

# Communalism Scale 2015 Cultural Validity Study

by

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**Acknowledgement:** KerriAnne Sejour, Victoria Rain, and Jacquelyn Buckman, who served as research assistants for this study. This research was made possible by a Goucher College Summer Research Grant. Correspondence concerning this study should be addressed to the first author (Nyasha Grayman-Simpson).

## Abstract

Twenty years after publication of the Communalism Scale by Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, and Albury, this work reports on the scale's current cultural validity. The investigation relied on responses from an ethnically and regionally diverse community sample of Black adults in the United States. Results suggest that a revised two-factor 18-item scale may be most appropriate for quantitative investigations into Black communalism. Additional cultural validity studies within yet-to-be queried Black communities in the U.S. are recommended, along with validity studies with Black/African collectives across the diaspora.

## **Introduction**

Attempting to precisely describe and measure our psychological experiences as members of the Black community has been the fundamental scholarly mission of Black/African Psychology since its emergence as a disciplinary specialty in the late 1960's. Those of us in the field know well the importance of such scholarship to the creation of culturally accurate models of mental wellness, appropriate mental health policies, and, responsive clinical interventions (see Robert L. Williams' "The Death of White Research in the Black Community (1980) for an overview). Especially needed, is scholarship concerned with the development and refinement of culturally and psychometrically sound Black/African collective identity measures. A review of the literature reveals that conceptual work in this area far outpaces construct measurement (see Utsey, Belvet, and Fischer's "Assessing African-Centered (Africentric) Psychological Constructs: A Review of Existing Instrumentation" (2009) for a review). This report on our 2015 cultural validity study of the Communalism Scale contributes to the identified need.

## **Communalism**

Communalism, variably known as "ubuntu" in Xhosa and Zulu, "unhu" in Shona, and "uMunthu" in Malawi, is an afrocultural ethos that:

denotes awareness of the [fundamental] interdependence of people. One's orientation is social rather than being directed toward objects. One acts in accordance with the notion that duty to one's social group is more important than individual privileges and rights. Sharing is promoted because it signifies the affirmation of social interconnectedness; self-centeredness and individual greed are disdained (Boykin, 1983, p.345)

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) identified five essential dimensions of a communalistic orientation as part of the original scale development process: (1) Anchoring of Individual Identity in Group; (2) Transcendence of Group Duties and Responsibilities over individual Concerns; (3) Sanctity of Social Bonds and Relations; (4) Primacy of Social Existence; and, (5) Emphasis on Sharing and Contributing in Support of the Group. Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, and Albury, then developed a 31-item paper-and-pencil self-report survey designed to measure the five dimensions. The measure was then tested with multiple samples of African Americans. Results of these investigations suggest that the original Boykin et al. Communalism Scale is a reliable and valid measure of this cultural psychological orientation (see Utsey et al, 2009 for a full review).

At the same time, while the original Communalism Scale has been established as a psychometrically sound measure, Utsey et al. rightly note its potential limited use due to the ethnic, regional, developmental, and educational homogeneity of study participants (2009). Specifically, all original participants self-identified as ethnically African American, as undergraduate college students, and, all were recruited from the northeastern region of the United States. Accordingly, one aim of the 2015 cultural validity study was to test the psychometric properties and utility of the scale with a more ethnically, developmentally, and regionally diverse Black population. At the end of their review of the Communalism Scale, Utsey et al. also encouraged scholars to test the predictive validity of the measure with measures of psychological functioning (2009). Taking up this challenge, a second aim of the study was to test the predictive validity of the instrument using a culturally validated index of subjective well-being. This study was approved by the first author's IRB.

## Method

### Participants

Snowball recruitment through social media, SMS technology, and email contacts was employed to obtain study participants. After giving informed consent, participants completed the "Good Character in the Black Community Survey," an online 100 item self-report questionnaire designed to collect data on character strengths, prosocial behavior, cultural orientation, and demographic information from self-identified Black adults. Survey completion took approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Power analysis indicated a need to recruit a minimum of 200 participants. After reaching the goal of 200 completed surveys (i.e., no missing data), exploration of mean communalism scores commenced, revealing four outliers, two at each end of the measurement continuum. We recruited four additional participants to offset the outliers, ending up with a final group of 205 respondents. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics.

**Table 1.**

*Study Participant Characteristics (N = 205)*

Nation	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	Region	Age
United States	Black	80% African American 10% Multiethnic 5% West Indian/Carib 3% Continental African 2% Latinx	77% (F) 23% (M)	44% South 42% Northeast 10% Midwest 4% West	88% 21-59 yrs. 12% ≥ 60 yrs.

## **Measures**

### **Communalism Scale**

A 31-item 6-Point Likert (1 “completely false” – 6 “completely true”) designed to measure an afrocultural orientation that privileges human and community interdependence (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1997).

### **Black Community Involvement**

A single-item dichotomous measure that asks participants to indicate engagement in volunteerism within the Black community (0 = No; 1 = Yes).

### **Subjective Well-Being Derived from Black Community Involvement**

An 11-item dichotomous measure developed based on findings from a qualitative study on the topic (Grayman-Simpson, 2013). A sample item from the index includes, “When helping people in the Black community, I feel a sense of gratification” (0 = No; 1 = Yes). Internal consistency reliability for the index was very good ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

## **Results**

### **Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Consistent with Boykin’s articulated conceptualization of communalism, we first ran Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) specifying five factors. While the Cronbach alphas for the first three factors were acceptable ( $\geq .70$ ), the internal consistency reliability for the fourth factor was .65, and, the fifth factor had only one item loading on it. A review of the scree plot suggested the presence of two distinct factors. Thus, we re-ran the factor analysis specifying two factors. Item loadings of  $\geq .50$  from the original 31-item scale were retained, resulting in the retention of 18 items. As you can see from Table 2, each of the 18 items loaded on only one of the two factors, and, Cronbach alphas for both factors are acceptable.

