


Responding to Partners' Expression of Anger: The Role of Communal Motivation

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Abstract

The effects of communal motivation on reactions to relationship partners' expressed anger were examined. In Study 1, married couples reported on the communal strength of their marriage, their expressions of anger to their spouse, and relationship satisfaction. In Study 2, college students reported on the communal strength of their best friendships, those friends' expressions of anger, and their evaluations of and provision of support to those friends. In Study 3, communal motivation toward a stranger who expressed mild anger was manipulated and evaluation of that stranger was measured. In all three studies, low communal motivation was associated with more negative evaluations of angry partners, lower relationship satisfaction, and, in Study 2, lower support provision. In contrast, when communal motivation was high, these decreases either did not occur (Studies 1 and 3) or were diminished (Study 2), and in Study 2, partners' anger was associated with increased provision of social support.

Keywords

responding to anger, communal motivation, relationships

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What are the consequences of expressing anger in relationships? Most extant evidence suggests expressed anger has negative interpersonal consequences. Yet we hypothesized that the interpersonal consequences of anger would depend on the extent to which the perceiver was motivated to be communally responsive to the partner. We predicted that individuals low in communal motivation would react negatively (with low evaluations of the partners, low relationship satisfaction, and less social support) to partners' expressed anger whereas individuals high in communal motivation would not react negatively and, indeed, if given a chance, would provide the angry partners with social support. We tested these hypotheses in three different types of relationships—marriages (Study 1), college friendships (Study 2), and potential relationships (Study 3).

The Nature of Communal Motivation and Why It Should Relate to Reactions to Partners' Anger

Communal motivation refers to the degree to which individuals wish to assume responsibility for a relationship partners' welfare and to be noncontingently responsive to those partners (Clark & Mills, 1979; Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004). Past research has shown that, relative to people who

neither have nor desire a communal relationship, people who have or desire to establish a communal relationship with partners pay greater attention to partners' needs (Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989; Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986), have more positive reactions to partners' expressed emotions (which indicate need states; Clark & Taraban, 1991), and help partners more when a need is detected (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987). Greater communal motivation also has been linked to blaming partners less for their failures and giving them more credit for their successes (McCall, 1995). In sum, communal motivation has been found to predict focusing on partners and their needs and being responsive to those partners.

Low communal motivation, in contrast, should predict reduced focus on partners' welfare and a relatively greater focus on the costs and burdens of dealing with relationship

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partners for the self. Fitting with this prediction is research showing that low communal strength of relationships or low communal orientation within individuals predicts burnout among nurses (Van Yperen, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1992) and among leaders of self-help groups (Medvene, Volk, & Meissen, 1997), depression among caregivers of Alzheimer's patients (Williamson & Schulz, 1990), and personal resentment when one perceives one has been underbenefited in a relationship (Thompson, Medvene, & Freedman, 1995). In sum, low communal motivation appears to be linked with focusing on the negative implications of partners' needs and demands for the self.

Ways of Interpreting Expressions of Anger

Anger is generally described as an emotional state that is aroused as a result of unjust treatment or blocked goals (Lazarus, 2001; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). Expressions of anger can signal that the expresser is feeling hostile and might act unpleasantly (Shaver et al., 1987). This suggests that expressing anger might very well decrease liking for the expresser. However, expressions of anger also can convey the needs and vulnerabilities of the expresser (Clark & Brissette, 2003; Clark & Finkel, 2005; Ekman, 2003; Keltner, Ekman, Gonzaga, & Beer, 2003) and the expresser's desire for sympathy, support, and help in remediating the situation. This suggests that expressing anger might not decrease liking and that it, like sadness or nervousness, may elicit sympathy and support (Clark et al., 1987; Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008).

Consistent with the communal motivation findings described above, we reasoned that among those low in motivation to be responsive to partners, the implications of the partner's anger for the self would loom large and thus predicted that anger would cause liking for the partner to decrease. In contrast, we expected that among those high in motivation to be responsive to partners, a partner's anger would lead individuals to consider the implications of the partner's anger for understanding the partner's needs and desires and thus predicted that partner anger would not result in more negative evaluations of that partner and might even elicit social support when perceivers can provide it.

Existing Work on the Interpersonal Consequences of Expressing Anger

Existing literature on the interpersonal consequences of expressing anger has focused mainly on how individuals make attributions about others who have expressed anger. People expressing anger, both verbally and nonverbally, have been rated as being threatening, unsocial, arrogant, and calculating (Knutson, 1996; Tiedens, 2001). They are perceived as tough, strong, competent, and powerful. In negotiations, people tend to be easier on and give in more to a

negotiator expressing anger than a negotiator expressing happiness (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2004; van Kleef, Dreu, & Manstead, 2004).

Less often studied are questions of how anger expression influences liking for the expresser. What research exists in this regard suggests that angry people are not liked as much as others (Averill, 1982; Sommers, 1984; Tavris, 1984) and elicit distress and low relational satisfaction in perceivers (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Gottman & Levenson, 1992) as well as low levels of felt closeness (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1984). Thus, there is ample evidence to suggest that expressing anger has negative interpersonal consequences.

Yet a review of this literature suggests reasons to question the generalizability of these findings. None of this work was conducted in a relational context in which one would expect communal motivation to be high. In some of the work, the individuals involved had no relationship with one another and no reason to expect or desire a close relationship to develop with one another (see, e.g., Sommers, 1984). Other research involved relationships that took the form of negotiations or business-like relationships (see, e.g., Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2004; van Kleef et al., 2004). In research that did involve relationships that are normatively communal in nature (e.g., marriages), those relationships had deteriorated to a point that the researchers labeled them as distressed at the start of the studies (see, e.g., Carstensen et al., 1995; Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

To test whether our hypothesis that high communal motivation will buffer the potential negative effects of expressed anger on liking and social support, it is necessary to examine reactions to expressed anger among people who feel high motivation to be communally responsive to partners as well as among people who feel relatively lower motivation to be communally responsive to partners. That was our aim.

