Personality Psychology

Agency and Communion in Racial/Ethnic Narratives and Relations With Racial/Ethnic Identity

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Examining agency and communion in narratives about race and ethnicity can reveal how experiences of autonomy and connection shape the development of racial/ethnic identity. Across two studies of racially and ethnically diverse young adults, we examined themes of agency and communion in narratives about feeling aware of race and ethnicity in relation to measures of identity. Study 1 ($N = 154$) examined cross-sectional and longitudinal relations of agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity in two waves of data gathered six-months apart. Study 2 ($N = 942$) examined these cross-sectional associations in a larger, multi-site sample. In Study 1, themes of agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures were stable across waves and racial/ethnic identity predicted variations in themes over time. Across studies, communion correlated positively with measures of racial/ethnic identity, and themes of agency and communion were positively related. This research provides insight into a narrative feature that might promote racial/ethnic identity and the importance of considering how narrative themes function in context.

Agency (i.e., autonomy/control) and *communion* (i.e., connection/unity) are fundamental human motives (Bakan, 1966) that are central to personality and identity (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Although substantial research has examined manifestations of agency and communion to explain cultural differences in how people organize their social worlds, less research has applied these dimensions to assess variations in identity based on race and ethnicity (Revelle, 2023)[1]. Race and ethnicity are significant psychosocial constructs, especially in the U.S. where dynamics of power and oppression underscore the need for both self-advocacy and group connection (Rogers et al., 2020). Past research suggests that narrative themes of agency and communion inform how individuals experience race and ethnicity (Syed & McLean, 2022). Yet, the ways in which these themes relate with racial/ethnic identity are not well understood. Examining agency and communion in narratives about race and ethnicity can shed light on how autonomy and connection function in this context and their implications for identity development (McCabe & Dinh, 2016).

Across two studies, we investigated themes of agency and communion in narratives about feeling aware of race and ethnicity in relation to measures of racial/ethnic identity. In Study 1, we examined cross-sectional and longitudinal relations of themes of agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures within and across two waves of data gathered six-months apart. In Study 2, we examined cross-sectional relations of agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures in a larger sample gathered through a multi-site data collection effort. Our two-pronged approach can provide quantitative and qualitative insight into within- and between-person relations of agency, communion, and measures of racial/ethnic identity, revealing how structural domains correspond with variations in personality.

Conceptualizing the Narrative Approach and Themes of Agency and Communion

The narrative approach used in this study builds on Erikson's (1968) foundational view of identity as a developmen-

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1 Race and ethnicity are socially constructed concepts often used to refer, respectively, to a system of power based on perceived physical differences and to shared cultural origins and customs, including language, food, and dress. Although race and ethnicity have distinct aspects, racial and ethnic identity are overlapping developmental processes with shared mechanisms and outcomes. Accordingly, we use the terms *race* and *ethnicity* separately but follow existing literature in using the combined term *racial/ethnic identity* when discussing developmental processes related to these domains (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

tal process progressing toward integration. Expanding on this framework, the narrative approach posits that individuals construct internalized, evolving life stories that provide their lives with unity and purpose (McAdams & Pals, 2006). These personal narratives are not formed in isolation, rather they are shaped by social and cultural contexts and represent a key aspect of personality (McLean & Syed, 2015). As a more contextualized layer of personality, narrative identity is particularly attuned to structural influences (Westberg & Syed, 2024). From this perspective, examining how individuals narrate experiences related to race and ethnicity—particularly through themes of agency and communion—can illuminate how identity is shaped by the individual and their context.

Agency and communion are core constructs in personality psychology that have become particularly prominent in narrative research (Dunlop et al., 2023; Lind et al., 2024). Bakan (1966) originally described agency and communion as "fundamental modalities" of human existence (p. 14), which capture drives for autonomy and affiliation. Extending this, Wiggins (1991) mapped agency and communion onto the interpersonal circumplex—a structural model that organizes personality traits along the orthogonal dimensions of dominance (agency) and warmth (communion). Hogan (1991) further integrated these constructs into the socioanalytic theory of personality, positing that individuals are guided by two social imperatives: getting ahead and getting along. These motives, grounded in evolutionary theory, reflect the relevance of agency and communion for navigating social group membership.

As central human motives, it is perhaps unsurprising that agency and communion are significant themes within life narratives that are frequently associated with psychosocial adjustment and identity development (Adler et al., 2016; Bauer et al., 2008). These themes are typically assessed through quantifying the extent to which individuals narrate striving for autonomy and achievement (agency) or relational harmony and connectedness (communion). Based on the research reviewed, agency and communion clearly matter for personal and collective identity. But it remains unclear how these themes function within narratives about group experiences and how they are associated with contextualized processes of identity—including racial/ethnic identity.

Although research on agency and communion and research on racial/ethnic identity have operated in parallel, they each represent contextualized and likely interrelated aspects of personality (Syed, 2021). Past research indicates that agency and communion are useful for understanding individuals and their social groups (Dunlop & Westberg, 2022), showing that these themes are central in narratives pertaining to race and ethnicity. For example, McCabe and Dinh (2016) found that domain-general life narratives evinced by ethnically minoritized youth in the U.S. involved establishing autonomy (i.e., agency) through connections (i.e., communion) with friends and family. Additionally, Jacobson et al. (2024) found that the types of racial and ethnic experiences narrated by young adults often coincided with themes of agency and communion.[2] These studies highlight how agency and communion are relevant within racial and ethnic narratives and may promote this aspect of identity (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008).

The current studies extend prior work by examining themes of agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives in relation to measures of racial/ethnic identity. Domain-specific constructs are often stronger predictors of outcomes within that same domain (i.e., the bandwidth-fidelity tradeoff; Dunlop et al., 2019). Thus, narrative themes embedded in stories about race and ethnicity may offer more meaningful insight into processes of racial/ethnic identity including exploration and belonging—core components of identity formation that are associated with numerous health outcomes (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Further, because agency and communion reflect autonomy and relational concerns, they may align with the importance attributed to race and ethnicity and the extent to which individuals engage in conversations about these aspects of their identity (Syed & Juan, 2012). Past work shows that narratives gathered using a single prompt about feeling aware of race and ethnicity reliably reflect processes of racial/ethnic identity (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010). As such, we examined themes of agency and communion through a single prompt about a time when young adults' felt aware of their race and ethnicity in relation to measures of racial/ethnic identity.

Why Might Agency and Communion Relate with Racial/Ethnic Identity?

Racial/ethnic identity involves the process and content of exploring one's race and ethnicity and developing a sense of belonging (Rogers et al., 2020). Individuals who explore and connect with their race and ethnicity are more likely to value this domain and discuss related experiences with others (Sellers et al., 1998; Syed & Juan, 2012). Establishing a racial/ethnic identity is a developmental task that often fosters psychosocial adjustment (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2022). Thus, identifying factors that promote this identity is crucial, particularly among young adults for whom identity concerns are prominent and likely to yield valuable insights (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Although past research has identified variations in the levels of racial/ethnic identity across racial and ethnic groups (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), there is little evidence to suggest that correlates with this aspect of identity differ significantly across groups (Syed & Juang, 2014). This makes predictions regarding mean-level differences based on racial or ethnic

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2 Jacobson et al. (2024) utilized the same narrative dataset (excluding Study 1, Wave 2) as the current studies to investigate different research questions.

group untenable. On the other hand, examining themes of agency and communion in relation to racial/ethnic identity measures *across* groups may provide insight into the impact of these themes over diverse racial and ethnic experiences.

