in that they will report experiencing greater self-esteem in daily life. We also expect that the positive relationship processes to which positive emotion contributes (Forgas, 1998; Harker & Keltner, 2001; Impett et al., 2010; Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006) will lead to greater relationship satisfaction and love for the communally oriented in their close relationships and for humanity as a whole. Finally, we draw upon the experimental research indicating that giving leads people to experience positive emotion (Dunn et al., 2008; Williamson & Clark, 1992), to posit that it is likelier that communally oriented people feel positive emotion through caring for others which leads to rewards, rather than that they experience a host of rewards that lead to the experience of positive emotion.

### **The selfless and self-oriented sides of communal orientation**

A communal orientation is not driven solely by selfless motives to care for others; there is also a “selfish” – or self-oriented – side that has been often overlooked within research on communal motivation. This self-oriented component entails desiring care for the self and assuming that others are also communally motivated (Clark, 2011). The self-oriented side of communal orientation manifests itself in multiple ways. For instance, within communal relationships, people often desire reciprocal and relatively balanced care so long as people are capable of providing such care (Clark, 2011; Clark, Dubash, & Mills, 1998). In addition, communally oriented people may engage in caregiving to avoid feelings of guilt associated with not giving care (Clark, 2011; Clark & Mills, 2012). While the communal orientation scale is comprised of items that measure both the desire to care for others (the selfless component of communal orientation) and the desire for others to provide communal care for oneself (the self-oriented component of communal orientation), prior research has treated the communal orientation construct as a single factor, and thus, we cannot be sure which component, or if both components, is driving the outcomes that communally oriented people experience, such as enhanced relationship quality (Jones & Vaughan, 1990) and greater cooperation with others (Thompson & DeHarpport, 1998). In the present study, we aimed to test for the first time the unique contributions of the selfless and self-oriented sides of communal orientation to personal and interpersonal rewards. Extending research showing that experimentally induced care for others promotes greater positive emotion (Dunn et al., 2008; Williamson & Clark, 1992) and other-focused, rather than self-interested, care promotes rewards for caregivers (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker et al., 2009), we reason that it is in communal care that is *selfless*, rather than *self-oriented*, which is associated with daily personal and interpersonal rewards. Hence, we test the prediction that it is their caring and giving nature toward others, rather than the desire or assumption that others will give care to the self, that prompts communally oriented people to experience rewards in their daily lives.

## Current study

The primary aim of the current study was to test our hypothesis that people with a dispositional communal orientation experience a broad range of personal and interpersonal rewards through the experience of positive emotion. We used a naturalistic, daily-experience design (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003) to test four central predictions. First, we predicted that communally oriented people would experience more rewards in daily life, including greater self-esteem, greater relationship satisfaction, and greater love in close relationships and for humanity as a whole. Second, we expected that communally oriented people would experience heightened positive emotion in daily life, which in turn would mediate the associations between being communally oriented and the experience of personal and interpersonal rewards (and that this would be likelier than communally oriented people experiencing positive emotion as mediated by rewards). Third, we predicted that communally oriented people would experience positive emotion and rewards as a unique function of their tendency to care for others rather than their desire for others to behave communally in return. Finally, we examined whether the rewards experienced by the communally oriented people are unique to their inclinations to care for others above and beyond the general personality traits of both agreeableness and extraversion, which are associated with interpersonal cooperation (Graziano & Tobin, 2009) and positive affect, respectively (Lucas & Fujita, 2000).

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

Participants were 232 undergraduates (181 women and 51 men) from a large public university in the United States who received course credit as compensation for participation. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 40 years ( $M = 18.60$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ) and were from various ethnic backgrounds: 7.3% African/African American, 11.7% Asian/Asian American, 44.4% European/European American, 5.6% Mexican/Mexican American, and 31% mixed and/or other ethnicities.

Participants completed the study entirely online over the course of 4 weeks. The study consisted of two parts: a background survey and a 4-week diary. Upon signing up for the study, participants were provided a web link to the background survey. A day after completing the background survey, participants started the diaries, which they completed 3 days each week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday). In each diary, participants answered questions about their emotions, self-esteem, satisfaction in close relationships, and experiences of love in close relationships and with humanity. The mean number of completed diaries was 8.48 ( $SD = 3.27$ ;  $Min = 1$ ,  $Max = 12$ ),<sup>1</sup> producing a total of 1959 diaries. All measures in the background survey and daily-experience surveys were measured on a 7-point Likert or dichotomous “yes” or “no” scale. Alphas for both level 1 and level 2 variables were computed as the intercorrelation between all valid entries across all participants. For the diary measures, one-item measures were used when possible to increase efficiency and minimize participant attrition due to the length of the study.