Present Research

The present research program includes three studies. Two studies include participants who were either high or low in communal motivation to be responsive to their spouse (Study 1) or to their friend (Study 2) as indexed by their reports of the communal strength of their relationships (Mills et al., 2004). In a third study, participants were assigned randomly to receive manipulations known to produce high versus low communal motivation to be responsive to a new potential partner (Clark, 1986; also see Clark, 1984; Clark et al., 1987; Clark & Mills, 1979).

We focused on the question of whether communal motivation affects responses to expressions of anger. We predicted that differences in the strength of communal motivation toward partners would result in differential responses to those partners' anger. When individuals' communal motivation was low, we predicted they would respond negatively to partners' expressions of anger. This is because such individuals

feel little responsibility to meet partners' needs and therefore presumably are focused on themselves, that is, on how the partners' anger makes the self feel (Clark, Graham, Williams, & Lemay, 2008). When the focus is on the self, individuals are more likely to be in a self-protective mode. As a result, partners' expression of anger could be perceived as a possible attack or threat to the self (Maner et al., 2005), resulting in a negative response toward partners. Angry partners may complain, yell, or show signs of physical aggression as a result of being angry (Shaver et al., 1987). Anger may be perceived as an annoyance and a source of personal unpleasantness with which individuals may prefer not to deal. This too may result in a negative response from the individuals to the partners' anger.

In contrast, when communal motivation is high, we predicted that individuals would *not* respond negatively to partners' anger. When felt responsibility to respond to partners' needs is high, individuals are attentive to situations that would alert them to the partners' needs so that they can intervene. When such needs are detected, focus of attention should be on the partners, the partners' needs, and how they can support the partners (Clark et al., 2008). Given this perspective, partners' expressed anger may be taken as a sign that the partners trust the perceivers and are willing to be dependent on the perceiver. It may be taken as evidence of the partners' need for support. Therefore, although angry people may still be somewhat unpleasant, overall partners' expressions of anger may not decrease liking and are likely to elicit support.

Based on this theoretical rationale, we set forth the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who are low in communal motivation toward partners will exhibit negative responses to partners' expressions of anger. These negative responses include negative evaluation of partners, reduced relationship satisfaction, and decreased support provision.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who are high in communal motivation toward partners will not exhibit these negative responses to anger. In other words, communal motivation acts as a buffer.

These two hypotheses were tested in three studies. The responses examined were evaluation of the partner (Studies 1, 2, and 3), satisfaction with the relationship (Studies 1 and 2), and support provided to the partner (Study 2). Each involved a distinct methodology and a distinct relationship, yet each tested the same conceptual hypothesis. In Study 1, a survey of married couples assessed the communal strength of marriages, which measures communal motivation using an established, valid index (see Mills et al., 2004) as well as expressions of anger and satisfaction within these marriages. In Study 2, a survey and daily diary study of college students'

existing friendships and a measure of communal motivation (Mills et al., 2004) were collected together with global evaluations of the friends and global satisfaction with the friendships. Afterward, students completed a diary for 5 days in which they reported on their friends' expressions of anger and their own evaluations of that friend, satisfaction with the friendship, and provision of support to the friend. Study 3 was an experiment. Communal motivation toward fellow students whom participants believed they would meet later in the study was manipulated using an established, valid manipulation of communal motivation (see Clark, 1986; Clark et al., 1987; Clark & Mills, 1979). Afterward, participants learned that one of the potential partners had expressed irritability (mild anger) whereas others had expressed no emotion or sadness, and their evaluations of the potential partners were collected.

Study 1

Method

Participants were both members of 96 couples (96 men and 96 women), married on average for approximately 25 months. They had been recruited prior to their wedding for a longitudinal study of marriages.¹ They had not been previously married, did not have a child prior to marriage, and were younger than the age of 35 at the time of marriage. All participants completed questionnaires independently and were instructed not to share their responses with their spouse. Participants completed a 10-item measure of communal strength (Mills et al., 2004), which assessed on 11-point scales, 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*extremely*), participants' motivation to be responsive to their spouse's needs (e.g., "How far would you be willing to go to help your spouse?" "How happy do you feel when doing something that helps your spouse?"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). They indicated their tendency to express anger toward their spouse ("I freely express my anger to my spouse") and to other people ("I freely express my anger to other people") on 5-point scales, 0 (*no*) to 5 (*yes*). They also completed a 6-item measure of relationship satisfaction using 7-point response scales, 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; e.g., "We have a good relationship," "Our relationship is strong"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$).

Results

Predictions were tested using a two-level model that accounted for the nested data structure (participants modeled as nested within couples). To model the possible interdependent nature of participants' satisfaction, intercepts were modeled as randomly varying across couples. Because of restricted degrees of freedom, slopes were modeled as fixed.

We examined the interaction between spouses' reports of expressing anger to participants and the participants'

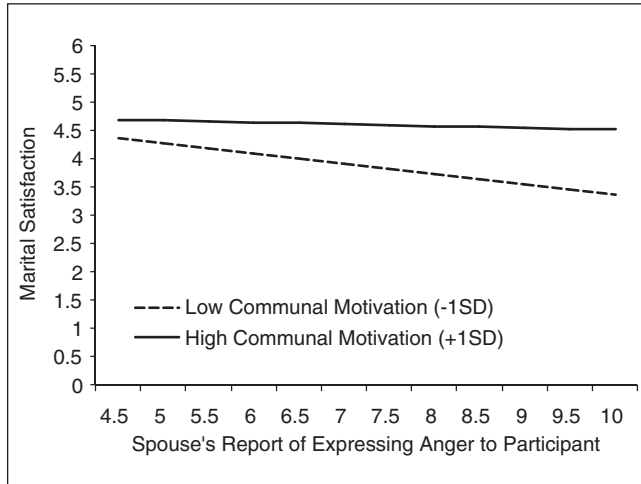


Figure 1. Differences in marital satisfaction as a function of communal motivation and spouse's expression of anger (Study 1)

independently reported communal motivation. We examined the impact of this interaction on predicting participants' satisfaction with the relationship, controlling for the main effects of anger expression and communal motivation. Importantly, spouses' reports of expressing anger to others in general were controlled to rule out the possibility that results were driven by their general tendencies or personality traits to express anger to others in general instead of their expression of anger to the spouse.