Past research suggests that agency and communion may share positive relations with racial/ethnic identity. In an analysis of racial/ethnic narratives, Jacobson et al. (2024) found that the types of events discussed were associated with themes of agency and communion. For example, communion was positively linked with the mention of peer interactions. Thus, the narration of connection (i.e., communion) and autonomy (i.e., agency) within experiences about race and ethnicity may inform racial/ethnic identity. Supporting this idea, Westberg et al. (2024) found that among U.S. college students, greater connection with race and ethnicity in narratives about these domains correlated with higher levels of racial/ethnic belonging. High communion in racial and ethnic narratives may reflect belonging rooted in cultural traditions or in the ability to sustain interpersonal bonds despite systemic oppression. Conversely, low communion might indicate social exclusion and possible feelings of disconnect from one's group. Taken together, these findings led us to expect that communion in racial and ethnic narratives would correlate positively with racial/ethnic belonging among a diverse sample of young adults.

In contrast, racial/ethnic exploration involves cognitive and behavioral engagement with what it means to be a member of one's racial or ethnic group (Roberts et al., 1999). Expressions of agency in racial and ethnic narratives may reflect efforts to assert control and meaning within systems that marginalize certain groups. These agentic expressions may include participation in cultural events, activism, or identity-affirming spaces that foster group understanding. Thus, high agency in this context may represent intentional engagement with one's community and resistance to systemic oppression, whereas low agency might indicate a lack of control over one's racial and ethnic experiences. Consistent with this view, Jacobson et al. (2024) found that agency in racial and ethnic narratives was positively associated with references to cultural events and negatively associated with experiences of being othered. Thus, we expected that agency in racial and ethnic narratives would relate positively with racial/ethnic exploration among young adults. Moreover, grounded in Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), which posits that individuals are motivated to maintain positive perceptions of their ingroup, we anticipated that young adults who demonstrated higher levels of agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives would also report greater importance of these identities and more frequent discussions about them with friends and family.

How Might Agency and Communion Relate with Racial/Ethnic Identity Over Time?

In addition to examining cross-sectional relations between themes of agency and communion and measures of racial/ethnic identity, we examined whether these themes predicted racial/ethnic identity over a six-month period (Study 1). Past work finds that agency and communion in domain-general life narratives predict variations in mental health outcomes over time (Adler et al., 2016; Lind et al., 2024). In the context of race and ethnicity, agency and communion may reflect the extent to which the person has engaged with and feels connected to their group and be associated with specific aspects of identity development.

In support of this notion, Turner et al. (2024) examined whether exploration of narratives representing the self-concept predicted changes in identity exploration and commitment over four-years among young adults in college. After finding that narrative exploration did not predict broader identity exploration, Turner et al. suggested that features of domain-specific narratives may be more predictive of change within corresponding domains of identity. Demonstrating this, Syed and Azmitia (2010) found that changes in what ethnic events individuals narrated over 18-months related to higher ethnic exploration, illustrating how features of ethnic narratives can influence the development of identity in this domain. The ethnic experiences that Syed and Azmitia identified were likely to involve agency and communion insofar as one feels that they can challenge unequal structures and garner support from others. Thus, it is reasonable to suspect that agency and communion underlie narratives about race and ethnicity and are important for understanding promotive factors of racial/ethnic identity over time. Consistent with our cross-sectional predictions, we expected agency and communion at wave 1 would predict higher levels of racial/ethnic exploration and belonging at wave 2, respectively. In addition, we predicted agency and communion at wave 1 would predict higher racial/ethnic importance and frequency of discussions about this domain with friends and family at wave 2.

Are Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Identity Consistent Over Time?

A secondary aim of assessing agency and communion in relation to racial/ethnic identity measures over time was to examine the consistency of these psychological variables (Study 1). Research investigating agency and communion over time is mixed, with some finding no changes in themes over three years among White college students (McAdams et al., 2006) and others finding increases in themes among White women and racially minoritized youth (Booker & Graci, 2021; McCabe & Dinh, 2016). It is possible that levels of agency and communion stabilize before college. Although previous research has documented considerable variability in people's narratives depending on the prompt to which they are responding (McLean et al., 2017), other work underscores intraindividual variability in how people construct narratives of key life events over time—suggesting that such shifts may occur independently of broader patterns of social development (Pasupathi et al., 2020). Through assessing narratives gathered using a single prompt over time, this study may provide clearer insight into the relative stability of agency and communion in racial/ethnic narratives as well as their correlates.

Regarding measures of racial/ethnic identity, past research has found that there is an increase in this aspect of

identity over time (Syed & Azmitia, 2009; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2019), with college providing opportunities for self-awareness and development (Sladek et al., 2023). But we were uncertain whether the six-month period in Study 1 would capture variability in components of racial/ethnic identity, for which development is gradual and contextual (Rogers et al., 2020). As such, we expected that levels of agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity would remain stable across waves 1 and 2 of Study 1.

The Current Studies

In the current studies, we examined themes of agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives in relation to self-report measures of racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, importance, and frequency of discussions about this domain with friends and family. In Study 1, we examined agency and communion in relation to these measures within and across each of two waves of data. In Study 2, we examined agency and communion in relation to racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, and importance in a larger sample of young adults gathered across three universities. Study 1 was guided by three research questions and seven hypotheses, preregistered prior to analyses. Study 2 was not preregistered but flowed from Study 1, serving as a direct replication of the cross-sectional relations outlined in Research Question 1 in a larger sample.[3]

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research question 1 asked whether agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives are cross-sectionally related to racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, and discussions about this domain with friends and family. We hypothesized that agency would positively correlate with exploration, importance, and frequency of discussions (Hypothesis 1), while communion would positively correlate with belonging, importance, and discussion frequency (Hypothesis 2). Lastly, we hypothesized that these correlations would remain consistent across waves (Hypothesis 3).

Research question 2 asked whether agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives at wave 1 predict racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, importance, and discussions about this domain at wave 2, controlling for wave 1 relationships. We hypothesized that agency at wave 1 would positively predict exploration, importance, and discussion frequency at wave 2 (Hypothesis 4), and that communion at wave 1 would positively predict belonging, importance, and discussion frequency at wave 2 (Hypothesis 5), while controlling for wave 1 relations.

Research question 3 asked whether participants with higher levels of agency, communion, exploration, belonging, importance, and discussions about race/ethnicity at

wave 1 would maintain similarly high levels at wave 2. We hypothesized that higher agency and communion (Hypothesis 6) and exploration, belonging, importance, and discussion frequency (Hypothesis 7) at wave 1 would predict higher levels of these variables at wave 2.

Study 1

Method

Positionality Statement

We would like to start by noting that our research team brought diverse lived experiences and scholarly perspectives to each of these studies. The first author is a Mexican American cis-gender woman and early career faculty member, whereas the senior author is a Mixed-Ethnic cis-gender man; both have significant experience conducting narrative identity research with racially and ethnically minoritized youth. The second author is a Taiwanese-Kiwi man, and the third author is a Filipina-Jewish woman, both are graduate students. Our identities and experiences in academia likely shaped the collection of these data and our analysis of the narrative responses. For example, the senior author intentionally ensured broad representation of young adults from marginalized racial and ethnic groups and gathered data from institutions where he was affiliated. Moreover, the first author wanted to examine themes of agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives based on her theoretical work discussing how these themes are relevant for understanding intracountry variability in personality (Dunlop & Westberg, 2022). Nevertheless, we approached the analysis with reflexivity and a commitment to honoring the participants' interpretations and perspectives.

