

## Developmental Trajectories of Agency and Communion in Moral Motivation

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How does moral motivation develop across the life span? Previous research has indicated that moral exemplars have integrated the typically oppositional motives of agency and communion. The present research maps developmental trajectories in these motives that may lead to this end-point integration. Participants were 140 Canadians comprising four age groups (childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood, and mid-adulthood). Agentic and communal motivation was assessed in an interview that asked participants about aspects of their lives and prompted for the instrumental-terminal framing of their motives. Results indicated that agency was the dominant instrumental motive for all ages. In terms of terminal values, agency was the dominant motive early in development; however, the effect progressively weakened and, by mid-adulthood, had dissipated. The pattern of instrumental agency for communal goals increased across the age groups, implying that replacing agency with communion as the characteristic terminal motive represents an important goal for moral development.

Wherein is the motivation to act morally? How do motives of agency and communion interrelate in moral functioning? How do they develop? Answers to such questions have important implications for how we conceptualize morality, understand moral functioning, and attempt to foster its development. The present research attempts to advance our understanding of how moral motivation develops.

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The program of research, of which the present study is a part, represents an investigative process of reverse engineering. Previous research (reviewed in this article) sought to identify the “finished product”—developmentally mature moral exemplars—and to assess the characteristic psychological functioning that undergirds their action. The present research maps typical developmental trajectories in moral motivation. Future research will then determine the psychological mechanisms that influence these developmental trajectories and end states (e.g., progressions, stagnations) and their relationship to behavior, as well as implement and assess intervention efforts in this regard. Insights from previous research obviously set up assumptions and hypotheses for subsequent research.

### *Agency and Communion*

Agency and communion comprise the fundamental motivational duality of human existence (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1988; Wiggins, 1991). *Agency*, broadly defined, is the motive to individuate and advance the self; *communion* is the motive to relate to others and contribute to social cohesion. As will be explicated in this article, these metaconstructs emerge repeatedly in disparate literatures (e.g., social judgment, prejudice, the self; for a review, see Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008). Therein, agency and communion can have somewhat different meanings. However, a common theme is that these motives are conceptualized as being in tension. Hogan (1982) framed them antithetically as getting ahead versus getting along; and Schwartz (1992) contended that the more people endorse the agentic values of power and achievement, the less they will typically endorse the communal values of benevolence and universalism (and vice versa).

Agency and communion have been defined and measured variously, but the personality-development literature does suggest that these motives, writ large, evidence age-related patterns (for a review, see McAdams & Olson, 2010). For example, Ely, Melzi, Hodge, and McCabe (1998) found that themes of agency predominated over those of communion in the personal narratives of 4- to 9-year-old children and speculated that, with development, communion more explicitly becomes part of the essential self. Consistent with that suggestion, Diehl, Owen, and Youngblade (2004) examined the implicit expression of agency- and communion-related attributes in adults' (20–88 years) spontaneous self-representations and found that older adults expressed more communion attributes than did younger adults and that younger and middle-aged adults expressed more agency attributes than did the older adults.

A great deal of the empirical efforts in the area of personality has been framed within the five-factor model and involves reliance on standard personality inventories. Wiggins and Trapnell (1997) argued that agency and communion map onto the factors of extraversion and agreeableness, respectively. In that light, the meta-analysis of 92 longitudinal studies of mean-level personality change in behavioral traits, reported by Roberts, Walton, and Viechtbauer (2006), is illustrative. They observed that communal traits of agreeableness tend to increase across the life course, as well as traits of conscientiousness. They also found that agentic traits of social dominance (a subcategory of extraversion) showed a consistent pattern of increase from adolescence through mid-adulthood. However, a finer-grained analysis than is afforded by these broad factors of personality is necessary to adequately examine developmental trends in agentic and communal motivation. Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, and Knafo (2002) reported, for example, that different facets of extraversion were positively related to both agency and communion; that communion was also tapped by facets of agreeableness and openness; and that agency was also tapped by traits of conscientiousness. Contrary findings were reported by Diehl et al. (2004), who found that agency was negatively related to conscientiousness and positively related to openness. All of this to say that the Big-5 factors do not clearly overlap with the dual motives of agency and communion.

The conception of agency and communion that, in our view, best addresses the issue of moral motivation focuses on promoting the interests of self versus promoting the interests of others (Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, & Riches, 2011). Schwartz's (1992) values typology reflects this distinction well with the self-enhancing values of power and achievement defining agency and the self-transcending values of benevolence and universalism defining communion. Schwartz (2006) reported developmental trends, based on a sample of over 35,000 people (15 years and older), drawn from the 20-nation European Social Survey. He reported that agentic self-enhancement values decreased with age, whereas communal self-transcending values increased with age.

### *What Motivates Moral Exemplars?*

These developmental trends and the common perspective that agency and communion are antagonistic motives imply that moral exemplarity would require communion to somehow prevail over agency. But when agency and communion are in opposition, the motivation to contribute to the greater good lacks the impetus necessary to move from judgment to action since there is little personal investment in the enterprise.

To address this issue, Walker and Frimer (2007) undertook an examination of the motivational profiles of moral exemplars. Their participants were recipients of a national award for extraordinary volunteerism, as well as a demographically matched comparison group. Among other findings, these moral exemplars evidenced both more agency and more communion in their life-story interview than did the comparison participants. Both motives were strongly operative in their psychological functioning. Perhaps, for exemplars, agency and communion are not in opposition but instead have, in some way, become synergistically integrated.

Colby and Damon (1992) provided the first suggestive evidence of such integration by drawing qualitative impressions of the psychological functioning of a small sample of moral exemplars. Their major conclusion was that these exemplars did not subjugate their personal interests for the sake of their prosocial causes; rather, personal and moral concerns seemingly had become fused in their identity.