The interaction between spouses' report of expressing anger to the participants and participants' independently reported felt communal motivation toward spouses on marital satisfaction was in the predicted direction and was marginally significant, $b = .08$, $p = .07$. The control interaction (communal motivation \times spouses' expression of anger to others in general) was not significant, $b = -.05$, $p = .18$. Follow-up conditional effect analyses (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) revealed that spouses' expressions of anger to the participants predicted decreases in participants' satisfaction when participants' communal strength was low ($-1 SD$), $b = -.18$, $p < .001$, but not when communal strength was high ($+1 SD$), $b = -.03$, $p = .57$, as seen in Figure 1.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 supported our hypotheses in a sample of married couples. Among those participants who felt high motivation to be communally responsive to their spouse, spouses' reports of expressing anger were not associated with decreased marital satisfaction. Among participants less communally motivated, spouses' reports of expressing anger were associated with decreased satisfaction. This study demonstrates that expression of anger is not always linked with negative consequences for a relationship.

The finding that anger expressions are not always met with decreased partner evaluations is, we believe, an important finding relevant to establishing a boundary condition for prior findings that have suggested that expressing anger is almost always detrimental in the eyes of the partners. These findings fit with the rationale for our hypothesis that those low in communal motivation would react to a partner's expressed anger in terms of its negative implications for the self, whereas those high in communal strength would be more prone to react to a partner's expressed anger in terms of its meaning for the angry partner. However, another conceptually distinct possibility is that the very nature of the anger-producing events and/or the intensity of anger expressed differed in relationships including participants high versus low in communal motivation. Perhaps the anger-producing events and/or expressed anger are more intense when expressed to perceivers who report low rather than high communal motivation.²

It is also possible that the interaction we observed is unique to marriages. This might be the case because marriages are exclusive and involve a strong legal commitment to partners. Strong commitment combined with strong communal motivation may buffer effects of a partner's expressed anger on negative evaluations of the partner. In particular, strongly committed individuals who are communally motivated may feel a particularly high need to reduce any dissonance created by a partner's expressed anger and may do so by reasserting a positive attitude toward the partner (Festinger, 1957).

Studies 2 (and 3) were conducted to test the generalizability of the observed effects and to rule out the alternative explanation just posed. We tested the generalizability by testing whether the results would emerge in friendships that varied in strength of communal motivation (Study 2) and in brand-new relationships in which communal motivation could be experimentally manipulated using established, valid techniques (Study 3).

We worked to rule out the alternative explanation for the observed interaction between expressed anger and communal motivation on perceptions of partners in two different methodological ways. In Study 2, we measured expressed anger and evaluations of partner on multiple days, allowing us to test the effect *within* as well as between relationships. Although doing so still did not allow us to control the nature and exact causes of anger in these relationships, it did allow us to examine reactions to partners on days when those partners were angry versus not angry while controlling for the overall nature of the strength of the communal motivation. In Study 3, we randomly assigned participants to experimental conditions and manipulated both communal motivation and expressed anger in new relationships, allowing us both to control for relationship history and, importantly, to hold the nature of anger expressed constant across the high versus low communal motivation conditions.

Study 2

As just noted, Study 2 investigated links between friends' expressions of anger and participants' evaluations of their friends both within and between participants. Study 2 also incorporated a number of other changes. First, in Study 2, reports of friends' anger expression came from the participants themselves rather than from their friends. This allowed us to more directly examine links between participants' perception of friends' expression of anger and evaluations of friends (ruling out the possibility that people high in communal motivation just miss or misinterpret partners' expressions of anger). Second, we collected both global evaluations of friends and daily evaluations of friends, allowing us to examine communal motivation differences in daily fluctuations of evaluations of the friends. Moreover, by collecting multiple ratings of the friends' expression of anger, the ratings were more likely to portray accurately the average day-to-day interactions shared by the participant and the friend. Third, we collected measures of social support provided to friends, allowing us not only to determine if communal motivations are associated with how people change (or do not change) evaluations of friends in the face of the friends' anger expression but also to determine whether people differentially respond to anger by providing support (or not) in relationships characterized by high versus low communal motivation. Our prediction in this regard was that among people high in communal motivation, friends' expressed anger would be associated with providing social support to those friends but that this would not occur among people low in communal motivation.

The predictions for evaluations of relationship partners were the same as in Study 1. Among students with low felt communal motivation to be responsive toward their friend (but not among those high in communal motivation), we predicted that their friends' expressed anger would be associated with decreases in evaluations of those friends and in relationship satisfaction. We further predicted that expressed anger would elicit increased social support for the friends when communal motivation toward the friends was high.

Method

Participants were 189 students (109 female, 80 male, mean age = 19.51 years old) enrolled in an introductory-level psychology class who completed an optional survey on relationships. On an initial anonymous electronic survey, they indicated the strength of their communal motivation toward a best friend in school using a 10-item scale assessing their concern for their friend and willingness to respond to their friend's needs (e.g., "I care for this person's needs, I would go out of my way to help this person"; $\alpha = .92$). They also rated their global evaluation of the friend using a 2-item scale, ("I like this person," "I value this person"; $r = .86$)

and their global relationship satisfaction using a 3-item scale ("This relationship makes me very happy," "I feel satisfied with our relationship," "This relationship is close to ideal"; $\alpha = .83$).

Participants then completed a daily diary for five consecutive days. They rated (a) how much the best friend expressed anger to them each day ("Today, this person intentionally expressed anger to me"), (b) their daily evaluation of friend, adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (four-item scale, "Today, I took a positive attitude toward this person," "Today, I felt that this person had a number of good qualities," "Today, I felt this person was a failure," "Today I felt that this person does not have much to be proud of"; $\alpha = .90$ across the 5 days), and (c) support given daily to friend (two-item scale, "Today, I provided support to this person," "I listened to and comforted this person today"; $r = .83$ across the 5 days). All items were assessed using 6-point rating scales, 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated greater expression of anger, more positive daily evaluation, and greater support provision.