Participants and Procedure

Study 1 data originated from the Ethnicity and Friends Study, conducted at a large public university in the Midwest U.S. Recruitment flyers were posted on campus and online. Participants were not required to be students but were asked to bring a friend within two years of age who also participated. A $15.00 honorarium was provided in exchange for participants' time. Although the data contains friend-dyads, this was not relevant to the current study (see Moffitt & Syed, 2021 for dyad details). Data collection occurred across two waves, six-months apart.

The wave 1 and wave 2 assessments consisted of 214 and 154 young adult participants, respectively. Completion of the wave 2 assessment did not differ based on participants' race, ethnicity, or gender, nor on any of the racial/ethnic identity measures used in this study (supplemental, Table S1).[4] We excluded participants who did not provide racial/ethnic narratives within each wave, reducing the fi-

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nal analytic sample to 154 participants at wave 1 (M_{age} = 20.37 years, SD = 2.22, range = 18-30 years) and 133 participants at wave 2 (M_{age} = 20.37 years, SD = 2.11, range = 18-30 years). There were no significant differences in missing narrative data at either wave based on race or ethnicity (supplemental, Table S2). Participants were 58-59% women and 41-42% men at waves 1 and 2. Target participants (who initially signed up for the study and brought a friend with them to participate) were 63% racial or ethnic minority and 37% White, as a result of oversampling on a campus with a 78% White student population at the time of data collection. We coded all participants' forced-choice and open-ended responses of their racial or ethnic identification, finding that they identified as 63 Asian American, 58 White, 18 Multiracial, 9 Black/African American, 3 Latine, and 2 Native/ Indigenous at wave 1 and 54 Asian American, 50 White, 17 Multiracial, 7 Black/African American, 2 Latine, and 2 Native Indigenous at wave 2 (1 participant did not report racial or ethnic identification at each wave).

After completing the eligibility screening and providing informed consent, participants completed a survey containing measures of racial/ethnic identity and personality in a research lab on campus with a researcher present but facing away. Participants then engaged in an unstructured conversation with a friend who also participated, not used in this study. Six-months later, participants were contacted via email to take part in wave 2, comprising an online survey completed at a place of their choosing. Participants received a $5.00 iTunes gift card in exchange for wave 2 participation.

Quantitative Measures

Ethnic Exploration and Belonging. Participants completed the 12-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Roberts et al., 1999), which assesses two dimensions of racial and ethnic identity: racial/ethnic belonging (7 items; e.g., "I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background") and racial/ethnic exploration (5 items; e.g., "I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership"). Items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree). Mean scores were computed separately for racial/ethnic belonging and exploration (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Internal consistency was high for both subscales across wave 1 and wave 2 (belonging: ω = .93, .94; exploration: ω = .81, .83).

Racial/Ethnic Importance. Participants responded to a single item assessing the centrality of race and ethnicity to their identity: "How important is your race/ethnicity or ethnicities to your sense of who you are, your identity?" Responses were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot), with higher scores indicating greater racial/ethnic identity importance (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Frequency of Racial/Ethnic Discussions. Participants reported how often they discussed issues of race, ethnicity, or culture with both friends and family using two separate single-item measures. The friend item read: "How fre-

quently do you discuss issues of race, ethnicity, or culture with your friends?" The family item read: "How frequently do you discuss issues of race, ethnicity, or culture with your family? (including parents, siblings, aunts/uncles, etc.)." Both items were rated on a 4-point scale from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot), with higher scores indicating more frequent discussions (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Narrative Measures

Based on past work examining racial/ethnic narratives (e.g., Syed & Azmitia, 2010), participants at each wave of data collection responded to the following prompt:

> *Please describe a particular time in your life, either positive or negative, that you felt aware of your race/ethnicity when you were hanging out with one or more of your close friends. Tell us how old you were when this happened, where you were, whom you were with, what happened, how you reacted. Include details that would help us see and feel as you did.*

Narratives were an average length of 195 words at wave 1 (range = 4-684 words) and 115 words at wave 2 (range = 4-725 words). Well-validated coding procedures from past research (McLean et al., 2020) and Adler's (2012) continuous coding schemes for agency and communion were used to quantify narratives. *Agency* captured the degree of autonomy and motivation to impact/control others or one's own life circumstances, whereas *communion* captured the degree of connection and unity expressed towards individuals, groups, or society (McAdams, 2001).

Before coding commenced, the first author—who has significant experience coding narrative data—held two one-hour training sessions with the second and third authors over the course of two weeks. During this time, the authors coded 10% of the narratives to establish how agency and communion were to be identified. Following this initial training, the authors trained three teams of two undergraduate research assistants over the course of one-week. During training, raters coded example narratives not used in the present study and worked collaboratively to establish consensus on the coding of agency and communion. Once a shared understanding was achieved, narratives for the current study were randomized in Excel and distributed in batches to coders, who rated each narrative for each theme on a five-point scale (0, 1, 1.5, 2, 3). In line with established guidelines (Adler et al., 2017), coders met weekly with one of the authors to review coding. These meetings provided opportunities to change or maintain discrepant codes following a group discussion. The authors in turn met periodically to discuss coding progress and maintain shared views of the themes. This process facilitated consistent application of the coding scheme and minimized coder drift (Syed & Nelson, 2015). Each narrative received a separate score for agency and communion. Lower scores reflected lower levels of the respective theme, while a score of 1.5 represented a lack of agentic or communal language. For ease of interpretation in quantitative analyses, scores were recoded to -2, -1, 0, 1, and 2. Interrater reliability was assessed using two one-way random effects models to esti-

Table 1. Reliability and Examples of Narrative Themes

Narrative Theme (rating scale)	Study 1	Study 2	Example
Agency (-2, -1, 0, 1, 2)	ICC = .73, .85	ICC = .78	-2 (Low agency) = "*I went to a pretty much all white private school. It was summer and during the summer we get all types of kids from other areas joining the group. This boy was Mexican, and he couldn't speak much English and no one wanted to play with him. They made fun of him and instead called him names. He soon became the outcast. I remember being really confused and was afraid to talk to him. I was scared that if I did something, I would be an outcast too.*" 0 (Neither high nor low agency) = "*Walking down the street. I was upset [and] yelled. [I felt] surprised.*" 2 = (High agency) = "*Going to [redacted] high school, I got a real taste of what it was like to be Mexican, simply by the Mexican culture there. Girls my age who spoke Spanish showed me how to embrace my heritage rather than deny it or ignore it, to appreciate myself. I learned something new. It was a good change.*"
Communion (-2, -1, 0, 1, 2)	ICC = .84, .87	ICC = .81	-2 (Low communion) = "*At my church, I always feel aware of my ethnicity due to the fact that we are the only Filipinos in the congregation. There is always a meet and greet session in between the service, and at times I sense tension whenever someone is to greet me, because it never seems sincere. Everyone else in the congregation (predominantly white) usually chat with each other much longer, but to us, they always say a quick hello. We have been attending this church for years, yet the interaction between my family and everyone else is always segregated. As much as I'm used to it, I always feel uncomfortable every time.*" 0 = (Neither high nor low communion) = "*Social Studies class. It was awakening. Put it in perspective.*" 2 = (High communion) = "*This was the first time I experienced Kwanzaa. Before, I knew nothing about it. This holiday speaks of our African roots and goes back to generations to acknowledge our ancestors. I learned a lot about my relatives that had passed before I was born. I also learned about the things my family has achieved. It was a positive event to me because I love learning new things.*"

Note. Higher scores are indicative of greater agency or communion.