### *Individual difference measures in background survey*

**Communal orientation.** Participants completed a 14-item measure assessing a communal orientation (Clark et al., 1987). Items from this measure capture both the extent to which participants typically behave communally toward others (e.g., “I often go out of my way to help another person”) and expect others to behave communally toward them (e.g., “When I have a need that others ignore, I’m hurt”) for a global assessment of communal orientation ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Agreeableness and extraversion.** Participants also completed the agreeableness (i.e., “I see myself as someone who is helpful and unselfish with others”; nine items;  $\alpha = .81$ ) and extraversion (“I see myself as someone who generates a lot of enthusiasm”; eight items;  $\alpha = .89$ ) subscales from the 44-item Big Five Inventory (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008).

**Daily measures.** *Emotions.* Participants completed a measure of positive and negative emotions used in previous research on daily experience (Impett et al., 2010; Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009). The four positive emotions measured in synonym clusters included happy/pleased/joyful, proud/good about myself, interested/attentive, and uplifted/inspired/elevated (diary level  $\alpha = .94$ , person level  $\alpha = .96$ ); the four negative emotions included anxious/nervous, sad/depressed/down, angry/irritable/frustrated, and embarrassed/ashamed (diary level  $\alpha = .90$ , person level  $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Self-esteem.** Participants also completed a single-item measure of self-esteem: “I have high self-esteem” (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

**Satisfaction with close relationships.** Participants rated how “happy” they felt in relationships with each of the following people: romantic partner, mother, father, sibling/siblings, and best friend. Responses to these five items were averaged into one summary score representing daily satisfaction with close relationships (diary level  $\alpha = .75$ , person level  $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Love.** Participants reported whether or not they experienced love in six different types of relationships including with their romantic partner, mother, father, siblings, and best friend, along with whether they experienced love for humanity as a whole. Love with one’s romantic partner, mother, father, sibling/siblings, and best friend were averaged into one summary score representing daily love within close relationships (diary level  $\alpha = .67$ , person level  $\alpha = .73$ ).

## **Results**

### *Data analysis*

Analyses were conducted using multilevel modeling with the HLM computer program to account for dependencies within the data (HLM 6.04; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Specifically, diary entries (level 1) were nested within people (level 2). Results are reported using robust standard errors to minimize the likelihood of type I errors and person-specific model results are reported for models with dichotomous outcomes

(Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). For our main effects analyses examining the association between communal orientation and daily rewards, we grand-mean centered communal orientation and entered it as a predictor of the mean daily experience of each of the rewards. These estimates represent the total effect for our subsequent mediational analyses. For our mediational analyses, examining positive emotion as an explanatory mechanism of the association between communal orientation and daily rewards, multilevel “2-1-1” (level 2 predictor, level 1 mediator, and level 1 outcomes) mediations were conducted using methods outlined by Zhang, Zyphur, and Preacher (2009). First, we grand-mean centered communal orientation to predict positive emotion to ensure that the predictor and mediator were significantly associated. Second, to avoid confounding within- and between-person effects of communal orientation, which can only predict between-person differences in daily rewards, we partitioned positive emotion into its within- and between-person components by person-mean centering and aggregating positive emotion, respectively, allowing the intercept for person-mean centered positive emotion to vary. We then simultaneously entered both the components of positive emotion as well as communal orientation (grand-mean centered) to predict each of the daily rewards. In all these mediational analyses, we assessed the aggregate of positive emotion (level 2 variable) in the indirect path mediating the link between communal orientation and daily rewards because communal orientation can only predict level 2 variance in positive emotion. Finally, we assessed the association between communal orientation and each of the daily rewards in these models to assess the magnitude of the direct effect of communal orientation on daily rewards. These models were also used in all subsequent control and reverse mediational analyses. In the control analyses, all additional variables were grand-mean centered and entered at level 2. In the reverse mediational analyses, daily rewards were partitioned into their within- and between-person (the estimate of interest) components and simultaneously entered with communal orientation as predictors to assess the indirect effect of rewards on the association between communal orientation and positive emotion. The Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (MCMAM) was used to generate a 95% confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect (using 20,000 repetitions)—a null hypothesis of no mediation (when the indirect effect is equal to zero) was rejected when zero fell outside of the CI (Selig & Preacher, 2008). MCMAM is a method similar to parametric bootstrapping and is used in the multilevel context for assessing models with a level 2 predictor, a level 1 mediator, and a level 1 outcome (Preacher & Selig, 2010) and provides better estimates than the traditional Sobel test (Selig & Preacher, 2008).