Frimer et al. (2011) found the first evidence of this agency–communion integration by using the same sample of adult moral exemplars as Walker and Frimer (2007) but implementing more precise definitions of agency and communion, microanalytic coding procedures, and person-level analytic strategies to more appropriately examine the issue. These researchers coded goal motivation as expressed in personal strivings and a life-story interview for 10 motivational themes, representing Schwartz's (1992) typology of universal values. This typology arrays values around a circular motivational continuum, and this circumplex structure has been validated in 344 samples from 83 countries in different regions of the world (Schwartz et al., 2012). These motivational values fall into four quadrants, reflecting two bipolar dimensions:

- *Agency* (power, achievement) versus *communion* (universalism, benevolence):<sup>1</sup> Agency entails the motivation to advance the self in a social hierarchy through social power, dominance, material wealth, and achievement, whereas communion entails the motivation to promote the interests of others through a concern for the welfare of others in everyday interactions and through a more universalized concern for others beyond the primary reference group and for ecological preservation. Agency and communion, in this conceptualization, explicitly juxtapose promoting the interests of self and others and thus frame the issue of moral motivation.
- *Openness to change* (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism<sup>2</sup> versus *conservation* (tradition, conformity, security): Openness to change entails

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1. Schwartz's label for the agency quadrant is self-enhancement and, for the communion quadrant, self-transcendence.

2. Hedonism straddles the boundary between self-enhancement and openness to change.

motivation for new ideas, actions, and experiences, whereas conservation entails motivation for self-restriction, order, and the status quo. These two quadrants entail values that are less relevant to moral motivation as conceptualized here.

A variety of models of agency and communion are extant (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008) but, conceptually, the foregoing definitions of agency as the self-enhancing values of power and achievement and of communion as the self-transcending values of benevolence and universalism best capture the oppositional dualism that, we posit, may be reconciled in moral maturity.

Frimer and colleagues (2011) found that moral exemplars tended to coordinate agentic and communal themes within their personal strivings and in the flow of their life stories, more so than comparison participants and even when controlling for baseline levels of motivation. Agency and communion may function dualistically for most people, but exemplars have overcome the tension by integrating their personal ambitions with their moral concerns. This suggests that the end-point goal for moral motivation is the integration of agency and communion in a form of enlightened self-interest. Morality can and should be self-regarding if it is to have motivational oomph (Walker, 2013).

### *The Structure of Agency–Communion Integration*

The evidence, thus, is that agentic and communal motivation frequently co-occur in the functioning of moral exemplars, but how are these motives integrated? In particular, what is the direction of the integrated relationship between agency and communion? Two possibilities, which carry vastly different moral weight, exist: One possibility would be the reliance on agentic motives to advance communal ends (e.g., “I desire to use my social standing to help others”); the other would be the use of communal motives to pursue agentic ends (e.g., “I want to help the poor so as to enhance my social status”). Rokeach (1973) first articulated this notion of instrumental and terminal value motivation. *Instrumental motivation* represents a means to some other end, whereas *terminal motivation* represents an ultimate value, an end in itself. Thus, agentic and communal motivation can be understood within an instrumental–terminal framework.

To investigate the direction of the instrumentality between agentic and communal motives, Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, and Dunlop (2012) examined the moral motivation of a different sample of exemplars: influential figures of the past century as identified by *Time* magazine. Expert raters judged the moral character of this set of target subjects. The top-ranking

figures were classified as moral exemplars (including several Nobel Peace Prize laureates); the bottom-ranking figures comprised a comparison group of similar renown and familiarity but who were not noted for their moral qualities. These historical figures were not available for direct research participation, so these researchers content-analyzed archival materials (their speeches and interviews) for agency and communion in an instrumental-terminal framework.

The comparison subjects evidenced strong agentic motivation at both the instrumental and the terminal levels: Agency was the means to attaining more power and achievement. They ubiquitously advanced notions of agency. The exemplars similarly evidenced strong agentic motivation at the instrumental level; after all, these were incredibly influential figures. However, in sharp contrast to the comparison group, exemplars' terminal motivation was predominantly communal. Thus, exemplars' moral motivation was hierarchically integrated, with agency instrumental to terminal communal ends. These findings reinforce the importance of distinguishing between instrumental and terminal aspects of motivation and, further, suggest that replacing agency with communion as the characteristic terminal motive represents a goal for moral development.

### *How Do Agency and Communion Develop?*

Instrumental motives seem to be predominantly agentic (for both exemplar and comparison participants). This represents the inherent motivational structure of goal-directed activity. Goals require motives of power and achievement for their attainment. Terminal motives, in contrast, may be more variable and have a stronger relation with moral behavior. But do instrumental and terminal motives vary across developmental levels?

Dunlop, Walker, and Matsuba (2013) reported the first study to compare the motivational profiles of exemplars at different points in the life span. Their participants were young adult exemplars (who had been identified for their extraordinary moral commitment to social service agencies), along with a matched comparison group, who were then contrasted with the influential historical figures from Frimer et al.'s (2012) study. The young adult participants completed an interview, which, among other aspects, focused on life goals that were coded for agentic and communal motivation within an instrumental-terminal framework.

The older comparison figures strongly typified unmitigated agency; the younger comparison participants also had agency predominate at both the instrumental and terminal levels, but the effect was attenuated at the terminal level. The older exemplars showed a pattern of instrumental agency but

terminal communion. The younger exemplars were not quite there: They showed predominantly instrumental agency, but, at the terminal level, they were in a divided state, pursuing agentic and communal goals with equal vigor. Thus, Dunlop et al.'s (2013) study provides preliminary evidence that the relation between the moral motives of agency and communion does change over the course of development.