[a] Qualitative responses are edited for brevity.

[b] ICC's presented for Study 1 represent wave 1, wave

mate absolute agreement, indicating good reliability (see Table 1). Final scores were averaged across raters to produce a single agency and a single communion score for each narrative.

We found no differences in mean levels or correlations of agency and communion based on gender (supplemental, Table S3-S4). Although there was not substantial theoretical or empirical rationale to suspect differences in relations between narrative themes and racial/ethnic identity measures based on racial or ethnic group (Syed & Juang, 2014), we conducted exploratory partial correlations controlling for narrative length to determine whether relations differed for young adults of color (*n* = 95). Visual examination suggested some variations in correlations among young adults of color (see supplemental, Table S5), prompting us to estimate two multigroup path models with a robust maximum-likelihood estimator to determine whether longitudinal relations varied based on race and ethnicity. These models indicated no meaningful differences in the overall pattern of relations between racial or ethnic minority and White young adults (see supplemental, Tables S6-S9). Due to the small sample sizes involved in this exploratory analysis we recommend interpreting these results with caution and have focused our interpretations on analyses conducted using the full sample. Study 2 provides a higher-

powered examination of variations in correlations based on race and ethnicity.

Study 1 Results

All analyses were preregistered unless otherwise specified. Effect sizes in the predicted direction and with *p* < .05 were considered consistent with hypotheses. Analyses were conducted in R v.4.2.2 (R Core Team, 2022) via RStudio v.2023.6.2.561, using the *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012), *dplyr* (Wickham et al., 2023), *tidyr* (Wickham et al., 2023), *psych* (Revelle, 2023), and *apaTables* (Stanley, 2021) packages. Consistent with past research, we present narrative examples alongside quantitative findings to contextualize and aid understanding of results.

Cross-Sectional Relations of Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Identity

To test hypotheses 1-2, we computed bivariate correlations between themes of agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures (belonging, exploration, importance, discussions about race and ethnicity with friends and family) within each of two waves of data (see Table 2). Though not preregistered, we computed partial correlations accounting for narrative length in words, finding the same pattern of findings with slightly attenuated ef-

Table 2. Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations of Narrative Themes and Racial/Ethnic Identity Measures

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
						Wave 1									
1. Agency	-0.39	1.33													
2. Communion	-0.60	1.38	.69**												
3. Racial/Ethnic Belonging	3.00	0.57	.11	.25**											
4. Racial/Ethnic Exploration	2.73	0.61	.01	.17*	.62**										
5. Racial/Ethnic Importance	2.67	1.02	.08	.24**	.55**	.58**									
6. Racial/Ethnic Discussions with Friends	2.41	0.79	-.01	-.03	.26**	.37**	.33**								
7. Racial/Ethnic Discussions with Family	2.14	0.75	.11	.06	.23**	.34**	.46**	.53**							
						Wave 2									
8. Agency	0.44	1.16	.28**	.18*	-.07	.12	-.04	.12	.03						
9. Communion	-0.50	1.35	.20*	.24**	-.02	.12	-.02	.01	-.04	.66**					
10. Racial/Ethnic Belonging	3.03	0.59	.07	.15	.77**	.59**	.52**	.22*	.24**	.02	.01				
11. Racial/Ethnic Exploration	2.73	0.63	.05	.17	.56**	.77**	.63**	.35**	.36**	.05	.08	.66**			
12. Racial/Ethnic Importance	2.72	0.91	-.01	.08	.54**	.56**	.69**	.36**	.42**	-.01	-.03	.56**	.65**		
13. Racial/Ethnic Discussions with Friends	2.43	0.70	-.02	.13	.29**	.39**	.35**	.53**	.33**	.12	.06	.29**	.46**	.53**	
14. Racial/Ethnic Discussions with Family	2.11	0.75	-.02	.04	.34**	.40**	.43**	.33**	.50**	-.03	-.04	.31**	.41**	.42**	.49**

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.
[a] * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$, $N_{wave1} = 154$; $N_{wave2} = 133$

fect sizes (supplemental, Table S10). Regarding hypothesis 3, we tested the stability of correlations across waves using two one-sided tests (TOST) for equivalence (Lakens et al., 2018).

Bivariate correlations between agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures within and across waves 1 and 2 are reported in Table 2 (hypotheses 1-3). Contrary to hypothesis 1, agency did not relate with racial/ethnic identity measures at waves 1 and 2, indicating that high agency may not consistently reflect high racial/ethnic identity. This is evident in the narrative of Jenny[5], a White participant with high agency in our sample who shared,

> I tutored at an inner city school that was mostly Mexican. At first they were unreceptive to me but over the weeks they started to talk to me more and more. At first I was intimidated but eventually i became close with a few of the kids I did my best to stick through it because I had agreed to the task and needed to complete Eventually i felt it was a rewarding experience It further cemented my view that although race can be an obstacle at first, it is easily overcome once you get to know someone.

Although Jenny displays high agency through her dedication to the program and ability to connect with others, her narrative reinforced the view that, for her, race can be set aside.

Partly consistent with hypothesis 2, at wave 1, communion correlated positively with racial/ethnic belonging and importance but did not correlate with friends or family discussions about race and ethnicity at either wave. In addition, we found an un-hypothesized and positive correlation between communion at wave 1 and racial/ethnic exploration at wave 1. However, contrary to hypothesis 2, communion at wave 2 did not relate with racial/ethnic identity measures at wave 2. These findings suggest that the path from communion to racial/ethnic identity may not be as straightforward as we suspected. Turning to the narratives themselves as the site at which quantitative findings are substantiated, we see the complexity of communion within racial and ethnic experiences. For example, Eric, a Chinese participant with higher communion, shared,

> The Chinese American Student Association threw their annual Chinese New Year Party. My friends looked to me and other Asian friends to explain the Lion or the traditions behind various costumes. I only had a vague idea of the answers to their questions. It was a fun celebration but I felt a little "white-washed." I look Asian but was raised in White America. Although I wasn't able to answer the questions my friends were asking, I learned from the people who did along with them. Despite sometimes feeling like I do not fully belong to America nor Asia, experiences like these help me feel proud of being different. In the end, I am proud of my

> heritage even though at times I do not know as much about it as I should.

Although Eric expressed connection with his friends and pride for his heritage, he also felt excluded from being fully Asian or American.[6] This is captured by Eric's score of '1' for communion, indicating that he felt mostly connected to others but was also somewhat disconnected, perhaps making relations with racial/ethnic identity more complex.

We also found un-hypothesized positive relations between the themes of agency and communion within and across each wave of data, indicating that these themes were often entwined rather than opposing within young people's experiences. One possible reason for this is that many participants narrated cultural celebrations, which often involved enhanced understanding of one's group and belonging within it. For example, Laila, a Multiracial participant who identified as Guyanese, Indian, and Pakistani, shared,

> This girl I went to high school with was born in India and came to the United States when she was in elementary school. She was much more open and knowledgeable about Indian culture than i was. I remember she had a party at her house and invited me. It was a cultural party. That was the first time I was aware and accepting of my culture. I was shocked at first, but had a really good time. I followed everyone else to see how things work, I learned a lot. I was excited and anxious I learned that I should be more accepting of my culture and it was the start of me becoming more cultural.