### *Communal orientation and the experience of rewards*

Our first prediction concerned the link between communal orientation and the experience of personal and interpersonal rewards in daily life. Beginning with the experience of personal rewards, we found that communal orientation was positively associated with daily self-esteem,  $b = .35$ ,  $t(226) = 3.01$ , and  $p < .001$ . Thus, highly communally oriented people felt a greater sense of self-worth when compared with those low in communal orientation.

Turning to daily interpersonal rewards, we predicted that communal orientation would be associated with greater satisfaction within close relationships and greater feelings of love in close relationships and beyond. As expected, communal orientation significantly predicted greater daily satisfaction with close relationships,  $b = .34$ ,



$t(226) = 4.30$ , and  $p < .001$ .<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, communal orientation significantly predicted experiencing love in one's close relationships,  $b = .37$ ,  $t(226) = 3.41$ , and  $p = .001$ ,<sup>3</sup> and with broader humanity,  $b = .65$ ,  $t(226) = 3.06$ , and  $p = .003$ .

### *The mediating role of positive emotion*

Our second hypothesis was that communally oriented people would experience more positive emotion in daily life and that this emotion would in turn mediate the associations between communal orientation and rewards in self-esteem, satisfaction with close relationships, and love in close relationships and with humanity. Indeed, the higher people were in communal orientation, the more positive emotion they experienced on a daily basis,  $b = .40$ ,  $t(226) = 5.03$ , and  $p < .001$ . Although we had no specific predictions concerning communal orientation and the experience of negative emotion, results indicated that communal orientation significantly predicted experiencing lower levels of daily negative emotion,  $b = -.33$ ,  $t(225) = -3.43$ , and  $p = .001$ . Thus, people who are motivated to communally care for the needs of others reported experiencing increased positive emotion and decreased negative emotion in their daily lives.

As expected, positive emotion mediated the associations between the communal orientation and each of the rewards: self-esteem (CI<sub>95%</sub> [.22, .53]), relationship satisfaction (CI<sub>95%</sub> [.10, .30]), love in close relationships (CI<sub>95%</sub> [.01, .07]), and love for humanity (CI<sub>95%</sub> [.13, .44]). Specifically, after controlling positive emotion, the association between the communal orientation and each of the rewards was reduced in magnitude: self-esteem ( $b = -.01$ ,  $t(225) = -.09$ , and  $p = .93$ ), relationship satisfaction ( $b = .15$ ,  $t(225) = 1.87$ , and  $p = .12$ ), love in close relationships ( $b = .23$ ,  $t(225) = 2.27$ , and  $p = .02$ ), and love for humanity ( $b = .35$ ,  $t(225) = 1.70$ , and  $p = .09$ ). Thus, positive emotion mediated the link between communal orientation and all of the rewards, consistent with the hypothesis that positive emotion confers rewards for the self, in close relationships, and with humanity as a whole.

### *Rewards for selfless versus self-oriented communal orientation*

Our third prediction was that noncontingent responsiveness to other people's needs (i.e., selfless communal orientation) – and not the desire for others to be responsive to one's own needs (i.e., self-oriented communal orientation) – is what predicts the experience of rewards for communally oriented people. To examine this hypothesis, we conducted a principal components analysis with an orthogonal varimax rotation to extract two fixed factors from the original communal-orientation scale to examine the unique predictability of different components of communal orientation. The first factor, accounting for 26.5% of the variance, included 10 items that tapped caring for others' needs, or what we refer to as the "selfless communal orientation" subscale ( $\alpha = .81$ ; factor loadings ranged from .52 to .73). The second factor, accounting for 17.4% of the variance in the scale, included four items that tapped the desire for others to care for one's own needs, or the "self-oriented communal-orientation scale" subscale ( $\alpha = .70$ ; factor loadings ranged from .55 to .77). The correlation between the two factors was  $r = .29$ , indicating that, in our sample, these two components of communal orientation only minimally overlapped.