Results

Descriptive statistics. The mean level of participants' felt communal motivation toward their college best friend was 4.96 ($SD = 0.72$). Participants' mean ratings of that friend's expression of anger averaged across the 5 days was 2.11 ($SD = 0.86$). To examine whether friends' expressions of anger occurred only or primarily in low-strength (or high-strength) communal relationships, we regressed friends' expressions of anger separately on participants' communal motivation. Communal motivation did not predict friends' expressions of anger, indicating that it was not the case that friends expressed anger only or primarily in low-strength (or high-strength) communal friendships but that it was expressed similarly often in both low and high communal friendships ($\beta = .01, p = .85$).

Responses to friends expressing anger. As an initial test of the predictions, we regressed each of the dependent variables on communal motivation, perception of the amount of anger expressed by friends (averaged across the 5 days), and a product term representing the interaction of communal motivation and friends' expression of anger. For these analyses, daily diary evaluation and support provision responses were averaged across the 5 days.

Global evaluation of friends. The interaction of communal motivation by expressions of friends' anger was a significant predictor of global evaluation, $\beta = .18, p < .01$. A test of conditional effects (Cohen et al., 2003) revealed that when communal motivation was low ($-1 SD$), friends' expression of anger predicted decreased global evaluation $\beta = -.31, p < .001$, whereas when communal motivation was high ($+1 SD$), friends' expression did not predict global evaluation of friends, $\beta = .06, p = .39$. These findings, which are shown in

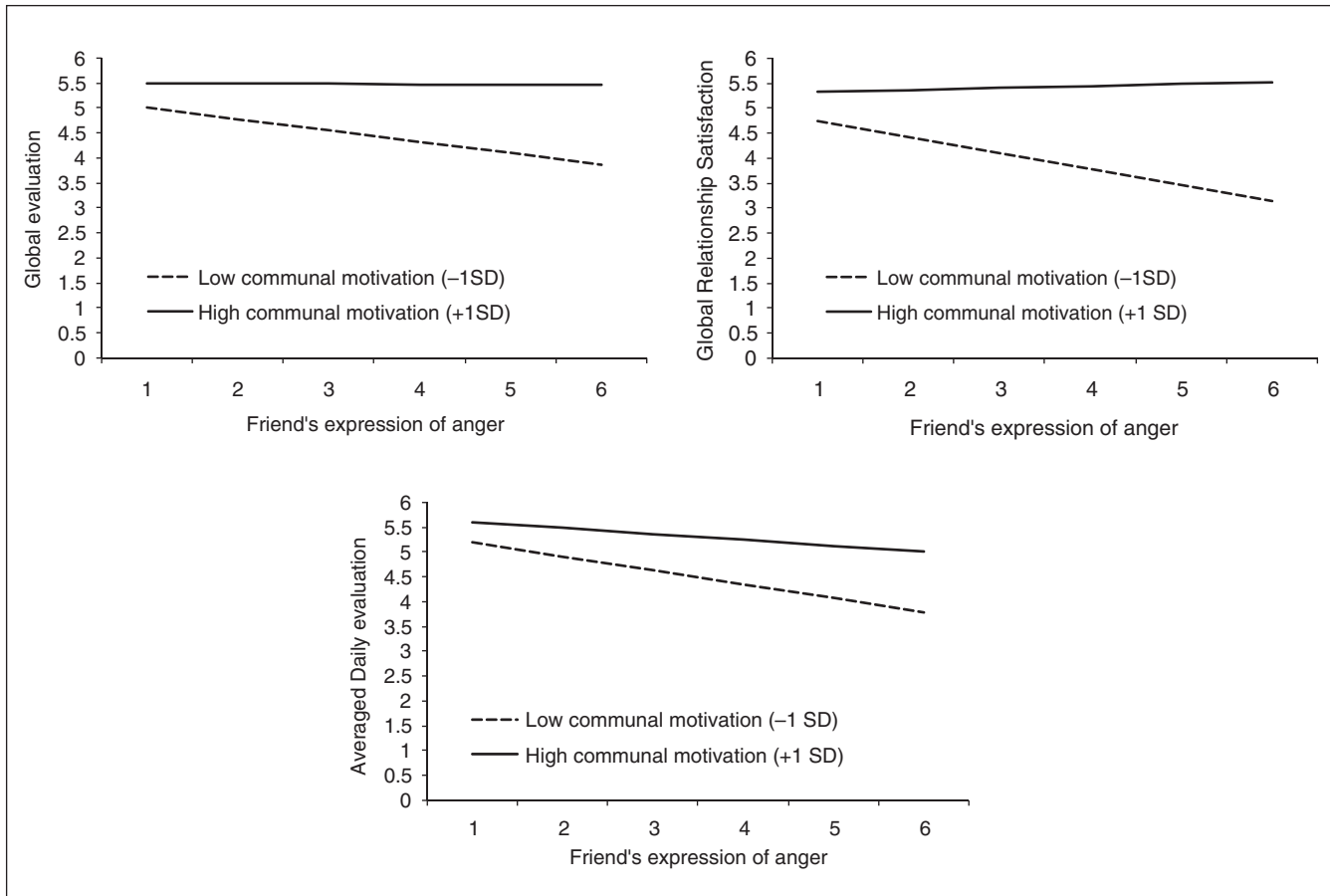


Figure 2. Differences in global evaluation of friend, global relationship satisfaction, and daily evaluation of friend averaged across 5 days, as a function of communal motivation toward friend (Study 2)

the upper-left graph of Figure 2, replicate the pattern of findings in Study 1.

Global relationship satisfaction. The interaction of communal motivation by expressions of friends' anger was a significant predictor of global satisfaction, $\beta = .18, p < .01$. As seen in Figure 2 (upper-right graph), a test of conditional effects revealed that when communal motivation was low ($-1 SD$), friends' expressions of anger predicted decreased relationship satisfaction, $\beta = -.33, p < .001$, whereas when communal motivation was high ($+1 SD$), friends' expressions did not predict relationship satisfaction, $\beta = .04, p = .62$.