### *The Present Study*

The purpose of the present study was to map developmental trajectories of agentic and communal motives within an instrumental–terminal framework. The study involved a cross-sectional research design, using a community-based sample comprising four age groups from a wide portion of the life span (8–45 years), to assess different phases that may mark transitions (childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood, and mid-adulthood). Because patterns of agency and communion may vary across cultural contexts (e.g., individualistic and collectivistic), we restricted our sample to the most populous ethnic group in the local region and deferred questions about cultural variability to future research (see the Discussion section). We assessed agentic and communal motives with a semistructured interview, asking each participant about the value motivation in various aspects of their everyday lives and prompting for the instrumental–terminal structure in their thinking.

Extrapolating from the findings of previous research, we predict that agency will be the dominant instrumental motive across the life span from childhood to mid-adulthood, but that the hegemony of agency as the terminal motive will decline over age as communal ends increase in significance. Delineating these trajectories of agency and communion will advance the process of reverse engineering of moral motivation and set the stage for subsequent research on the mechanisms underlying these trajectories and their relationship to behavior.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Participants were from Greater Vancouver, a cosmopolitan city on the west coast of Canada. Research assistants recruited prospective participants in public places in the community (e.g., community centers, coffee shops, parks) and through a process of snowballing. Aiming to avoid the possible moderating effects of culture/ethnicity, we limited the sample to the

most populous local ethnicity; thus, only individuals who self-identified as White/Caucasian, had English as their first language, and fit into one of the four age groups of interest (childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood, and mid-adulthood) qualified for the study. Limiting the study to one ethnicity also helped reduce the pragmatic challenge of recruiting demographically matched age groups. Participants received an honorarium of \$25.

The sample comprised 140 participants across four target age groups: childhood (8–12 years,  $M = 10.8$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ,  $n = 20$  boys and 20 girls), adolescence (14–18 years,  $M = 16.8$ ,  $SD = 1.9$ ,  $n = 20$  boys and 21 girls), emerging adulthood (20–28 years,  $M = 23.4$ ,  $SD = 2.7$ ,  $n = 20$  men and 19 women), and mid-adulthood (35–45 years,  $M = 40.9$ ,  $SD = 3.4$ ,  $n = 9$  men and 11 women).

### *Interview*

After providing written informed consent (parents for their children and adults for themselves), participants completed a self-report measure (not of interest here) and then responded to an individual audio-recorded interview that implicitly measured value motives of agency and communion. One of three trained female research assistants conducted the interviews, typically in a university lab. These interviews, averaging 30 minutes in length, were subsequently transcribed verbatim for blind coding.

The semistructured interview (inspired by Damon and Hart's [1988] self-understanding interview and by Frimer and Walker's [2009] self-understanding interview–transmogrified) asked participants about various aspects of their lives but within an instrumental–terminal framework, allowing their value-laden motives to emerge in an implicit fashion (McAdams, 1993). We contend that this implicit approach to assessing value motivation is not merely a redundant and labor-intensive means of measuring the same individual differences as would be provided by self-report measures (such as the Schwartz Value Survey; Schwartz, 1992). First, extant self-report measures do not appropriately tap the critical distinction between instrumental and terminal values and so do not assess their hierarchical integration that is of interest here. We rely on implicit measures because they much more clearly distinguished moral exemplars from comparison participants in previous research (Walker & Frimer, 2007). Second, implicit and explicit measures access different psychological systems, with implicit measures being more predictive of life outcomes than are explicit measures and less predictive of behavior in any specific context (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). Not surprisingly, then, implicit and explicit measures have been found to correlate weakly (Thrash & Elliot, 2002)



perhaps because they access different selves (agents vs. actors; McAdams, 2013) with different moral qualities (Frimer, Schaefer, & Oakes, 2014).

*Seed questions.* The interview had five seed questions regarding several domains of daily life: (a) Do you go to school? What do [did] you study? (b) Which of your activities are most important to you? (c) Who are the most significant people or groups of people in your life? (d) What is important to you in terms of your physical characteristics? (e) What are your responsibilities? These general questions were simply intended to focus attention on different but important domains of everyday life.

*Instrumental–terminal chain co-construction.* Each time a participant provided a response, the interviewer asked a series of follow-up prompts intended to co-construct, with the participant, an instrumental–terminal chain of moral motives. An instrumental–terminal chain is a sequence of concepts wherein any one concept is the result of the previous, ending in a terminal value that a person describes as being worthwhile in its own right. For example, if concept X will bring about concept Y, which will, in turn, bring about concept Z, then X is instrumental to Y, and Y is instrumental to Z (symbolically,  $X \rightarrow Y \rightarrow Z$ ). For example, a person may choose to study math (X) to get a good job (Y) to be able to support a family (Z). See the Appendix for annotated examples of two interview excerpts.

To co-construct a chain, the interviewer asked participants to explain the significance of (and thereby unwittingly give value content to) a first link. For example, if the response to a seed question was “I study math,” the interviewer would ask, “Why is studying math important to you?” The interviewer then subtly prompted the participant to explain the instrumentality of the link by asking, “What has been the result of [studying math]?” or “What do you hope to achieve by [studying math]?” The process was then repeated, establishing the value content and instrumentality of each link until the participant identified a terminal motive and had nothing further to add. And, when the interviewer suspected that the participant had no further links to report, she checked this by asking, “Is [supporting a family] satisfying in itself or do you hope that something else will come from it?” The chain was complete when the participant (a) had no further response or (b) offered a generic, value-neutral statement (e.g., “Just because” or “It will make me happy”<sup>3</sup>); otherwise, the co-construction of the chain continued. Across participants, each chain averaged 4.2 ( $SD = 1.0$ ) links, indicating that several instrumental motives were typically implicated before a terminal motive was articulated.

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3. Schwartz et al. (2001) found that happiness belongs at the neutral point of the typology of 10 universal values.

Participants often provided several responses to each of the five seed questions in the interview. The interviewer followed up on each response and co-constructed a respective chain. Across participants, interviews averaged 10.7 ( $SD = 2.8$ ) chains, providing a good sampling of value motivation in daily life. Thus, the interview allowed participants to express the structure of their moral motivation in several domains of everyday life.