We conducted a subsequent set of analyses in which both the subscales were entered simultaneously to predict each of the rewards. These results showed that the self-oriented communal orientation subscale was not significantly associated with positive emotion or any of the other rewards (*bs* ranged from  $-.01$  to  $.14$  and *ps* ranged from  $.10$  to  $.94$ ). Most importantly, after controlling for self-oriented communal orientation, people who scored high on the selfless communal orientation subscale still showed a pattern of elevated personal and interpersonal rewards (*bs* ranged from  $.23$  to  $.63$  and *ps* ranged from  $<.001$  to  $.01$ ). Furthermore, all of the mediation models indicated a reduction in the association between communal orientation and rewards when positive emotion was included as a mediator, suggesting that it is indeed a selfless care for others rather than self-oriented desire for care that leads to personal and interpersonal rewards for communally oriented people.

### *Ruling out alternative explanations*

Our results supported the prediction that communally oriented people experience greater positive emotion in daily life, which in turn contribute to experiencing rewards in personal and interpersonal well-being. However, it could also be that experiencing greater personal well-being or satisfaction with one's social bonds prompts communally oriented people to feel positive emotion. To rule out this alternative pathway, we conducted a set of reverse mediation analyses. These results indicated that when communal orientation (predictor) and each of the rewards (now as the mediator) were entered as predictors of positive emotion, both remained significant and resulted in lower proportions in reduction in the total effect (18–38%, *bs* ranged from  $.25$  to  $.34$ , and all *ps*  $<.001$ ). These results contrast with our hypothesized results, which indicated greater reductions in magnitude in all the total effects (38–100%), suggesting that for communally oriented people, positive emotion contributes more to the experience of rewards rather than the other way around.

Another alternative explanation for our findings is that the rewards experienced by communally oriented people may be driven by more general personality traits associated with cooperation and positive emotion such as agreeableness and extraversion, rather than by the relationship construct of communal orientation that is specifically associated with caring for others. Thus, in our final set of analyses, we controlled for the personality traits of agreeableness and extraversion. Indeed, agreeableness was a unique predictor of all of the rewards communally oriented people experienced (*bs* ranged from  $.20$  to  $.35$  and *ps* ranged from  $<.001$  to  $.05$ ), and extraversion was a unique predictor of all of the rewards except for love of humanity (*bs* ranged from  $.16$  to  $.39$  and *ps* ranged from  $<.001$  to  $.02$ ). However, after controlling for both of these personality dimensions simultaneously, communal orientation still significantly predicted experiencing all of the daily rewards except for self-esteem (all *bs*  $>.22$  and all *ps*  $<.05$ ; when controlling for extraversion and agreeableness separately, communally oriented people still experienced greater self-esteem to a marginal and significant degree, respectively). These results suggest that beyond the influence of personality factors linked to increased cooperation and positive emotion, communal orientation is uniquely associated with the experience of a broad array of rewards in daily life.

## Discussion

In the current study, communally oriented people experienced greater self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, and love within close relationships and with humanity in the course of their daily lives. The broad constellation of rewards that communally oriented people experienced was explained by the enhanced positive emotion they felt on a daily basis. These findings contribute to the literature on communal orientation, which has focused on communal care for others, to reveal that communally oriented people experience a host of personal and interpersonal rewards in their daily lives. The current findings extend past research indicating the psychological resilience (Medvene et al., 1997; VanYperen et al., 1992; Williamson & Schulz, 1990) and relationship-sustaining qualities (Clark & Finkel, 2005, McCall, 1995, Thompson & DeHarpport, 1998) that communally oriented people exhibit as well as previous work demonstrating the positive emotion and rewards associated with caregiving (Crocker, 2008; Kogan et al., 2010; Piferi & Lawler, 2006) by showing that a caring disposition can promote well-being both personally and interpersonally.

Furthermore, these results suggest that in some ways, communally oriented people have their needs fulfilled simply through *giving* care to others. That is, by giving communal care to others, positive personal and interpersonal relationship processes – such as greater love and satisfaction within one’s relationships – follow, which can thereby help maintain communal relationships, independent of self-oriented communal motivations to receive care from others. Thus, our findings add to the literature on the rewards of communal orientation by showing that not only are communally oriented people buffered from the negative consequences of sustained caregiving, but that giving communal care might promote well-being and maintain relationships, independent of the desire to receive communal care from others.

The present study is also the first to examine the association between communal orientation and the experience of love across a broad range of relationships and even for humanity as a whole. These results contribute to a growing body of research demonstrating the capacity for people to care for humanity as a whole (McFarland et al., 2012; Sprecher & Fehr, 2005) by showing that communally oriented people feel deep affection across a range of personal relationships and even for broader humanity. Our findings demonstrate the breadth of relationships across which communally oriented people experience rewards, ranging from close family members, such as one’s parents and siblings, to the human collective. Although previous studies have tended to examine communal orientation in a specific relationship context, such as with strangers or patients, the current study is the first to examine communal orientation across a range of important relationships within people’s lives, revealing that a caring disposition is associated with personal and interpersonal well-being that transcends many relationship contexts.