Average daily evaluation of friends. The interaction of communal motivation by expressions of friends' anger was a marginally significant predictor of daily evaluation averaged across the 5 days, $\beta = .11, p = .07$. A test of conditional effects revealed that when communal motivation was low ($-1 SD$), friends' expressions of anger predicted decreased positive evaluations, $\beta = -.39, p < .001$. Friends' expressions of anger also predicted decreased evaluations when motivation strength was high ($+1 SD$), but the size of the effect was

smaller, $\beta = -.17, p < .05$. These findings are illustrated by the lower-center graph in Figure 2.

Average daily support provision. The interaction of communal motivation by expressions of friends' anger was a marginally significant predictor of support provision averaged across the 5 days, $\beta = .12, p = .07$. Tests of conditional effects revealed that when communal motivation was low ($-1 SD$), friends' expression of anger did not predict support provision, $\beta = .03, p = .80$. Friends' expressions of anger predicted increased support provision when communal motivation was high ($+1 SD$), $\beta = .27, p < .01$, as seen in Figure 3.

Responses to friends expressing anger: Communal motivation predicting residualized change in daily evaluation and support provision. These findings replicate the pattern of effects of Study 1 using both global and averaged measures of relationship outcomes. We also sought to test whether communal motivation would moderate transient reactions to variations in the friends' expressions of anger. We conducted a series of multilevel analyses, modeling days

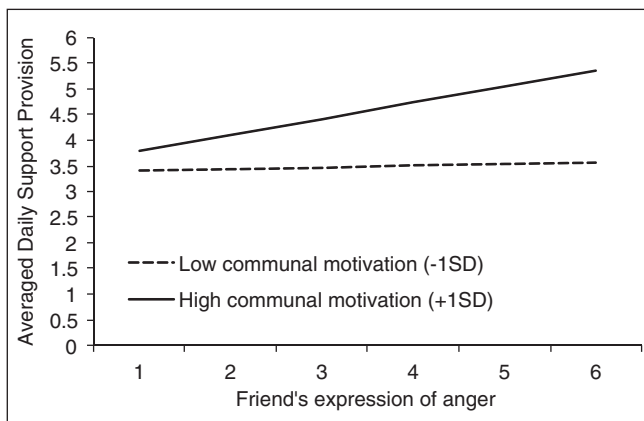


Figure 3. Differences in daily support provision averaged across 5 days as a function of communal motivation toward friend (Study 2)

as nested within individuals (502 observations nested 169 individuals), to examine whether daily perception of friends' expression of anger predicted the next day's evaluation and support provision as a function of communal motivation. The same-day assessment of the criterion variable (evaluation or support provision) was included as a covariate, as was the interaction of this assessment with communal motivation.

Change in support provision. The interaction between communal motivation and expressions of friends' anger was a significant predictor of next day's support provision, $b = .17$, $p < .05$. Tests of conditional effects revealed that when communal motivation was low ($-1 SD$), friends' expressions of anger predicted reduced provision of support the next day, $b = -.20$, $p < .05$, whereas when communal motivation was high ($+1 SD$), friends' expressions did not predict provision of support to the friend the next day $b = .04$, $p = .50$.

Change in daily evaluation. The interaction between communal motivation and expressions of friends' anger was not a significant predictor of evaluations of the friends the following day, $b = .02$, $p = .55$.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended the findings of Study 1 to ongoing friendships. The predictions once again were supported. Those individuals with high communal motivation toward their college best friend maintained positive evaluations of the friend and high satisfaction in spite of the friend expressing anger to them, whereas among participants with low communal motivation perception of the friend's expressions of anger was associated with derogation of the friend and reduced satisfaction. Importantly, in Study 2, the within-participant nature of the design allowed us to show that among people low (but not among those high) in communal

motivation *changes* in anger expression within an individual across time led to decreases in liking.

Study 2 also revealed that friendships characterized by different levels of communal motivation were associated not only with differential reactions in terms of evaluations of the partner and the relationship but also with differential reports of giving support to the partner. When communal motivation was low, expressed anger not only was associated with decreased liking but also was associated with decreased support provision as a function of the friend expressing anger the previous day. When communal motivation was high, support provision did not decrease as a function of the friend expressing anger the previous day. In fact, in these relationships, averaged daily provision of support increased.

As in Study 1, we believe the findings from Study 2 can be accounted for by the change in relational focus as a result of differences in communal motivation. We believe feeling low communal motivation toward a relationship partner leads to thinking about the implications of the partner's anger for the self, resulting in a negative response (decrease in evaluation of the partner and the relationship) to the angry partner, whereas feeling high communal motivation leads to a focus on partner's anger, its meaning for the partner, and how one can be of support, which then does not lead to a negative response to the angry partner. However, as was the case in Study 1, in Study 2 we could not control the nature of the anger that was expressed in relationships characterized by differing levels of communal motivation. Thus, conducting an experiment in which expressions of anger were standardized and manipulated and in which communal motivation was manipulated seemed wise. In Study 3, therefore, we *manipulated* college students' motivation for a strong communal relationship with a fellow, but unknown, college student using established manipulations that elicit differential levels of (low or high) communal motivation (see Clark, 1986) toward another person.

Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 found support for the hypothesis that individuals' reactions to a partner's anger are affected by the communal motivation felt toward partners in two different types of ongoing relationships: marriage and friendship. Study 3 specified and held constant the target of and the reason for partners' anger, which were ambiguous and varied in Studies 1 and 2. In Study 3, the target of anger was a third party, not the participant, and appeared to have been motivated by something that happened prior to the study. Study 3 also employed a method in which anger expression was held constant across all participants.

Method

Participants. Participants were 66 university students who received course credit or monetary compensation (41 females,

25 males, mean age = 19.08). Data from two additional participants were not included in the analyses because they voiced suspicion about the cover story.

Design. The study employed a 2 (communal motivation: low or high) \times 3 (emotion: anger, sadness, no emotion) mixed-factorial design. Communal motivation was manipulated between participants; emotion was manipulated within subjects. Motivation to form a communal relationship was manipulated by providing information regarding three other ostensible participants' (portrayed as participating in the same study session) reasons for participating in the study (33 participants in each condition). Emotion was manipulated by providing information regarding each of these ostensible participants' emotional states (one expressed irritation, another sadness, and the third no particular emotion). In reality, other participants were not present and the information about the other participants' reasons for participating and expressions of emotional states were fabricated.