### *Coding*

Trained research assistants coded the transcribed interviews, first for interview structure and then for motives at each location within the structure.

*Structure coding.* Structure coding involved carefully reading the transcript and identifying the exact text that comprised each link of each instrumental-terminal chain. The coder circled the text that made up a link and delineated each link's instrumental-terminal location by drawing arrows from one link to the next. The coder then summarized each link with a *stem* (i.e., a few words that captured the main thrust of the link) and entered this information into a computer spreadsheet.

A second trained coder determined the reliability of structure by coding a random subset (25%) of the interviews. To avoid compounding errors in subsequent steps and thus underestimating the reliability of coding, we divided the reliability coding into three sequential steps that map the logic of the coding process. The reliability coder followed the same procedure as the primary coder save for the modifications described in the following paragraph.

After coding the interview for a participant, the reliability coder counted the number of chains and recorded this in a spreadsheet. This first step of coding produced near-perfect agreement,  $r(34) = .96$ . In the rare cases of disagreement, the reliability coder adopted the primary coder's response and revised the reliability coding as needed. After doing so, the reliability coder, in the second step, counted the number of links for each chain. This second step also produced near-perfect agreement,  $r(370) = .92$ . Again, in the rare cases of disagreement, the reliability coder then adopted the response of the primary coder and revised the reliability coding accordingly. In the third and final step, the reliability coder identified a stem (a few words that captured the essence) for each link. A second reliability coder judged stem agreement by ascertaining whether the 1,572 pairs of stems that each of the primary and reliability coders had produced captured the same concept. Reliability on this third step was, again, excellent with 96% agreement. We relied on data from the primary coder for all subsequent coding and analyses.

*Motive coding.* Once the structure coding of the interview was complete, a trained research assistant undertook motive coding by analyzing the content of each stem. For each stem, the coder judged the single most strongly implied value motive by matching concepts to the *Values Embedded in Narrative (VEiN) Coding Manual* (Frimer, Walker, & Dunlop, 2009), which taps Schwartz's (1992) typology of values in narrative text. Coding was performed at the level of the 10 VEiNs (viz., power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security). As noted before, the 10 values are situated around a circumplex, summarized by two bipolar dimensions, forming four quadrants: agency (power and achievement) versus communion (universalism and benevolence), and conservation (tradition, conformity, and security) versus openness to change (self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism). With our theoretical interest being in two value quadrants—agency (as power and/or achievement) and communion (as universalism and/or benevolence)—we recoded the VEiNs to be agency, communion, or neither. A second trained coder determined the reliability of this classification by coding a random subset (25%) of the interviews. Reliability was substantial with 86% agreement and  $\kappa_n = .80$ .

*Validity of motive coding.* The VEiN methodology has been validated in several studies: Frimer and Walker (2009) found that VEiN coding distinguished participants in terms of their self-reported and observed moral behavior; and Frimer et al. (2011, 2012) and Dunlop et al. (2013) found that VEiN coding readily distinguished different sets of moral exemplars (who have engaged in a “moral career”) from matched comparison groups. And one of the significant advantages of the VEiN methodology is that its coding can be applied to any sort of textual material, including life-story interviews (Dunlop et al., 2013; Frimer et al., 2011), self-understanding interviews (Frimer & Walker, 2009), personal strivings and personal projects (Dunlop et al., 2013; Frimer et al., 2011), and speeches and media interviews (Frimer et al., 2012).

### *Analytic Strategy*

The number of chains that participants produced in response to questioning in the interview was unrelated to age,  $r(139) = -.08$ ,  $p = .33$ , and there was a nonsignificant trend for the number of links per chain to decrease slightly with age,  $r(139) = -.16$ ,  $p = .06$ . Counter to the intuition that perhaps adults have more to say than children or are more likely to confabulate, the data weakly suggest the opposite. Variability in verbal production is not of prime interest in this study; however, to remove individual differences

in verbal productivity, we operationalized motives in terms of *proportions* (dividing the relevant frequencies by the total opportunities). For example, we calculated the proportion of terminal agency as the number of terminal concepts expressed that endorsed agentic (power or achievement) values, divided by the total number of chains in the interview. With this operationalization, participants who spoke more in the interview (and therefore had more chains or more links per chain) would be no more or less likely to evidence any particular motives than less talkative participants.

The proportions of terminal agency and terminal communion are straightforward to determine since each chain of responses has a single terminal motive. The proportions of instrumental agency and instrumental communion are less straightforward to determine since the number of instrumental links varies across chains. To determine the proportions of instrumental agency and instrumental communion, averages were calculated based on the number of links in each chain. For example, if a chain of responses had five instrumental links (leading to a terminal value) with three links being coded as agency, one as communion, and one as neither, the proportion of instrumental agency for that chain would be .6 and the proportion of instrumental communion would be .2. These proportions were then averaged over the chains of responses in the interview.

To summarize, we examined value motives within an instrumental–terminal framework by interviewing people from four age groups about various aspects of their lives and asking them to explain how their current endeavors might be instrumental to more ultimate (terminal) goals. We later analyzed the content of the value motives that emerged in their chains of responses in terms of agency (power and/or achievement) and communion (benevolence and/or universalism).

## Results

### *Omnibus Analysis*

Our primary interest was in developmental trajectories of moral motivation as expressed within an instrumental–terminal framework. Does agency or does communion dominate? Does it depend on the level within this framework? How do they relate? Our main analysis took the form of a 4 (age group: childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood, mid-adulthood)  $\times$  2 (gender: male, female)  $\times$  2 (motive: agency, communion)  $\times$  2 (level: instrumental, terminal) mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA) that used proportional scores as the dependent variable. We included gender as a variable because agency is sometimes aligned with masculinity and

communion with femininity (Wiggins, 1991). However, in this analysis, the main effect of gender and all interactions involving gender were not significant ( $ps > .21$  and  $\eta_p^2s < .04$ ). Thus, we consider gender no further in these analyses.