Furthermore, our finding that communally oriented people feel love for humanity as a whole builds upon existing research that has shown that communally oriented people show care for strangers, such as the homeless. This finding suggests that it is also possible that communally oriented people may be motivated to provide support to causes and organizations that support the human collective – causes and organizations that could never explicitly return benefits. Thus, the communal care that communally oriented people give in their close relationships may also translate into giving care to others at the broader level. Indeed, research showing that communally oriented people

are more likely to participate in AIDS activism and civic engagement (Omoto, Snyder, & Hackett, 2010) supports this idea. Future research would benefit from a more careful examination of the breadth of targets – and collective causes or organizations – to which communally oriented people give support.

The current study is the first to examine the unique predictability of two distinct components of communal orientation including selfless care for others and self-oriented desire for care for oneself. We found that it is indeed the communal motivation to selflessly care for *others* that is associated with personal and interpersonal rewards, whereas desiring care for the *self* was not associated with any of these rewards in daily life. This paradoxical finding underscores that caring for others can indeed be good for the self, above and beyond desires for others to care for the self. Furthermore, the identification of the two unique components of communal orientation and their unique predictive ability of daily outcomes underscores the need for future research in this area to examine both components of communal orientation in tandem. Future research would benefit from investigating the different facets of communal orientation to elucidate the unique consequences of the tendency to care for others when compared with desiring care for oneself. Our results suggest that for those who are inclined to care for others *without* concern for reciprocated care, boosts in well-being, satisfaction and love may follow. Furthermore, our findings underscore the need to reexamine past research on communal orientation – which has investigated communal orientation as a global measure tapping both selfless and self-oriented care – to tease apart what component of communal orientation is driving the effects of past findings. It is likely that, and as the current findings have indicated, selfless and self-oriented care have unique implications for personal and interpersonal well-being and examining past findings under this lens may lead to a more nuanced understanding of how having a communal orientation shapes personal well-being and relationship dynamics.

Although our results indicate that having a selfless as opposed to a self-oriented communal orientation was associated with daily personal and interpersonal rewards, future research would benefit from examining the boundary conditions of these effects. It is possible that having a selfless communal orientation is not always rewarding, and therefore identifying the contexts under which this is the case would be an important step in future research. Research on unmitigated communion (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998) and self-silencing (Jack & Dill, 1992) indicates that being overly concerned about others to the point of self-neglect is associated with harmful effects for the self, including negative views of the self, distress, and depression. In future research in this area, it will be important to identify the most optimal levels of a selfless communal orientation and the conditions under which providing care to others in a selfless fashion is beneficial versus costly. Furthermore, it might also be possible that a healthy degree of self-oriented communal orientation can be rewarding in some contexts. Although we did not document that rewards were associated with having a self-oriented communal orientation, it is possible that desiring care for the self might be beneficial in some contexts and costly in others. For instance, being high in a self-oriented communal orientation might lead to decreased personal and interpersonal well-being if one's desires and needs are not being met – a circumstance that is unlikely to elicit the experience of positive emotion. However, if people who are high in a self-oriented desire for care have their needs met, they may feel greater positive emotion as well as a greater sense of personal and relationship well-being. Furthermore, not all social support is beneficial, and the most optimal outcomes tend

to occur when social support fits the needs of the receiver (Maisel & Gable, 2009); thus, having a self-oriented communal orientation may be beneficial when one is receiving appropriate care from others as opposed to care that is incompatible with one's needs. It is possible that these two opposing possibilities for people high in self-oriented communal orientation might explain the lack of association between self-oriented communal orientation and rewards in our sample, and more research is needed to examine the specific contexts under which having a self-oriented communal orientation might be beneficial or costly.