Through attending this event and learning about her ethnicity, Laila demonstrated enhanced agency, which in turn, evoked a greater connection with her culture. Lastly, consistent with hypothesis 3, both one-sided tests for significance were rejected, indicating effects were comparable across waves.

Relations of Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Identity Across Waves 1 and 2

To test hypotheses 4-5, we estimated two path models with a robust maximum-likelihood estimator. Model 1 assessed relations between agency and communion at wave 1 and racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, and importance at wave 2. Model 2 assessed relations between agency and communion at wave 1 and discussions about race/ethnicity with friends and family at wave 2. For each model, all predictors and outcomes were estimated simultaneously, effectively controlling for relations between study variables at wave 1. We estimated all possible paths in each model, resulting in perfect model fit. Confidence intervals and p-values of paths within each model are reported in Tables 3-4.

Contrary to hypothesis 4, agency at wave 1 did not predict racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, or importance at

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[5] All names in this section, including those shared within narrative examples, are pseudonyms. Narratives were edited for brevity but not grammatical errors.

[6] Although race/ethnicity and nationality are distinct, they are often interconnected, particularly in the racialized context of the U.S.

wave 2 (Table 3) but did predict less frequent friend discussions about race and ethnicity at wave 2 (Table 4). In exploratory analyses, we tested whether relations between agency/communion and racial/ethnic identity measures varied if importance was modeled separately. We found no meaningful difference in the pattern of relations when importance was modeled separately from exploration/belonging (supplemental, Tables S11-S12).

Contrary to hypothesis 5, communion at wave 1 related negatively with racial/ethnic belonging and importance at wave 2 (Table 3). That is, when controlling for the effects of other racial/ethnic identity measures, communion predicted lower racial/ethnic belonging and importance over time. It may be that individuals with greater racial/ethnic identity narrated more negative experiences with race and ethnicity involving lower connection. For example, Caleb, a Black participant with low communion but high racial/ethnic identity, shared,

> One time we happened to be talking about Martin Luther King Jr. and the teacher was asking questions about our racial backgrounds. My teacher came to me and somehow got to asking me about my ethnicity and how my dad was from Africa. For some reason, this made me feel so uncomfortable. I think I was one of maybe 8 kids in the entire school that was of color, and all I remember is a bunch of white children staring at me as if I could speak for the entire black population. I reacted in a very awkward, unsure way. I felt really different from my classmates, a feeling I had never felt so strongly before.

Asking Caleb to serve as the spokesperson for his group singled him out from his classmates and made him feel disconnected. Although Caleb's narrative displays isolation from his White peers, this did not extend to his own racial/ethnic group. He went on to note, "This event only affected how I viewed other's race and ethnicities." Thus, low communion in racial/ethnic narratives may sometimes have reflected social exclusion from outgroup rather than ingroup members, highlighting the context of race in shaping expressions of communion.

At the same time, consistent with hypothesis 5, communion at wave 1 predicted more frequent friend discussions about race/ethnicity at wave 2 (Table 4). Importantly, this relation was observed in a model controlling for the other aspects of racial/ethnic identity that we measured. In this way, those with high communion who engaged in more conversations with friends about race and ethnicity may not have necessarily felt a strong connection with their group. Alternatively, those with low communion in narratives may have been unsure of how to navigate racial and ethnic conversations with friends. For example, Lian, a Chinese participant, shared,

> My American friend asked me what was my favorite food. My answer was surprising for them, and they made jokes about it which I wasn't happy about. I was surprised that the food I liked was weird in their eyes. I realized people don't appreciate differences most of the time. They tend to think in a negative/stereotypical way.

Lian's ability to connect with her friend was disrupted by her friend's offensive reaction to her favorite food. Navigating interactions that evoke low communion such as this might make one less likely to engage in conversations about race and ethnicity with friends over time.

Though un-hypothesized, we also found that racial/ethnic belonging at wave 1 predicted lower agency and communion at wave 2. It is possible that individuals who feel a stronger sense of belonging to their racial or ethnic group are also more attuned to moments when they have felt marginalized or at odds with those outside their group. This dynamic is evident in the narrative of Troy, a Black participant who expressed low communion but high racial/ethnic belonging,

> Since kindergarten, I attended public schools, and there was a lot of culture in the school. But when I ended up at my new school I noticed a change. All the brown faces that use to be around me had vanished and I was the only one. I noticed this right away on the first day of school. I looked from left to right and noticed these people were all white. I didn't really think it would be a big deal but I started to realize that I was a lot different than they were. Back in the cities I fit in with all the kids, now it was totally different. They talked different, looked different, and even acted different. Finally I realized that I was ashamed of being different than everyone else. I felt like I was on the outside looking in.

Although Troy felt connected with youth from diverse backgrounds at his old school, he felt isolated from White youth at his new school. Troy's high belonging within his own group may have made points of disconnect with outgroup members more salient.

In un-hypothesized findings, we also observed that racial/ethnic exploration at wave 1 predicted higher agency and communion at wave 2 (Table 3). Turning to the qualitative data, it may be that individuals who engage in activities related to race and ethnicity encounter more same-group experiences that foster autonomy and connectedness. For example, Jasmine, a Filipina participant who expressed higher agency and communion, described her experience attending a Filipino-American community event,

> Filipino-Americans acted very differently from the "Filipino way of life" I was born with. It made me look closer at how we define our culture. I later became the President of the Philippine Student Association. I became more aware of the nuances in my own culture and how it differs from person to person.

Stability of Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Identity

To test hypotheses 6-7, we examined stability of agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures across two waves of data using the path models described in the preceding section (Tables 3-4). Consistent with hypotheses, participants with higher levels of agency and communion as well as racial/ethnic identity measures at wave 1 had higher levels of these variables at wave 2.

Table 3. Path Coefficients for Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Exploration, Belonging, and Importance at Wave 1 Predicting these Variables at Wave 2

Wave 2 Outcome	Wave 1 Predictor	β	b	SE	*p*-value	95% *CI*
Racial/Ethnic Belonging	Agency	0.12	0.05	0.03	.08	-0.00 to 0.11
	Communion	-0.18**	-0.08	0.03	.00	-0.14 to -0.02
	Racial/Ethnic Belonging	0.70**	0.74**	0.06	.00	0.61 to 0.86
Racial/Ethnic Exploration	Agency	0.07	0.04	0.04	.34	-0.04 to 0.10
	Communion	-0.10	-0.04	0.04	.18	-0.12 to 0.02
	Racial/Ethnic Exploration	0.58**	0.58**	0.08	.00	0.42 to 0.73
Racial/Ethnic Importance	Agency	0.06	0.04	0.06	.47	-0.08 to 0.17
	Communion	-0.22*	-0.14	0.06	.01	-0.21 to -0.03
	Racial/Ethnic Importance	0.53**	0.46**	0.07	.00	0.32 to 0.61
Agency	Agency	0.30**	0.26**	0.05	.00	0.16 to 0.36
	Racial/Ethnic Belonging	-0.26**	-0.51**	0.18	.00	-0.88 to -0.14
	Racial/Ethnic Exploration	0.38**	0.70**	0.20	.00	0.30 to 1.09
	Racial/Ethnic Importance	-0.17	-0.19	0.11	.09	-0.41 to 0.03
Communion	Communion	0.28**	0.27**	0.08	.00	0.11 to 0.43
	Racial/Ethnic Belonging	-0.21*	-0.50*	0.24	.03	-0.96 to -0.03
	Racial/Ethnic Exploration	0.32**	0.69**	0.22	.00	0.26 to 1.11
	Racial/Ethnic Importance	-0.18	-0.24	0.14	.08	-0.51 to 0.03

Note. Path analyses presented here control for relations between narrative themes at wave 1 and race/ethnicity variables at wave 1. * indicates *p* < .05. ** indicates *p* < .01. *N* = 154.