This omnibus analysis revealed a main effect for motive,  $F(1, 132) = 128.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .49$ , indicating that, overall, people express more agency than communion. A main effect for level was also revealed,  $F(1, 132) = 23.53, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ , indicating that people expressed more agency and communion at the instrumental than at the terminal level. Significant two-way interaction effects for age group  $\times$  motive and for motive  $\times$  level were also revealed, but were qualified by the critical three-way age group  $\times$  motive  $\times$  level interaction,  $F(3, 132) = 3.58, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .07$ .

### *Motives for Each Age Group*

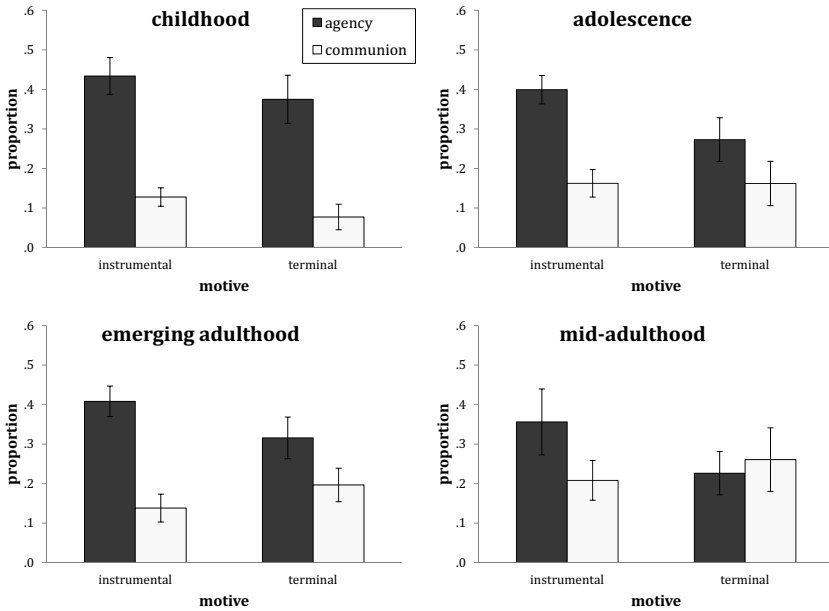
We decomposed this three-way interaction with a motive  $\times$  level ANOVA for each age group separately, addressing this question: Does the structure of moral motivation differ across developmental periods? Figure 1 shows the proportion of instrumental agency and communion and of terminal agency and communion for each age group.

In childhood, only main effects of motive (with agency being dominant over communion) and of level (with stronger motivation at the instrumental level than the terminal level) emerged,  $F_s(1, 39) = 126.49$  and  $14.24, ps < .001, \eta_p^2s = .76$  and  $.27$ , respectively. For each of the three other age groups, a motive  $\times$  level interaction was found: for adolescence,  $F(1, 40) = 8.88, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .18$ ; for emerging adulthood,  $F(1, 38) = 17.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$ ; and for mid-adulthood,  $F(1, 19) = 8.77, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = .32$ .

In adolescence, follow-up analyses indicated that agency predominated over communion at both the instrumental and the terminal levels, but that the effect was noticeably weaker at the terminal level,  $F_s(1, 40) = 62.28$  and  $7.23, ps < .001$  and  $= .01, \eta_p^2s = .61$  and  $.15$ , respectively.

Likewise, in emerging adulthood, analyses following up on the motive  $\times$  level interaction indicated that agency predominated over communion at both levels, but that the effect was again weaker at the terminal level,  $F_s(1, 38) = 86.12$  and  $9.80, ps < .001$  and  $= .003, \eta_p^2s = .69$  and  $.21$ , respectively.

In mid-adulthood, follow-up analyses indicated that, at the instrumental level, as with the other age groups, agency was more



**Figure 1.** Proportional scores for instrumental agency and communion and for terminal agency and communion for each of four age groups. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

prevalent than communion,  $F(1, 19) = 7.53, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .29$ . However, at the terminal level, the prevalence of agentic and communion motivation did not differ,  $F(1, 19) = 0.43, p = .52, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ; indeed, the direction of the difference had reversed, with more terminal communion than agency.

In summary, in all age groups from childhood to mid-adulthood, instrumental motivation was primarily expressed in agentic terms, which is not surprising given its instrumentality. In terms of terminal values, agency was also the dominant motive in the younger age groups, but the effect progressively weakened and, by mid-adulthood, had dissipated. Indeed, an analysis of the relations between terminal motives and exact age indicates that terminal agency decreased over age,  $r(139) = -.21, p = .01$ , whereas terminal communion increased with age,  $r(139) = +.40, p < .001$ . The rise of terminal communion is particularly pronounced, increasing from 8% in childhood to 26% in mid-adulthood.

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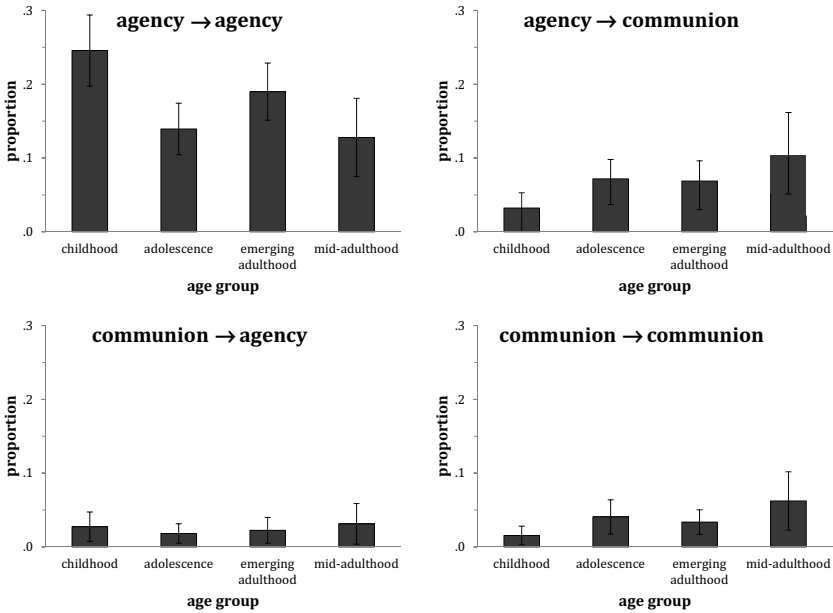
*Patterns of Initial Instrumental and Terminal Motivation*