### *Limitations and future directions*

One limitation of the current study was that the sample consisted solely of college students. Thus, there are a variety of people and relationship types that were overlooked in the current study. Specifically, college students' primary relationships are likely relatively balanced and mutual in care. Future studies would benefit from examining these processes in relationships where care is relatively *unbalanced*, such as in relationships in which parents care for young children or people care for their elderly parents. We would expect that across different types of relationships, even those requiring unbalanced caregiving, communally oriented people would experience a similar set of rewards as those identified in the current study, particularly because previous research on communal orientation has shown that a high communal orientation is associated with resilience and better relationships across different relational contexts, even when those relationships entail unidirectional caregiving (Medvene et al., 1997; VanYperen et al., 1992; Williamson & Schulz, 1990). We would further expect that people who are the relationship partners of highly communally oriented people would also experience enhanced personal and interpersonal well-being as a consequence of having a partner who responds to their needs in a communal fashion. Research that includes reports from both partners in romantic relationships is needed to examine this possibility.

The current study was also limited in the focus on dispositional communal orientation and rewards, and future research may be well served by investigating communally oriented people's underlying motivations for giving care to others. Recent research and theory on approach-avoidance social motivation provides one interesting new avenue for exploration (see review by Gable & Impett, 2012). For instance, individuals can give to others for approach motives, such as to support another person's growth or well-being, or for avoidance motives, such as to prevent another person's suffering. While research on sacrifice has documented that giving to others to avoid negative outcomes such as relationship conflict or a partner's disappointment can be personally and interpersonally costly (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005), it is possible that communally oriented people, due to their focus on providing care, may be buffered against these negative outcomes. Further research would benefit from examining the motivational processes that underlie acts of communal caring. In addition to examining the motives that underlie communally oriented people's caregiving, another promising avenue for future research would be to consider the role of different sources of knowledge and their influence on how communally oriented people report their emotions. For instance, there can be discrepancies between the ways in which people report emotions they are currently experiencing versus not currently experiencing (Robinson & Clore, 2002). Particularly, people often draw upon

experiential sources of knowledge when they are currently feeling an emotion (i.e., reporting a high level of positive emotion while giving care because one is presently feeling them), whereas recalling emotions may require people to reconstruct how they felt, which might prompt them to draw upon beliefs about how they thought they felt in that specific context (i.e., reporting a high level of positive emotion when recalling an instance of caregiving because one believes people often feel positive emotion in these situations; Robinson & Clore, 2002). Thus, although daily experience studies minimize retrospective biases in reports as compared with other study designs (Bolger et al., 2003), it would be informative to look at communally oriented people's experience of positive emotion within the context of actual relationship experiences and in instances of caregiving to more fully examine and understand their emotional experience and how this predicts the experience of rewards.

Future research could also focus on identifying other possible contributors to the personal and interpersonal rewards that the communally oriented people experience. One possibility that should be examined further is whether communally oriented people are more inclined to respond to well-being measures in a socially desirable way, and if so, whether they experience personal and interpersonal well-being above and beyond motivations to respond desirably. Another potential contributor that might explain the rewards communally oriented people experience could be a heightened sense of purpose and meaning that is experienced as a consequence of caring for others. In addition, examining the different forms of care that communally oriented people give to others and how they may differentially elicit positive emotion and its downstream rewards could also elucidate our understanding of the contributors to the link between communal orientation and rewards.

Finally, future researchers should also consider the possibility of examining whether promoting communal motivation through intervention could serve to increase personal and interpersonal well-being. That is, it may be possible that informing people of the benefits of caring for others and instructing them on healthy ways to do so could promote a cycle of care and well-being for communally oriented people and their partners. Existing research indicates that there is indeed positive feedback between compassion for others and interpersonal well-being (Canevello & Crocker, 2010); thus research that examines interventions that promote communally oriented caregiving might increase personal and interpersonal well-being and contribute to a better understanding of how to increase the rewards associated with communal orientation.

## Conclusions

The current findings support and add to a growing body of research on the rewards of giving by showing that the dispositional tendency to care for others can be rewarding in and of itself in daily life. These rewards enrich communally oriented people's lives personally and across a range of relationships and are derived from focusing on the needs of others rather than desiring care for oneself. Thus, our findings add to a small but growing body of work suggesting that it is truly in giving that we receive.

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## Notes

1. To ensure that the variability in response rates to the daily diary entries did not impact the study conclusions, we conducted another set of analyses including only participants who completed at least half of the daily diary entries. This sample included  $N = 188$  participants who completed an average of 10 diaries (Min = 6, Max = 12). Within this sample, all results reported in the original analyses remained the same. Thus, variability in response rates did not affect the final study results and conclusions.
2. Communal orientation significantly predicted experiencing love in each of the different relationships besides romantic relationships, although this effect was trending in the positive direction.
3. Communal orientation significantly predicted experiencing relationship satisfaction in each of the different relationships besides romantic relationships, which was marginally significant in the positive direction.

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