**Table 2.***Significant Item Loadings for Two-Factor Communalism Scale*

Original Item Statement	Factor 1 $\alpha = .84$	Factor 2 $\alpha = .76$
In my family it is expected that the elderly are cared for by the younger Generations	.59	-.07
I enjoy being part of a group effort	.24	.55
I prefer to concern myself with my own affairs than involving myself with other people	-.07	.65
In my family there are close friends which we consider family	.61	.06
It is family group membership which gives me a sense of personal identity	.67	.23
Older members of my family are often relied on for advice and guidance	.67	.12
I don't mind if my cousins come to live with me	.62	.12
I would prefer to live in an area where I know I have family members	.64	.09
I believe that a person has an obligation to work cooperatively with family and friends	.53	.27
It is not unusual for me to call close family friends "uncle" or "cousin"	.53	.08
I enjoy helping family members accomplish their goals	.52	.23
I prefer to work in a group	.38	.54
I am more concerned with personal gains than with those of my family and friends	.05	.55
Among my family members, it is understood that we should turn to another in time of crisis	.63	.09
I place great value on social relations among people	.25	.55
I make sacrifices for my family and they do the same for me	.56	.14
I believe that when people are "close" to one another (like family and friends) they should be accountable for each other's welfare	.21	.59
I place high value on my duty to the group	.33	.64

**Internal Consistency Reliability, Test-Retest Reliability & Predictive Validity**

Once it was determined that a two factor, 18-item measure best captured the data, we tested the measure's internal consistency reliability, test-retest reliability, and predictive validity. Results indicated that the revised scale shows very good internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = .86$ ). To determine test-retest reliability, we re-administered the "Good Character in the Black Community" survey to a subset of the original group of participants three weeks after initial completion of the survey. The relationship between initial and follow-up responses to the revised communalism scale was statistically significant and strong ( $r = .89$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ).

Next, we ran two correlations in order to investigate the revised measure's predictive validity. The first correlation examined the relationship between communalism and Black community involvement. That relationship was positive and significant, albeit weak ( $r = .15$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ). The second correlation explored the connection between communalism and subjective well-being derived from Black community involvement. The relationship between the two was also positive and significant, but weak ( $r = .20$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ). In sum, this revised communalism scale demonstrates very good internal consistency reliability, strong test-retest reliability, and acceptable predictive validity.

Finally, we looked for differences in responses based on demographic indicators. We did not find any differences in scores on the revised communalism scale based on ethnicity, gender, region of residence, or age. Table 3 summarizes descriptive statistics for the refined instrument.

**Table 3.**

*Revised Communalism Scale Descriptive Statistics (N = 205)*

Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness Statistic
4.5	4.6	.64	-.50

## Discussion

Black/African Psychology scholars have a responsibility to periodically revisit and retest our existing cultural knowledge claims. With this responsibility in mind, we set out to revalidate Boykin et al.'s Communalism Scale 20 years after its original publication. Results of our investigation suggest that the originally named five dimensions of communalism are better conceptualized as two: (1) Primacy of Social Existence (now encompassing original notions of "Primary of Social Existence," "Sanctity of Social Bonds and Relations," and "Anchoring of Individual Identity in Group"); and, (2) Transcendence of Group Duties and Responsibilities over Individual Concerns (now encompassing the original concepts "Transcendence of Group Duties and Responsibilities over Individual Concerns" and "Emphasis on Sharing and Contributing in Support of Group"). Further, our analyses indicate that the revised two-dimension construct is reliably measured with 18 of the original 31 scale items; and, that this rescaled communalistic orientation is positively related to Black community involvement and positive psychological functioning in the form of subjective well-being derived from Black community involvement.

With the revised scale's reliability and validity established, we recommend scholars conducting research on communal orientation within US-based adult Black communities use this revised instrument in their investigations. In addition, extending Utsey et al.'s recommendation that future studies test the Communalism Scale with more diverse US Black populations, we encourage fellow Black/African psychological scholars to conduct additional cultural validity studies of the original Communalism Scale with Black collectives across the global diaspora. The complete revised communalism scale is included in Table 4.

**Table 4.**

*Revised Communalism Scale*

Dimension	Original Scale Item	Original Item Statement (* = reverse score response)
Primacy of Social Existence		
	2	In my family it is expected that the elderly are cared for by the younger generations
	9	In my family there are close friends which we consider family
	12	It is family group membership which gives me a sense of personal identity
	13	Older members of my family are often relied on for advice and guidance
	14	I don't mind if my cousins come to live with me
	15	I would prefer to live in an area where I know I have family members
	16	I believe that a person has an obligation to work cooperatively with family and friends
	17	It is not unusual for me to call close family friends "uncle" or "cousin"
	18	I enjoy helping family members accomplish their goals
	23	Among my family members, it is understood that we should turn to another in time of crisis
	25	I make sacrifices for my family and they do the same for me

Transcendence of Group  
Duties and Responsibilities  
Over Individual Concerns

3	I enjoy being part of a group effort
7	*I prefer to concern myself with my own affairs than involving myself with other people
21	I prefer to work in a group
22	*I am more concerned with personal gains than with those of my family and friends
24	I place great value on social relations among people
28	I believe that when people are “close” to one another (like family and friends) they should be accountable for each other’s welfare
29	I place high value on my duty to the group

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