Although revelatory in many respects, the previous set of analyses has a couple of limitations that can be overcome by examining the data in a different manner. The previous analyses assessed instrumental agentic and communal motivation by averaging over the links within a chain of responses. This may best reflect the “weight” of the instrumental motivation, but it obscures the relationship between the initially expressed motive and the terminal value, which would be more consistent with the analytic strategy of previous research (Frimer et al., 2012). In the following set of analyses, various patterns in the relationship between the initial instrumental motive (the first link in the chain of responses) and the terminal motive are assessed: (a) initial instrumental agency culminating in terminal agency (agency → agency; i.e., agency for agency’s sake), (b) initial instrumental agency for a communal end (agency → communion), (c) initial communion leading to agency (communion → agency), and (d) initial communion culminating in terminal communion (communion → communion). The proportion of each participant’s chains of responses reflecting each of these four patterns was determined.

The previous set of analyses examined the relationship between the type (agency, communion) and level (instrumental, terminal) of moral motivation within each age group—and found that these relationships indeed differed across age groups—but the analyses did not directly assess developmental trajectories. In the following set of analyses, developmental trends in the four patterns of relationships between initial and terminal motive are examined. Figure 2 illustrates these developmental trajectories.

For each pattern of relationships, we conducted a trend analysis by using age group as the independent variable. For agency → agency, a significant linear trend was found,  $F(1, 136) = 8.22, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .06$ , indicating that this pattern of motivation generally declines across age groups (see Figure 2); indeed, the correlation with exact age was  $r(139) = -.21, p = .01$ . However, a cubic trend was also significant,  $F(1, 136) = 8.67, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .06$ , meaning that this pattern reasserts itself somewhat in emerging adulthood.

For agency → communion (arguably the ideal form of integrated motivation), a significant linear trend was found,  $F(1, 136) = 8.60, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .06$ , indicating that the pattern of instrumental agency for communal ends clearly increases across age groups. The correlation between the proportional scores for this pattern and exact age was  $r(139) = +.24, p = .004$ .



**Figure 2.** Proportional scores, across age groups, for four different patterns of links from initial to terminal motive. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

The communion → agency pattern was rare for any age (averaging just 2%), and the trend analysis indicated no significant effects,  $F(3, 136) = 0.34$ ,  $p = .80$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ .

Finally, for communion → communion, a significant linear trend was found,  $F(1, 136) = 6.06$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ , indicating that the motivational pattern of communion for communion's sake increases over age groups (as with agency for communion's sake). The correlation between the proportional scores for this pattern and exact age was  $r(139) = +.25$ ,  $p = .005$ .

## Discussion

All of us possess, in some measure, the desires to promote our own interests as well as the interests of others, but these desires are often in conflict, with the advancement of one resulting in the diminution of the other, typically with the interests of the self prevailing. Advancing



the interests of the self (self-enhancing agency) and advancing the interests of others (self-transcending communion) are typically conceptualized as an oppositional dualism. *Agentic motivation*, as defined here, is concern for social power, dominance, material resources, and achievement, whereas *communal motivation* is concern for the welfare of others in everyday interactions, as well as a more universalized concern for those beyond the primary reference group, including ecological preservation.

Moral exemplars, however, have seemingly surmounted this dualism, with agency and communion becoming hierarchically integrated such that self-interests are fulfilled through the pursuit of communal concerns (Colby & Damon, 1992; Dunlop et al., 2013; Frimer et al., 2011, 2012; Walker & Frimer, 2007). When agency is channeled into communal goals, the personal interest at stake provides the motivational impetus to energize judgment into action (Bergman, 2004; Blasi, 1984; for a review, see Walker, 2014). Thus, the “finished product”—developmentally mature moral exemplars—evidence a pattern of moral motivation that synergistically integrates agency into communion.

We suggest that this integration represents a developmental achievement, with typical adults having traversed some, but not all, of the developmental trajectory from childhood to moral exemplarity. We conducted a cross-sectional study with four age groups (childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood, and mid-adulthood), covering much of the life span (8–45 years). We assessed moral motives of agency and communion within an instrumental–terminal framework by interviewing participants about various aspects of their lives and asking them to explain how their current endeavors might be instrumental to their terminal goals. This enabled a developmental mapping of trajectories of moral motivation that may lead to the end-point integration of agency and communion. Tapping the instrumental–terminal distinction in value motivation became clearly evident as an important conceptual and methodological innovation of this work.

Agency was the dominant instrumental motive from childhood through mid-adulthood, representing the inherent and ubiquitous motivational structure of goal-directed activity. Agency was also the dominant terminal motive early in development, but, with increasing age, its hegemony as a terminal value diminished, albeit far from being completely extinguished (consistent with some of the previous research on developmental trends in motivation reviewed in this article’s introduction). Thus, the typical pattern from childhood through emerging adulthood

indicated a movement toward, but failure to achieve, integration; indeed, the dominant pattern was agency as the means to more agency. This pattern was particularly evident in emerging adulthood, a period that may represent a motivational turning point in the life span (Arnett, 2007; Erikson, 1968) as young adults prepare for careers and choose among certain social roles and lifestyles.

