



## Within-person covariation of agentic and communal perceptions: Implications for interpersonal theory and assessment

Michael J. Roche<sup>\*</sup>, Aaron L. Pincus, Amanda L. Hyde, David E. Conroy, Nilam Ram

The Pennsylvania State University, 361 Moore Building, University Park, PA 16802, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Available online 10 February 2013

#### Keywords:

Interpersonal theory  
Longitudinal  
Personality traits  
Personality disorder  
Narcissism  
Dependency  
EMA  
ECR  
Multilevel model

### ABSTRACT

Interpersonal theory identifies agency and communion as uncorrelated (orthogonal) dimensions, largely evidenced by research examining between-person analyses of single-occasion measures. However, longitudinal studies of interpersonal behavior demonstrated the within-person association of agency and communion is not orthogonal for many individuals, and between-person differences in these associations relate to adjustment. We applied a similar approach to investigate the association of interpersonal perceptions. 184 university students completed a 7-day event-contingent study of their interpersonal experiences. Using multilevel regression models, we demonstrated that agentic and communal perceptions were positively associated, and the strength of this within-person association was moderated by between-person scores of dependency and narcissism. We discuss the benefits of incorporating within-person interpersonal associations (termed interpersonal covariation) into interpersonal theory and assessment.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

The interpersonal theory of personality (Fournier, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2011; Pincus & Ansell, 2013) recognizes that humans are social animals and inherently experience many of life's meaningful moments in the context of relating to other people. These interpersonal experiences refer to the observable behavioral exchanges between two (or more) individuals, as well as the internal interpersonal processes evoked through the capacity for perception, memory, fantasy, and mental representation (Lukowitsky & Pincus, 2011). Contemporary interpersonal theory posits a meta-theoretical structure based on the two broad dimensions of agency and communion to organize interpersonal experiences (Bakan, 1966; Wiggins, 2003). Consistent with this, Leising and Bleidorn (2011) found that agency and communion are dimensions people spontaneously used in describing others' overt interpersonal behavior.

Agency is the condition of mastery and assertion, a term that can be represented in interpersonal motivations (to be in control vs. to defer control), traits (assertive vs. passive), behaviors (to dominate vs. to submit), and perceptions (to perceive dominance vs. submissiveness). Communion is the condition of connectedness, involvement and sharing with others, a term that can be represented in interpersonal motivations (to be close vs. to disaffiliate), traits (warmth vs. coldness), behaviors (to be friendly

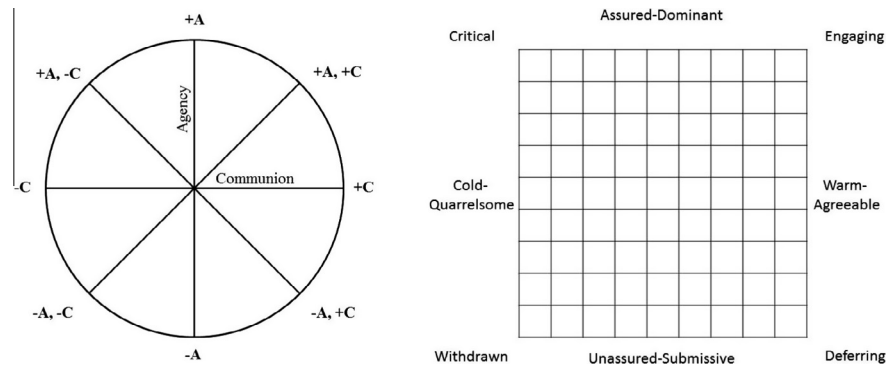
vs. to be unfriendly), and perceptions (to perceive friendliness vs. to perceive unfriendliness). These constructs share considerable overlap with the interpersonal traits of the Five Factor Model, as the traits of extraversion (high agency, high communion) and agreeableness (low agency, high communion) are considered rotational variants of agency and communion, and vice versa (McCrae & Costa, 1989).

Importantly, the dimensions of agency and communion are thought to be orthogonal, that is, conceptually and empirically independent of one another (Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1991). Agency and communion are represented conceptually (and often empirically) as axes of the interpersonal circle (IPC; see Fig. 1), where agency is denoted along the Y-axis and communion along the X-axis. The space between these axes represents combinations of agency and communion. There is ample evidence to suggest the two-dimensional structure of agency and communion underlies individual differences in interpersonal functioning at the trait level (Wiggins, 1979), and dispositional (between-person) measures based on agency and communion are often constructed to meet this criterion (Gurtman, 1993; Gurtman & Pincus, 2003; Locke, 2011).

Recently Fournier, Moskowitz, and Zuroff (2009) investigated whether this pattern would replicate for interpersonal behavior occurring in naturalistic settings. To examine this hypothesis, they asked 50 participants to record their interpersonal behaviors during 5 min (or longer) social interactions across 20 days. Participants completed the Social Behavior Inventory (SBI; Moskowitz, 1994), which presents a list of behaviors (organized into scales of dominance, submissiveness, friendliness, and unfriendliness), and

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [mjr386@gmail.com](mailto:mjr386@gmail.com) (M.J. Roche).