Procedure. In the laboratory portion of the study, participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine (a) how people form new relationships based on impressions and a short laboratory interaction (high communal condition) or (b) how strangers interact with each other based on impressions (low communal condition). The experimenter explained that in the first part of the study participants would complete a short background information questionnaire. Afterward, they would rate their impressions of three participants based on their responses on the background information questionnaire. These three "participants" were supposedly in other parts of the laboratory in the same study session. Participants were led to expect to interact with one of them for 8 minutes in the second part of the study.

Participants were first given a background information questionnaire that was going to be shown, ostensibly, to the other three "participants." The background information sheet contained four questions: (a) "What are your reasons for participating in today's study?" (b) "Think back to how you felt right before coming for today's study. How intensely did you feel the following emotions (sad, irritated, happy, nervous, and afraid) at that time? Please make sure to indicate the emotions you felt right *before* the study and NOT the emotions you feel because you're in the study"; (c) "Please list your hobbies"; and (d) "Please list two or three adjectives that best describe your personality." After completion, participants were asked to wait a few minutes while the experimenter made photocopies of the responses of the participant and of the other three "participants" questionnaires.

The experimenter returned with photocopies of three background information questionnaires, one supposedly completed by each of the other "participants." The first two responses on the background information sheet served as manipulations of communal motivation (low or high) and emotion expressed by the "participant" (anger, sadness, and no emotion).

Communal motivation was manipulated by using a slight variation of the manipulation successfully used to elicit communal responsiveness in previous studies (Clark, 1986; Clark et al., 1986; Clark & Mills, 1979). That is, in the high communal motivation condition, the questionnaires ostensibly completed by the other "participants" indicated "to meet new people" and "to make new friends" as their reasons for participating in the study. In the low communal motivation condition, the questionnaires indicated "to make money" as their reason for participating. To avoid having responses of the three "participants" all look the same, "to gain new experience" also was checked off as an additional reason on one of the response sheets in the high communal condition. Similarly, on one of the response sheets in the low communal condition, "to understand psychology studies" was checked off as an additional reason, and in another, "no particular reason" was checked off as an additional reason.

Emotion was manipulated by altering the responses on the background information questionnaire to suggest an emotional state held by each of the "participants." The ostensible angry participant reported relatively high irritation (a 6.5 on an 11-point scale, 0 = *not at all*, 10 = *extremely*). The ostensible sad participant indicated the same level of sadness. The remaining participant indicated being relatively low on all emotions.³ Responses to the questions about hobbies and personality all contained generic responses that were similar across the three emotion conditions. The order of relationship type and emotion manipulations was counterbalanced across participants, and the extra reasons checked off to make participants seem a bit distinct from one another were not confounded with what emotion participants were experiencing. The term *irritated*, which is a milder form of *anger*, was used instead of *anger* because it seemed more realistic to ask about a person's level of irritation before a study rather than anger because irritation is more often felt on a day-to-day basis rather than anger.

After reading each background information questionnaire, participants evaluated each of the other "participants" on a number of dimensions.

Likeability. Participants indicated how likeable they found each potential partner by rating how well 15 traits described their impressions of each person. These traits included likeable, annoying, dependable, trustworthy, inconsiderate, friendly, insincere, intelligent, irritating, kind, open-minded, sympathetic, understanding, unpleasant, and warm.

Desire to spend time in the future. Participants rated the degree to which they would want to become friends with, enjoy spending time with, count on, and like the potential partners. The participants also reported if they would feel uncomfortable if they spent time together with each potential partner, felt each partner would be a difficult person with whom to get along, and felt each potential partner would be an unpleasant person with whom to spend time.

Expectation for interaction. Participants rated the degree to which participants thought the interaction would be friendly, spontaneous, enjoyable, strained, and awkward.

Preference for being paired up. Participants indicated how much they wanted to be paired up with each person for the next part of the study, an 8-minute discussion.

All of the items were assessed using an 8-point scale, 0 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). After reverse scoring negatively worded items, an overall evaluation score was calculated by averaging the items, with higher scores indicating positive evaluations (Cronbach's α s = .96 for irritated "participant" and .90 for control "participant," respectively).

Finally, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire and a questionnaire assessing their impressions of Part 1 of the study (this was intended to probe for suspicion) while the experimenter was supposedly reading the ratings made by each participant to pair them up for Part 2. Participants were then debriefed.

To enhance the credibility of the cover story, a "Done" sign, which the participants were asked to slide under their door after they completed the initial background information questionnaire, appeared on the floor partially under one of the doors of a different room when the participant arrived in the laboratory. This made it seem that there was a participant in the other room. Also the experimenter went in and out of adjoining rooms at appropriately timed intervals to further enhance perceptions that another participant was present.

Results

Manipulation check. To assess whether the manipulation of communal motivation was successful, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing participants' responses to the question of how much they would enjoy responding to the needs of the potential partner (on a scale of 0 to 7) by condition was conducted. The mean difference was in the expected direction with participants in the communal condition reporting higher levels of motivation ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.23$) compared to those in the low communal condition ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.86$). This mean difference was not significant, $F(1, 56) = 2.08$, $p = .16$, but the trend suggests the manipulation was acceptable.