Communion as a terminal value increased markedly in significance from childhood to mid-adulthood, and the pattern of instrumental agency in service to terminal communion—the critical form of motivational integration—similarly increased in frequency. By mid-adulthood, terminal motives tended to be about equally agentic and communal.

Integrating with previous research (Dunlop et al., 2013; Frimer et al., 2011, 2012), several relevant observations can be made. The motivational profiles of children in this study and the nonmoral influential figures in Frimer et al.'s (2012) study were strikingly similar: Both treated agency as a means to more agency. The emerging adults in this study and the young-adult comparison participants in Dunlop et al.'s (2013) study evidenced the same profile, which is as would be expected given the similar age range and which provides a partial replication. The midlife adults in the present study evidenced parity between agency and communion as a terminal motive, which is the same pattern as the younger moral exemplars in Dunlop et al.'s study (indicating that those young-adult exemplars are developmentally advanced), but both groups fall short of the strong pattern of instrumental agency for terminal communion exemplified by the moral exemplars of historical renown (Frimer et al., 2012). In other words, the accumulated evidence is that the development of moral motivation covers most of the life span and is typically not complete in most adults.

The basic issue addressed by the present study focused on how moral motivation develops across the life span. The findings of previous studies in this program of research indicated that developmental maturity, as indicated by the functioning of moral exemplars, entails the synergistic integration of the typically antagonistic motives of agency and communion. The contribution of the present study was to further the process of reverse engineering by charting the developmental trajectory of the relationship between agentic and communal motivation that may lead to this endpoint integration that fosters moral excellence. Empirically, our innovative interview methodology that elicited participants' framing of their instrumental motives in relation to terminal (ultimate) values was particularly

consequential because it revealed that the hierarchically integrated pattern of agentic motivation in service to communal concerns increased across age groups from childhood to mid-adulthood and implied that displacing agency with communion as the terminal value should be a fundamental goal for moral development.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

A limitation of the present study is that inferences regarding developmental trajectories were made on the basis of cross-sectional data. Only a longitudinal design has the potential to rule out cohort effects and to assess intraindividual patterns of change in the relationship between agency and communion. Interestingly, generational differences on related variables have been reported. For example, Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman (2012) analyzed national survey data from high school and university students collected at different points in time, thus representing different birth cohorts: Boomers (born 1943–1961), Generation X'ers (born 1961–1981), and Millennials (born 1982–1999). Overall trends indicated that later cohorts more strongly endorsed extrinsic and narcissistic life goals than did earlier cohorts (suggesting a pattern of increasing agency across generations) while, at the same time, later cohorts were less likely to endorse goals reflecting concern for others, community feeling, and empathy (suggesting a concomitant pattern of decreasing communion). Untangling age- and time-related effects remains a focus for future research.

A related limitation of the present study is that portions of the life span were not represented in the sample. How moral motives are configured in early childhood and whether these motives continue to develop in later adulthood remain questions for further research. The methodology employed here may not be amenable to assessing the motivation of young children, so that presents a further research challenge.

Another limitation of the present study was the restriction of the sample to one cultural/ethnic group. Indeed, there is some evidence that patterns of agency and communion may vary between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, & Neberich, 2013). Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) have urged caution in drawing inferences about humanity at large based on data from a single subpopulation, particularly one that is WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic). They concluded, in their review, that members of individualistic Western societies were more likely to

hold independent self-concepts, whereas interdependent self-concepts were more common in collectivistic non-Western societies (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), as evidenced by Westerners' more positive self views, heightened value on self-direction and choice, and weaker motivation to conform.

These particular aspects of agency and communion for which there is evidence of cultural variability seem to pertain primarily to psychological distance (i.e., individuality-relatedness; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998) rather than to the promoting-interests aspects that are the focus of the present study. In that regard, it is noteworthy that Frimer et al. (2011) found that agency and communion were integrated in the motivation of moral exemplars only when these constructs were defined in terms of promoting interests of self versus others and not when they were defined in terms of an alternate scheme focusing on psychological distance. Further, Henrich et al. (2010) noted striking similarities across cultural groups and societies in some psychological characteristics, notably including personality structure (e.g., behavioral traits of dominance and nurturance). However, given our individualistic sample, we make no claim that the effects generalize to other cultural orientations, although recent findings suggest that they may. Frimer et al. (2014) asked both individualists and collectivists to describe their goals and then rate the degree to which their goals promote self-interest (agency) and the interests of others (communion). Both groups claimed that their goals advanced the self's interests more so than the interests of others. This dominance of agency over communion was evident in both samples, albeit greater for individualists, suggesting that culture can only partially moderate (and not eliminate) the dominance of agency over communion. Future research should examine cultural variability in the interplay between agency and communion within the instrumental-terminal framework that was so informative here.

In a related manner, the findings may be constrained by social-structural influences that are extant in modern technological societies. Such influences in children's and adolescents' lives seemingly are rather agentic in nature, including the ubiquitous requirement of school attendance that values achievement, the structured and often-coerced activities that pervade out-of-school time, the technological devices that can constrain meaningful human interaction, and the dominance of a worldview that often reifies economic development over other concerns. It was not always so, and it is not so everywhere. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the context in which the present research is situated and to remain mindful of the potential impact of the social-structural influences on patterns of motivation.

Despite its effectiveness in mapping developmental trajectories of moral motivation, the methodology of the present study presents an obstacle for further research. The individual interview format and the painstaking microanalytic coding of structure and motives are very labor intensive, and more expedient methods for obtaining similar data with reliability and validity would be advantageous for the research enterprise. Note, however, that implicit and explicit measures of the same construct rarely correlate with each other and often relate to behavioral indices in markedly different ways (McClelland et al., 1989), suggesting that they are tapping fundamentally different underlying mechanisms. Further research employing a range of measures of motivation may provide some clarification in this regard.