**Fig. 1.** The interpersonal circle and interpersonal grid. The interpersonal circle (left) is a conceptual model for orienting the interpersonal dimensions of agency and communion. The interpersonal grid (right) is an assessment tool used to measure the constructs. Adapted from “Assessing interpersonal perceptions using the interpersonal grid”, by D.S. Moskowitz and D.C. Zuroff, 2005, *Psychological Assessment*, 17, p. 221. Adapted with permission.

asks the participant to endorse the behaviors they enacted during that interaction. The authors calculated within-person correlations to obtain idiographic linkages or “covariations” between these four behavior scales.

As expected, the behaviors generally conformed to the circular structure, such that opposing sides of the circle were strongly negatively associated ( $r_{\text{dominance vs. submissiveness}} = -.69$ ;  $r_{\text{friendliness vs. unfriendliness}} = -.71$ ), and correlations between behavior scales at right angles on the circle were about half the size of the correlations obtained from opposing behavioral scales ( $r_{\text{dominance vs. friendliness}} = -.35$ ;  $r_{\text{dominance vs. unfriendliness}} = -.19$ ;  $r_{\text{submissiveness vs. friendliness}} = -.11$ ;  $r_{\text{submissiveness vs. unfriendliness}} = -.39$ ). However, the authors also found that the within-subject covariation scores for agency and communion spanned virtually the entire length of the correlation continuum ( $-.99, .87$ ), indicating that behavior is not organized in strict adherence to the IPC (Fournier et al., 2009). For some individuals, behaving dominantly tended to covary with behaving in a friendly way, while for others dominant behaviors tended to covary with unfriendly behaviors. These behavioral covariation scores were not significantly associated with interpersonal traits assessed by the Interpersonal Adjectives Scales (Wiggins, 1995) or with the five-factor model traits of extraversion or agreeableness evaluated using the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992), suggesting these covariation scores were not isomorphic with (i.e. not a redundant description of) an individual’s IPC trait profile. Instead, these covariation scores quantify how an individual links agency and communion when behaving towards others in their natural world. The authors found the covariation of dominance and unfriendliness was negatively related to openness to experience, while the covariation of dominance and friendliness was positively associated with self-esteem, and negatively associated with depression and neuroticism. Thus, the covariation of agentic and communal behavior reflects a unique individual difference distinct from interpersonal style that is related to dispositional measures of socio-emotional adjustment.

An equally interesting line of investigation is the extent of covariation between interpersonal perceptions of agency and communion, and what contributes to this covariation. In fact, there is some preliminary evidence to suggest that interpersonal perception covariation does exist, and may play a role in social learning. Benjamin (1988 and 1996) developed the Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB), an alternative IPC model, to articulate how the dimensions of agency (differentiation vs. enmeshment) and communion (love vs. hate) are incorporated into interpersonal experiences of perceiving others, behaving towards others, and actions directed inwardly toward the self (i.e. introjection). Benjamin (1988) asked 105 college students (blind to the structure of SASB) to rate the similarity of SASB items on dimensions of agency and

communion. Participants tended to rate SASB descriptors (Intrex Questionnaire items) of interpersonal warmth as simultaneously affirming and autonomy granting, and rated SASB descriptors of interpersonal coldness as simultaneously controlling, providing evidence for covariation within the structure of the SASB interpersonal surfaces. Also using the SASB, Benjamin (2000) demonstrated that college students who rated their mother to be friendly and dominant reported a greater agreement between what the mother expected of them, and how they behaved (i.e. introject). In a laboratory experiment, perceiving more warmth (high communion) and dominance (high agency) in parental figures was related to increased imitation of play behaviors among children (Hetherington & Frankie, 1967).

How a person comes to perceive their world has important implications across many fields of study. Social psychologists have emphasized agency (competence) and communion (warmth) as universal themes of social cognition, and have proposed how combinations of these dimensions could lead to distinct behaviors (Abele, Uchronski, Suitner, & Wokciszke, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Within life-span literature, McAdams (1985) has emphasized how narrative themes of both agency and communion can impact Erikson’s concept of generativity, while Hassan and Bar-Yam (1987) theorize how communion interacts with agency to promote psychosocial development across the lifespan. Research on leadership styles indicated the most effective leaders were perceived as high in agency (ambition) and communion (sociable) (Stogdill, 1974). Group dynamics and communications literature also highlight how perceiving communion in others can promote agentic goals such as productivity (Leonard, 1997; Turner, 1982). In short, examining the within-person patterning and covariation of interpersonal perception could have broad appeal to many fields already interested in understanding agentic and communal perception.

The current investigation focuses on how the extent of covariation of interpersonal perceptions relates to pathological personality dimensions. This application is particularly relevant as personality pathology is increasingly defined as a disorder of perceiving and relating to others (Skodol, 2012). The importance of how perceptions of others are organized (or perhaps distorted) and its impact on personality pathology is highlighted in several literatures including cognitive-behavioral (Beck, Freeman, Davis, et al., 2004), interpersonal (Leising & Borkenau, 2011; Pincus & Hopwood, 2012), psychodynamic (Bornstein, Denckla, & Chung, 2012), self-other agreement and person perception (Oltmanns & Turkheimer, 2006), and attachment (Shorey, 2010) theories of personality and psychopathology, as well as the integrative Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) approach to personality and adjustment (Eaton, South, & Krueger, 2009; Kammrath, 2011). Examining the covariation of interpersonal perception in personal-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10471131>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10471131>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)