Did the manipulation of communal motivation lead to differences in evaluation of angry potential interaction partner? Mean levels of evaluations are shown in Table 1. We conducted a 2 (communal motivation, manipulated as a between-participants variable: low and high) \times 2 (emotion manipulated within-participant: anger and no emotion) mixed ANOVA on the overall evaluation score was conducted. The main effect of emotion was significant, $F(1, 62) = 12.67$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$, with evaluations for the angry potential partner lower than the no emotion potential partner ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.01$ for angry potential partner, $M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.69$ for no emotion potential partner). The main effect of communal

Table 1. Means of Evaluations of Potential Partners (Study 3)

Motivation condition	No emotion (control) potential partner		Angry potential partner	
	M	SD	M	SD
Low communal	3.93	0.74	3.32	1.10
High communal	4.18	0.63	3.98	0.79

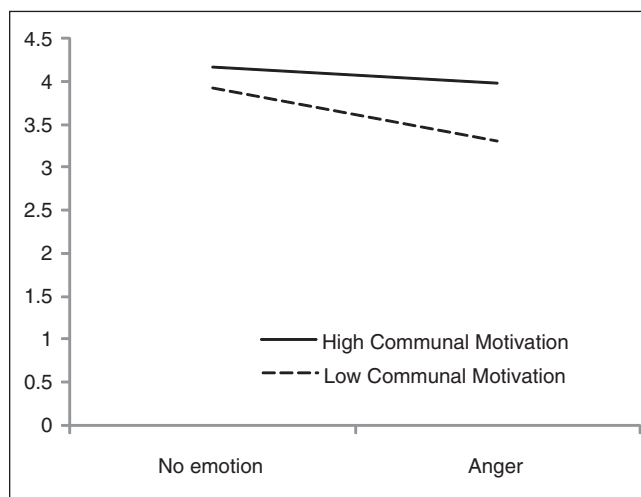


Figure 4. Overall evaluation of angry and no emotion "participant" in low communal and high communal motivation conditions (Study 3)

motivation was also significant, $F(1, 62) = 6.87$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, with evaluation in the high communal condition significantly higher than in the low communal condition ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.56$ for high communal and $M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.79$ for low communal).

The predicted communal motivation by emotion interaction was marginally significant, $F(1, 62) = 3.40$, $p = .07$. Follow-up analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. As predicted, in the low communal condition, there was a significant decrease in the overall evaluation of the angry potential partner compared to no emotion potential partner, $F(1, 31) = 13.42$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$. This decrease was not evident in the high communal condition, $F(1, 31) = 1.61$, $p = .21$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, as seen in Figure 4, confirming Hypotheses 1 and 2. We also tested our predictions separately for likeability, desire to spend time with, expectations for a positive interaction, and preference to be paired up. All of the variables yielded the same pattern of findings.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 once again supported Hypotheses 1 and 2, replicating the pattern of results obtained in Studies 1 and 2. When participants were manipulated to feel high

communal motivation toward a stranger they might meet later, their evaluation of the angry potential interaction partner did not decrease compared to the no emotion (control) potential partner, who did not express any emotion. Evaluation of the angry potential partner did decrease if participants had been manipulated to feel low communal motivation toward the potential partner.

Study 3 extended Studies 1 and 2 by using an experimental approach. By doing so, a causal relationship between communal motivation and reactions to partner's anger could be established. Study 3 showed that the differences in communal motivation felt by the perceiver caused differences in their evaluations of a partner who expressed anger. High communal motivation felt by the participants did *not* cause the evaluation of a potential partner expressing anger to decrease, whereas low communal motivation did so. The result that high communal motivation did not cause a decrease in evaluations is more impressive given that the potential partner was a stranger, with whom the participant had no prior relationship, and the level of irritation was relatively high. This speaks to the importance of the role of communal motivation in determining how individuals respond to partners' anger expressions. Furthermore, the fact that the same pattern of results was obtained in Study 3 as in Studies 1 and 2 is significant because the reason for the partners' anger and the manner in which anger was expressed did not differ across the two communal motivation conditions in Study 3. By keeping these two factors constant across conditions, the alternative explanation of Studies 1 and 2 (that possible differences between low and high communal participants on these factors led to differences in evaluations) can be ruled out.

We do not consider the fact that the manipulation check on the effectiveness of the communal motivation manipulation failed to reach a traditional level of significance to be of concern. This manipulation (or one very similar to it) has been shown to effectively produce significant differences in communal motivation as indexed by self-reports and behavioral measures in many prior studies (Clark, 1984, 1986; Clark, Dubash, & Mills, 1998; Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark et al., 1986; Clark et al., 1987). Furthermore, the results on the manipulation check in the present study fell in the predicted pattern, and the effects on the primary dependent variable were significant and conceptually matched the pattern of results obtained in Studies 1 and 2. Our guess as to why the manipulation check did not reach traditional levels of significance is that participants are likely to be reluctant to tell an experimenter (or anyone else) that they want to form a communal relationship lest the target of the desire not reciprocate their interest.

General Discussion

Summary of findings. Across three studies, with different pools of participants (a community sample of married

individuals and college students) and tapping different types of relationships (marriage, friendship, potential relationships), we found analogous interactions between the effects of expressed anger (present or absent) and communal motivation (low or high) on evaluations of partners. Partners' expressed anger decreased liking and relationship satisfaction when motivation to be communally responsive toward the partner was low. When communal motivation was high, however, this negative reaction did not occur, and in Study 2 partners' expression of anger was associated with providing greater social support in this context.

These studies show that individuals' responses to partners' anger depend on the social context in which the expression of anger occurs. They demonstrate that there is no simple answer to the question of whether it is better to suppress anger or express it. Rather, the effects of expressing anger appear to depend on social context. We believe the observed patterns emerged because when participants' motivation to be communally responsive toward their partners was high, they were focused on their partners and those partners' needs, and they were motivated to respond supportively to those needs. Consequently, when faced with partners expressing anger, they were likely to focus on those partners' needs and on addressing them. As a result, they should be less likely to consider the negative implications of partners' anger for the self (e.g., fears of contagion of irritability, possible unpleasant interactions, or resentment of the request for responsiveness request implicit in the expression of irritability) and more likely to consider the implications for the partner (e.g., the partner could use some understanding and support). This may be why partners' anger did not decrease evaluations of the partner or relationship satisfaction when communal responsiveness was high (Studies 1, 2, and 3) and elicited heightened support for the partner (Study 2) for participants with high communal motivation.

In contrast, when individuals have low motivation to be communally responsive toward a partner, they are likely to be thinking about themselves and their own welfare. They therefore focus on the self and what the partners' anger means for the self. They are focused on protecting the self from the possible unpleasant effects of the partners' anger, such as a disturbance of their current moods (Forest, Clark, Mills, & Isen, 1979; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992; Isen & Levin, 1972; Isen & Simmons, 1978), an undesired pull to support the partner (Clark & Taraban, 1991), or, worse, a possible attack. This is why, we suspect, partners' anger decreased liking and relationship satisfaction.