The present research examined the motivational functioning of ordinary folk. Future research should map and compare the developmental trajectories of moral exemplars versus other types of exemplars (political, business). Such research could test that notion (Frimer & Walker, 2009) that moral exemplars follow a typical developmental trajectory up until some turning-point phase when they diverge from their cohort.

Such research begs the question of the developmental mechanisms underlying divergent developmental trajectories, which is the subsequent step in the process of reverse engineering. What influences the various turning points, progressions, stagnations, and end states? How do these different developmental trajectories relate to behavior? We anticipate in that regard that a moral lifestyle will be more strongly related to patterns of moral motivation than idiosyncratic single behaviors.

The evidence from the present study is that the typical developmental trajectory is for motives of terminal communion to increase and that instrumental agency puts wind into these sails. We can speculate regarding—and proffer for future research—various social and intrapsychic factors that might contribute to this pattern of moral motivation: for example, developing social awareness and expanded worldviews (Selman, 1980), resolution of the tension between agentic and communal motivation (Frimer & Walker, 2009), meaningful contact with a prosocial cause (Hart & Matsuba, 2009), and the changing demands and opportunities associated with different phases of the life span (e.g., generativity; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). Once the psychological mechanisms underlying patterns of moral motivation are better understood, we will be in the place to implement intervention programs and to effect change.

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### **Appendix: Examples of Interview Excerpts Coded for Motives**

Here are two illustrative examples of interview coding, with arrows delineating instrumental–terminal structure and with motive coding of relevant links in the left margin. Agentic motives are achievement (AC) or power (PO). Communal motives are universalism (UN) or benevolence (BE). Also coded here is self-direction (SD), a motive that belongs within neither agency nor communion.

A first example illustrates three instrumental agentic motives leading to a terminal communion motive. The participant was a 15-year-old girl (ID no. 123). Integrated chains such as this one were rare for this individual (13%); more of her chains terminated in agency (33%).

AC	<p>DO YOU GO TO SCHOOL?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GO TO SCHOOL?</p> <p>It's important to learn things so that later on you can get a good job. . . .</p>
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PO	<p>WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GET A JOB?</p> <p>You'll probably need to earn some money for your life, just to buy things. It's pretty important to get a job, to basically earn money. And also if you enjoy it, like if you enjoy your job that could be nice too.</p> <p>SO IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A JOB THAT YOU ENJOY?</p> <p>Yes.</p>
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PO	<p>WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH THE MONEY YOU EARN?</p> <p>Obviously you need to buy some things, like food or other necessary things. You could also donate it to important causes, to help other people.</p>
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UN	<p>WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MAKE DONATIONS?</p> <p>I think in [my home town], I think I am pretty fortunate and if you . . . well, it is important to help the other people who are less fortunate. I think here we are a lot better off than some people in Third World countries. It is important to help them, too, instead of just living here with a lot of stuff that they don't have.</p> <p>IS IT SATISFYING IN ITSELF TO HELP OTHERS OR DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING ELSE FROM IT? OR DO YOU HOPE SOMETHING ELSE WILL COME FROM IT?</p> <p>It is satisfying. I mean if you donate money or something else like that, knowing that you've helped someone . . . they might need help for.</p> <p>SO IT'S SATISFYING KNOWING THAT YOU'VE HELPED SOMEONE?</p> <p>Yes.</p>
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A second example illustrates agency dominating both instrumental and terminal levels of motivation. The participant was an 18-year-old boy (ID no. 48). Over the course of his interview, his terminal motives were predominantly agentic (54%) and only rarely communal (8%).

AC	<p>DO YOU GO TO SCHOOL?</p> <p>Yes.</p>
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PO	<p>WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU TO GO TO SCHOOL?</p> <p>I don't know; I just think it is the only way to get ahead. Frankly, nowadays it is very difficult to make anything of yourself without a degree. At least it is something.</p>
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SD	<p>WHY IT IS A DEGREE IMPORTANT?</p> <p>I think it is like a starting a step to getting possibly a job or at least finding out what you want to do.</p> <p>DO YOU KNOW THE JOBS THAT YOU ARE INTO DOING?</p> <p>No, actually. I am thinking of microbiology as my area. Although a job? Frankly, I don't know if I want to do research. That is kind of a hassle. I also want to be a writer, so that is fairly conflicting.</p> <p>SO RIGHT NOW IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU ARE HERE AT SCHOOL TO, LIKE YOU SAY, FIND OUT WHAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO DO. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE THIS TIME TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO?</p> <p>Because I think in about 5 or 10 years, once you get into a family life or job setting, you really don't have the opportunity to take the time and have fun and see what you want to do. This is really like an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.</p>
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PO	<p>WHAT WOULD BE THE RESULT FOR YOU OF HAVING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THIS TIME?</p> <p>Hopefully I can find something that I at least mildly like and hopefully I will make some money, as well. I think ultimately I would rather be happy than make money.</p>
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AC	<p>SO YOU WOULD RATHER BE HAPPY IN TERMS OF A JOB OR?</p> <p>I would rather be at a job that I like.</p> <p>IF YOU WERE ABLE TO GET A JOB THAT YOU LIKED, WHAT WOULD BE THE RESULT OF THAT? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU TO DO WHAT YOU LIKE?</p> <p>I think people excel in the areas that they like. I don't think anybody will put their 100% effort into something they do just to get the money. It just seems like, especially if you are going in to something like sciences, like microbiology, you are not going to put in the extra effort to get the job done when you are only kind of cashing out because there are other things.</p>
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SO YOU THINK THAT IF YOU DO WHAT YOU LIKE THEN YOU WOULD EXCEL. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU TO EXCEL?

GENERIC

I think you only get one life. Frankly, I don't really want to waste mine behind a desk doing nothing. I can really do anything. I don't really know what it is that I am going to find what I like. Whatever it is . . . it just seems like it is really about being happy, ultimately, I think.