Table 4. Path Coefficients for Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Discussions at Wave 1 Predicting these Variables at Wave 2

Wave 2 Outcome	Wave 1 Predictor	β	b	SE	*p*-value	95% *CI*
Agency	Racial/Ethnic Friend Discussions	-0.16	0.24	0.14	.09	-0.04 to 0.51
	Racial/Ethnic Family Discussions	-0.10	-0.15	0.12	.22	-0.39 to 0.09
Communion	Racial/Ethnic Friend Discussions	0.06	0.10	0.16	.54	-0.22 to 0.42
	Racial/Ethnic Family Discussions	-0.10	-0.18	0.16	.26	-0.52 to 0.14
Racial/Ethnic Friend Discussions	Agency	-0.26**	-0.13**	0.04	.00	-0.22 to -0.04
	Communion	0.34**	0.16**	0.04	.00	0.08 to 0.25
	Racial/Ethnic Friend Discussions	0.50**	0.43**	0.06	.00	0.29 to 0.56
Racial/Ethnic Family Discussions	Agency	-0.16	-0.09	0.05	.08	-0.19 to 0.01
	Communion	0.10	0.05	0.05	.30	-0.05 to 0.15
	Racial/Ethnic Family Discussions	0.50**	0.50**	0.08	.00	0.34 to 0.65

Note. Path analyses presented here control for relations between narrative themes at wave 1 and race/ethnicity variables at wave 1. * indicates *p* < .05. ** indicates *p* < .01. *N* = 154.

Study 1 Discussion

We did not find support for our hypotheses that agency would relate positively with racial/ethnic identity, finding instead that agency predicted lower frequency of racial/ethnic discussions with friends over time. Consistent with SIT

(Tajfel & Turner, 2004), it is possible that young adults who express higher agency feel a greater sense of control over their racial and ethnic experiences based on less pervasive encounters with these domains in their lives (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). For instance, those who experience less discrimination may perceive fewer barriers to autonomy, con-

tributing to an elevated sense of control in this domain. This may be particularly true for White participants, who–due to structural racism and white supremacy–often perceive race and ethnicity as less central or impactful to their lived experiences (Moffitt & Syed, 2021; Satterthwaite-Freiman et al., 2023).

In contrast, we found partial support for our hypotheses that communion would relate positively with racial/ethnic belonging and friend discussions. But relations between communion and racial/ethnic belonging were nuanced, appearing to depend on the context of narration (Galliher et al., 2017; Syed & Juang, 2014). Based on our findings, we suspect that expressions of communion may vary based on both ingroup inclusion and outgroup exclusion (Loyd et al., 2023). Conversely, racial/ethnic identity measures predicted variations in agency and communion over time, illustrating how identity processes around structural domains may inform personality. Specifically, racial/ethnic belonging was negatively associated with agency and communion over time. One possibility is that strong identification with one's racial or ethnic group heightens awareness of intergroup tensions, leading individuals to narrate more experiences of conflict that limit expressions of agency and communion (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). On the other hand, racial/ethnic exploration was positively associated with agency and communion over time, reinforcing the notion that individuals who engage in activities involving race and ethnicity may have a larger repertoire of experiences that evoke autonomy and connectedness (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Yip et al., 2013).

Interestingly, we found that agency and communion were positively related, showing that these themes can function synergistically, at least in racial and ethnic narratives (Jacobson et al., 2024; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). As predicted, agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures were relatively stable across waves. As there were some inconsistencies in relations between agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity measures, a larger sample may be useful for providing further insight into relations among these variables.

Study 2

Study 2 replicates our investigation of research question 1 (are agency and communion correlated with racial/ethnic identity measures) in a larger sample of participants drawn from a multi-site data collection effort spanning three universities. This study was not preregistered but is a direct replication of the cross-sectional relations observed in Study 1.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 2 data originated from the larger Everyday Experiences with Ethnicity study conducted at two large universities in California and one large university in the Midwest U.S. After providing informed consent, 961 students took part in a survey containing racial/ethnic identity and personality measures in a research lab on campus in exchange for course credit. This survey contained the same racial/ethnic narrative prompt as in Study 1 (M_{length} = 163 words, range = 3-613 words). Participants were excluded if they did not provide a narrative, resulting in a final analytic sample of 942 participants (M_{age} = 21.41, SD = 5.38, range = 16-78) identifying as 65% women and 34% men (1 participant identified as transgender). We coded racial/ethnic identification in a manner paralleling Study 1, finding participants identified as 397 White, 268 Asian American, 152 Multiracial, 79 Latine, 42 Black/African American, and 2 Native/Indigenous (two participants did not report racial/ethnic identification, see supplemental Table S13 for demographics by campus).

Quantitative Measures

We included the same self-report measures of ethnic exploration and belonging (MEIM; Roberts et al., 1999) and one-item measure of racial/ethnic identity importance as described in Study 1. Internal consistency for the MEIM subscales remained high in Study 2 (belonging: ω = .93; exploration: ω = .79). Means, standard deviations, and range for each measure may be found in Table 5.

Narrative Measures

Racial/ethnic narratives were coded in a manner paralleling Study 1 and using the same coding scheme for agency and communion including 0, 1, 1.5, 2 and 3 (Adler, 2012), which were re-coded to -2, -1, 0, 1, and 2. Narratives from Study 2 were coded concurrently with those from Study 1, using the same raters and established coding protocol. Two one-way random effects models were used to assess absolute agreement, indicating good interrater reliability (see Table 1). Final scores were again averaged across raters to produce a single agency and a single communion score for each narrative. In an exploratory analysis, we found that means of agency and communion were significantly higher among men relative to women participants (supplemental, Table S14). But there were no differences in the pattern of correlations based on gender (see supplemental, Table S15). Mean levels of agency and communion were comparable overall across data-collection sites, with agency being significantly lower at the first California university relative to the Midwest university (supplemental, Table S16).

Study 2 Results

Following from Study 1, we report bivariate correlations between themes of agency and communion and measures of racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, and importance in Table 5. Partial correlations among these variables accounting for the length in words of participants' narratives did not differ substantially from the bivariate correlations (supplemental Table S17).

Contrary to hypothesis 1, but consistent with our findings in Study 1, we found agency did not correlate with any racial/ethnic identity measures. Thus, Study 2 provides additional indication that high agency in racial/ethnic narra-

Table 5. Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations of Narrative Themes and Racial/Ethnic Identity

Variable	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4
1. Agency	-0.23	1.34	-2 – 2				
2. Communion	-0.52	1.36	-2 – 2	.66**			
3. Racial/Ethnic Belonging	3.01	0.57	1 – 4	.02	.09**		
4. Racial/Ethnic Exploration	2.55	0.61	1 – 4	.02	.06	.64**	
5. Racial/Ethnic Importance	2.85	0.90	1 – 4	-.06	.01	.58**	.53**

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

a * indicates *p* < .05. ** indicates *p* < .01.

b *N* = 949

tives did not tend to reflect work around this identity domain. For example, Logan, a White participant with high agency, shared,

> In second grade a new student named Alex came to our school. He was from Uganda and didn't speak English. [My friend] and I quickly warmed up to him and welcomed him into our friendship. He was much different than other kids in our class and we loved getting to know him. It opened my mind to the fact that Alex was different but it wasn't a bad thing. I felt happy to make a new friend who was different than anyone I had ever met. It opened my mind up to other races and ethnicities very early.