Relevance of the present results to earlier debates about whether it is best to express or to suppress anger. The present findings are relevant to debates regarding whether anger should be kept in or let out. For a long time people took one position or another (e.g., Tavris, 1984, 1989), but our results suggest that whether it is wise or unwise to express anger depends on the social context. If one has a communally

motivated partner, expression of anger seems fine; if one's partner feels no particular communal responsibility toward one and wishes to have no such responsibility, suppression to prevent negative interpersonal consequences makes sense.

Might the results be the result of accommodation processes in high strength communal relationships? It might be asked whether our results are the result of differences in communal motivation leading to differential tendencies to accommodate to a poorly behaved partner as discussed by Rusbult and her colleagues (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). We think this is unlikely. Accommodation refers to the willingness, when a partner has enacted a destructive or potentially destructive act, to inhibit impulses to react destructively and, in some cases, to act constructively instead. Accommodation is conceived of as actively giving voice to one's concerns and attempting to constructively resolve the problem or restraining or suppressing one's negative impulses to lash out or to behave poorly toward one's partner and remaining loyal to one's partner. Rusbult and her colleagues have suggested that likelihood of accommodation increases with commitment (which refers to desire to remain in a relationship, long-term orientation, and feelings of attachment) to a partner.

Although we do believe that a partner's angry expressions may result in destructive impulses in the perceiver and that those impulses may result, in committed relationships, in accommodation, we do not believe accommodation can account for the present findings. It is important to note that accommodation involves a person evaluating a partner's behavior negatively and only then suppressing *behavioral* impulses to react toward that partner destructively, in ways that would harm the relationship. In our studies we measured people's *private* evaluations of partners—evaluations those partners would never see. If anger always induces distress and often induces impulses to behave poorly, *private* evaluations should always be more negative in the face of partners' angry expressions. They were not. Accommodation involves behaviors (or suppression of behaviors) that are (or would be) visible to the partner. Our only measure of visible behavior was our participants' self-reports of having given (or not given) partners social support (in Study 2). Perhaps the social support results were driven by accommodation (with the giving of support replacing more destructive tendencies), but if that were the case, we would still have expected the private evaluations of the partner to have been more negative. In addition, it is important to note that tendencies to accommodate presumably arise from commitment to relationships, not communal motivation. These constructs are not synonymous. In Study 3, we manipulated desire to establish a communal relationship with a person participants had never met. Although communal motivation can be high or low in such a situation, there ought to have been low commitment across the board in that study. Yet the same pattern of results was obtained in Study 3 as was obtained in Studies

1 and 2. Finally, even in Studies 1 and 2 there is no reason to think that high communal motivation and high commitment necessarily coincide. Communal motivation is a desire to be responsive to a partner's needs. Commitment is intent to stay in a relationship for whatever reason, including investment, lack of good alternatives, and social and personal prescriptives mitigating against leaving a relationship. It is also worth noting that our conceptualization of communal motivation includes having a focus on the partner's welfare, and the measures of this construct that we used included items that tapped such a focus, for instance, "How readily can you put the needs of _____ out of your thoughts?" Moreover, the manipulation of communal motivation utilized in Study 3 has been shown to result in greater endorsement of statements that capture focusing on partner needs, for instance, questions about how much participants would enjoy responding to partner needs and would like to do things to please the partner (Clark, 1986).

Communal motivation does focus people on partners' need, but further work explicating the mediator would be valuable. The fact that our measures and manipulations of communal motivation capture focus on partners' needs supports our current reasoning as to why high communal motivation is associated with liking not decreasing and provision of support increasing in the face of expressed anger. Yet it would still be useful in future work to show that expressed anger enhances self-focus when communal motivation is low but can enhance partner focus as well when communal motivation is high. It will also be useful to conduct meditational tests to discern whether these differential reactions to anger might account for the impact (or lack thereof) of expressed anger on liking and provision of support.

Conclusions. We have posited that it is important to examine the relational context in which anger is expressed when trying to understand the interpersonal consequences of expressed anger. Anger may be unpleasant, but it can also convey an angry partner's needs and trust in another person. The present research confirmed our hypotheses that when a person's communal motivation is high, expressed anger does not lead to decreases in liking for a partner (or, as in Study 2, it leads to smaller decreases in liking) and does lead to increases in support provision to that partner. It also confirmed our hypothesis that when such motivation is low, negative aspects of expressing anger will prevail with expressed anger decreasing liking for the partner. Importantly, the predicted pattern of results was obtained in three quite different samples of people and using three quite different methodologies.

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Notes

1. These couples participated in a longitudinal study of marriages. Other findings from this study are reported in Clark, Lemay, Graham, Pataki, and Finkel (2010), Graham and Clark (2006), and Lemay, Clark, and Feeney (2007).
2. If this were true it would still suggest a boundary condition for the often observed negative impact of expressed anger on judgments about relationship partners. In particular it would suggest that those negative impacts may be limited to intense or frequently expressed anger.
3. Responses to a partner's expression of sadness also were examined to see if the predicted relationship between communal responsiveness and response to a partner's expression of anger was specific to anger or whether it applied to other negative emotions. Sadness was chosen because it is similar to anger in having a negative valence. Moreover, it also calls for support from the partner. Yet it is a distinct emotion in that it is not perceived as a threat by others. The same analyses were conducted to compare the overall evaluation of the sad "participant" compared to the no emotion "participant." The interaction between condition and emotion was not significant, $F(1, 64) = 0.09, p = .77$. Regardless of the strength of communal motivation, evaluations of the sad "participant" did not decrease compared to the no emotion "participant." Separate analyses for the different dimensions of evaluations yielded the same null results. One possible reason for the null results could be because expression of sadness was not perceived as a sign of dependency. Further examination of responses to sadness as well as to other negative emotions could lead to interesting insights about whether the relationship between communal motivation and responses to partner's expression of emotions is specific to anger. For the sake of parsimony, results regarding sadness are not discussed further.

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