Although Logan displays high agency through establishing a relationship with Alex and gaining a better understanding of cultural differences, these lessons do not appear to affect Logan's understanding of *his own* racial group and Logan observes Alex's experience from a position of relative privilege.

Consistent with hypothesis 2, there was a modest positive correlation between communion and racial/ethnic belonging. As relations between communion and racial/ethnic belonging were nuanced in Study 1, it is possible that the modest effect size we found in Study 2 reflects how racial/ethnic identity is multifaceted, involving expressions of connectedness and isolation (Rogers et al., 2020; Syed & Azmitia, 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). This is evident in the narratives of Angela and Vanessa, presented in [Table 6], who each scored high on racial/ethnic belonging but whose narratives received high and low scores on communion, respectively. Through these stories, we see that low communion does not always translate to low racial/ethnic belonging, though communion often coincided with higher racial/ethnic belonging among Study 2 participants.

In exploratory analyses examining relations between agency and communion and racial/ethnic exploration and belonging based on data-collection site, we found relations differed based on where data were collected such that communion correlated positively with a) belonging at the first university in California and b) exploration at the second university in California. Agency and communion were unrelated with racial/ethnic identity measures at the Midwest university ([supplemental, Tables S18-S20]). This prompted us to explore correlations between study variables among only racially/ethnically minoritized participants—exclud-

ing White participants. We found no differences in the pattern of relations among only racially/ethnically minoritized participants such that communion in narratives maintained a modest positive correlation with racial/ethnic belonging ([supplemental, Table S21]).

Study 2 Discussion

Consistent with Study 1, there were no significant associations between agency in racial/ethnic narratives and measures of racial/ethnic identity. This suggests that agency may serve different psychological functions—or manifest in distinct ways—depending on the person and their context. For some, agency may be expressed through advocacy for one's racial or ethnic group or through a perceived sense of control over racialized experiences. For others, race and ethnicity may not be central to their self-concept and thus may not shape how agency is narrated or experienced when recalling racial and ethnic experiences (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

In contrast, communion was positively associated with racial/ethnic belonging, although this association varied depending on the site of data collection. These results suggest that the relationship between communion and racial/ethnic identity may depend on additional aspects of participants' narratives, including whether individuals describe connections with ingroup versus outgroup members (Loyd et al., 2023) or certain kinds of agency and communion (e.g., thwarted vs fulfilled; Lind et al., 2024). We turn now to a more comprehensive discussion of these and related interpretations.

General Discussion

Determining which aspects of identity are shared versus distinct from others in one's community is a key developmental task in young adulthood (Erikson, 1968). This process is shaped by broader themes of agency and communion, which capture how individuals assert the self and relate to others (Bakan, 1966; Syed & McLean, 2022). These themes may be especially relevant for understanding group-based identities, such as racial/ethnic identity, which are negotiated in relation to structural norms and expectations (Dunlop & Westberg, 2022). The current studies examined themes of agency and communion in narratives about feeling aware of race and ethnicity in relation to in-

Table 6. Narrative Examples with High and Low Communion from Participants with High Racial/Ethnic Belonging

Angela	Vanessa
High Communion	*Low Communion*
Recently, in the last year I attended plenty of debutante balls which are coming out parties. Traditionally in the Philippines, this is celebrated during your 18th birthday. The event is full of dances and performances to celebrate a certain female's coming out into the world. It is full of plenty of relatives and loud Filipino people! I enjoy these events and it's times like these where I truly enjoy being who I am. The sense of family and community that Filipinos represent is amazing! I acted as I normally would and realize that this is where I belong. I truly enjoy what my family stands for and I'm happy because of it.	I realized that I was the only one of my Mexican friends I grew up with that graduated High School. At my present high school (which is located in the sixth most affluent town in the country), I was the only Mexican to graduate. I was quite astonished and saddened. I told myself that at least I am making good progress into making a better life for our race later on. It was saddening to not see my friends graduate with me.

Note. Angela and Vanessa both received the highest score possible on racial/ethnic belonging.

dicators of racial/ethnic identity. In Study 1, we examined whether agency and communion in narratives related with racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, importance, and frequency of discussions about this domain with friends and family within and across two waves of data gathered six-months apart. In Study 2, we examined whether agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives gathered from a larger multi-site sample related with racial/ethnic exploration, belonging, and importance. In what follows, we discuss key findings of this work and implications for future research.

Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Identity

Focusing first on agency, we did not find support for our hypotheses that this theme would relate with racial/ethnic exploration and indeed, found that agency predicted a lower frequency of conversations about race and ethnicity with friends over time. Overall, our findings suggest that when race and ethnicity are salient components of one's identity, individuals may be more aware of negative aspects of racial and ethnic experiences that correspond with mixed levels of agency (Juan et al., 2016; Pasupathi et al., 2012). In contrast, young adults who discuss race and ethnicity with friends less often might evince narratives with greater perceived control over racial and ethnic experiences that potentially reflect less intensive work around this identity domain (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This is further supported by our finding that greater racial/ethnic belonging predicted lower expressions of agency over time. The distinct pattern observed in relation to racial/ethnic identity here may reflect the unique ways that structural marginalization and privilege shape agency in this domain. Additional research is needed to disentangle aspects of agency that might lead individuals to discuss this domain more with their peers and promote other aspects of racial/ethnic identity. For example, recent research indicates a specific form of agency that may support racial/ethnic identity development is *resistance*, which reflects feeling empowered to resist negative stereotypes about one's group and structures of oppression, including racism (Rogers et al., 2021).

Regarding communion, across studies, we found cross-sectional support for our hypotheses that this theme would relate positively with racial/ethnic belonging. However, these relations were not consistent over time or across university settings, nor were they predictive, suggesting the effect is small and variable in nature. These findings align with recent research showing that how individuals narrate their experiences can vary over time and across contexts, in ways that are sometimes independent of social identity development (Pasupathi et al., 2020). On the other hand, we found communion in racial and ethnic narratives predicted greater frequency of racial and ethnic discussions with friends over time, after accounting for other measured aspects of racial/ethnic identity. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that racial and ethnic experiences are complex and may involve expressions of isolation based on structural oppression and exclusion even when one feels supported by members of their group.

Relations between communion and racial/ethnic identity may be difficult to detect, due to the varied *content* of racial/ethnic experiences (Galliher et al., 2017). In future, researchers should assess whether relations between racial/ethnic identity measures and communion vary based on what experiences individuals narrate and how they are narrated (e.g., affective tone). In addition, our inspection of the narrative data suggests that it is perhaps communion towards ingroup rather than outgroup members that bolsters racial/ethnic identity. This is consistent with our finding in Study 2 that relations between communion and racial/ethnic belonging were driven by participants at the university with a more racially and ethnically diverse student body, where positive ingroup experiences are potentially more common. Rooted in SIT, communal behaviors—such as caring for and engaging with ingroup members—may serve to strengthen ingroup identification (Sellers et al., 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Narrative research supports this idea, suggesting that locating a source of communion, particularly within one's ingroup, can foster positive feelings towards that group (Adler et al., 2022; Syed & McLean, 2022; Westberg & Syed, 2024). Future research should examine more nuanced forms of communion towards ingroup relative to outgroup members, particularly among racially and ethnically minoritized young adults,

for whom this distinction may be most impactful (Loyd et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2020). Moreover, researchers should gather a larger longitudinal sample equipped to detect small effect sizes, especially across varied event types.

Although we found mixed support for our hypotheses that agency and communion would predict racial/ethnic identity over time, aspects of racial/ethnic identity including belonging and exploration predicted lower and higher levels of agency and communion, respectively. Individuals with greater belonging may view race and ethnicity as more central to identity (Sellers et al., 1998), leading them to recognize times when they had less control over racial and ethnic experiences or were isolated because of them. This is consistent with research finding that individuals with greater racial/ethnic belonging were more likely to narrate experiences of discrimination (Pasupathi et al., 2012). Conversely, individuals with greater exploration may reflect on experiences involving group participation in ways that lead to enhanced agency and communion over time (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Syed et al., 2013). In support of this notion, Syed and Azmitia (2010) found that changes in racial/ethnic identity exploration among young adults corresponded with shifts in what racial and ethnic events were narrated over time, indicating that those with greater exploration may have a larger repertoire of race and ethnicity related experiences that, perhaps, foster connection over time.

Overall, findings are consistent with research indicating that narratives are reciprocally linked with processes of identity (McLean, 2008) but it may be that racial/ethnic identity has larger top-down effects on racial and ethnic narratives. It is also possible that more contextualized features of racial and ethnic narratives would be more predictive of racial/ethnic identity. For example, future work could distinguish between positive and negative forms of agency and communion to determine whether event valence influences racial/ethnic identity. It might also be useful to apply the coding scheme for thwarted and fulfilled agency and communion, to better understand how experiencing success and encountering obstacles with these themes impacts racial/ethnic identity (Lind et al., 2024). Ultimately, these results demonstrate that while the broadstroke themes often used by researchers–including agency and communion–are useful for generating research (McLean et al., 2020), these themes are possibly limited when examining more contextualized aspects of narrative identity.

Agency and Communion in Racial/Ethnic Narratives

Though un-hypothesized, we notably found positive cross-sectional and longitudinal relations between narrative themes of agency and communion. Although some research finds that agency and communion are unrelated or even negatively associated (MacKinnon et al., 2013; McAdams et al., 1996), and theoretical models have framed them as orthogonal constructs (Wiggins, 1991), our results suggest a positive relationship between these themes within racial and ethnic narratives. Some have conceptual-

ized agency and communion as antagonistic, arguing that they are motives to promote oneself versus others (Dunlop & Westberg, 2022); however, recent studies find agency and communion are interrelated and may be important for achieving balance within the self, especially in the context of race and ethnicity (McCabe & Dinh, 2016). For example, Jacobson et al. (2024) found that communion in racial and ethnic narratives moderated the association between agency and the mention of peer dynamics, indicating that agency and communion are interrelated within racial and ethnic experiences. Our findings extend this literature by demonstrating that agency and communion may function not as opposites but as intertwined pathways—especially within narratives about race and ethnicity (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008), as well as other group-based experiences such as religion (Fivush, 2013) and disability (Adler et al., 2022).

Stability of Agency and Communion and Racial/Ethnic Identity

Consistent with our hypotheses, individuals who scored higher on agency, communion, and racial/ethnic identity measures at wave 1 also scored higher on these variables at wave 2. The modest effect sizes reflect both stability and intra-individual variability in narration (Pasupathi et al., 2020), suggesting that while these aspects of identity remain relatively stable, there is also meaningful fluctuation in how individuals narrate their experiences. Overall, our findings support past work indicating that levels of agency and communion may stabilize in the years preceding college (McAdams et al., 2006), and that narrative identity tends to move toward stability over time (McLean, 2008). Importantly, our findings speak to stability in *how* people narrate stories, potentially to maintain a sense of continuity throughout time (Josselson, 2009) as opposed to *what* events individuals narrate in response to certain prompts (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Also, in line with our hypothesis, we found racial/ethnic identity measures were positively related over time. These findings are consistent with past research indicating levels of racial/ethnic identity generally persist and strengthen over time (Zhou et al., 2019). Future research should examine agency and communion and racial/ethnic identity over a greater length of time among a larger sample of participants to capture a more robust estimation of how agency, communion, and racial/ethnic identity develop among young adults.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study examines agency and communion within narratives about feeling aware of race and ethnicity in relation to measures of racial/ethnic identity, demonstrating one step towards understanding how contextualized features of narratives might influence identity development. Although this study possessed various strengths, we would like to review limitations and highlight directions for future research. Our samples were composed of primarily Asian American and White young adults for whom agency and communion may function in distinct ways. Future work is needed to examine how specific forms of agency and

communion emerge within racial and ethnic narratives and correspond with racial/ethnic identity measures among a more representative sample that includes a greater number of Black/African, Latine/Hispanic, Indigenous/Native, and Multiracial participants. Moreover, while the current studies contain both longitudinal data and a large cross-sectional sample, future work might gather a larger longitudinal sample with additional time points with which to test the relations examined in the current studies. The larger and more representative sample might enable future researchers to further investigate whether relations between narrative themes and measure of racial/ethnic identity vary over time or based on intersecting aspects of identity (including race, ethnicity, migration, gender). Researchers should also seek to engage in a more inductive thematic analysis that would allow for the identification of distinct forms of agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives based on specific groups.

Conclusion

In the current studies, we examined cross-sectional and longitudinal relations between agency and communion in racial and ethnic narratives and indicators of racial/ethnic identity including exploration, belonging, importance, and frequency of racial/ethnic discussions with friends and family. Across two studies, we found communion related positively with racial/ethnic belonging and frequency of racial and ethnic discussions with friends. In addition, we found that themes of agency and communion were positively interrelated in the context of racial and ethnic experiences. Lastly, this work provided insight into the relative stability of narrative features and racial/ethnic identity measures among young adults over a six-month period. Ultimately, these studies shed light on factors that may support the positive development of racial/ethnic identity among young adults for whom this aspect of identity is increasingly salient (Sladek et al., 2023) and revealed how

features of personality may be shaped by structural factors including race and ethnicity.

Data Accessibility Statement

For each study, we report sample size, all data exclusions, and all measures. Preregistration of our analytic plan, deidentified quantitative data, and analysis scripts are available here: https://osf.io/f32tv/?view_only=e1490ed6009b453d9d1cc55904fe2404. Qualitative data are not made publicly available due to risk of reidentification but are available to request.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Dulce W. Westberg (Lead). Data curation: Dulce W. Westberg (Lead). Formal Analysis: Dulce W. Westberg (Lead), Edward Chou (Supporting), Rachel Jacobson (Supporting). Methodology: Dulce W. Westberg (Lead). Writing – original draft: Dulce W. Westberg (Lead). Writing – review & editing: Dulce W. Westberg (Lead), Edward Chou (Supporting), Rachel Jacobson (Supporting), Moin Syed (Supporting). Supervision: Moin Syed (Lead).

Competing Interests

We have no conflicts of interest to report.

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