

Social Motives Contribute to Flow State among Older Adults

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INTRODUCTION

- An engaged lifestyle is a contributor to healthy cognitive aging, yet motivational precursors to activity across the lifespan are not well understood.
- Flow (Csikszentmihalyi et. al., 2005) is the phenomenological experience accompanying the complete absorption in an activity, which can engender engagement in the activity for its own sake.
- Given theories for socioemotional selectivity (SST) suggesting that cognition may be more tightly linked with social-emotional concerns with aging (Carstensen et al., 2006), we examined age differences in the Flow experience as a function of the social purpose and context of the activity. We also examined whether these differences were related to Future Time Perspective (FTP) and values for Individualism (Ind) and Collectivism (Col).

EXPERIMENT

Table 1 Participant Information

	Y(18-29)	YM(30-40)	MA(41-65)	Total
Age				
<i>N</i>	239	270	201	710
<i>M</i>	25.29	34.05	50.97	35.89
<i>SD</i>	2.83	3.02	7.22	11.16
Years of Education				
<i>M</i>	14.92	15.66	15.00	15.23
<i>SD</i>	2.01	2.03	2.34	2.14
Future Time Perspective				
<i>Mean</i>	4.72	4.68	4.28	4.58
<i>SD</i>	0.86	1.01	1.07	1.00
Individualism				
<i>N</i>	148	151	119	418
<i>Mean</i>	5.93	5.76	5.66	5.79
<i>SD</i>	0.96	0.97	0.89	0.95
Collectivism				
<i>Mean</i>	5.73	5.93	6.13	5.92
<i>SD</i>	1.22	1.13	1.08	1.16

Table 2 Flow Scale Items

Flow Dimension	Example Item
Challenge-Skill Balance	I felt competent in meeting the demands of the situation.
Clear Goals	I clearly knew what I wanted to do.
Concentration	My attention was totally focused on what I was doing.
Control	I felt like I could control my attention.
Time	I lost my awareness of time.
Merging Action and Autotelic Experience	Once I got started, I performed the activity automatically. The experience was extremely rewarding.

Table 3 Example Activities

	Individual (Alone)	Social (With Others)
Agentic (For Yourself)	Reading, Training for a marathon	Going to a gym class or the movies
Communal (For Others)	Cooking, volunteering (river clean up)	Teaching, planning a birthday party

References:

- Carstensen, L. L. (2006). The influence of a sense of time on human development. *Science*, 312, 1913-1915.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi, Cs., & Nakamura, J. (2005). Flow. In A. J. E. C. S. Dweck (Ed.), *Handbook of Competence and Motivation* (pp. 598-608). New York: Guilford Press.
- Payne, B. R., Jackson, J. J., Noh, S. R., & Stine-Morrow, E. A. (2011). In the zone: Flow state and cognition in older adults. *Psychology and Aging*, 26(3), 738-743. doi:10.1037/a0022359

RESULTS

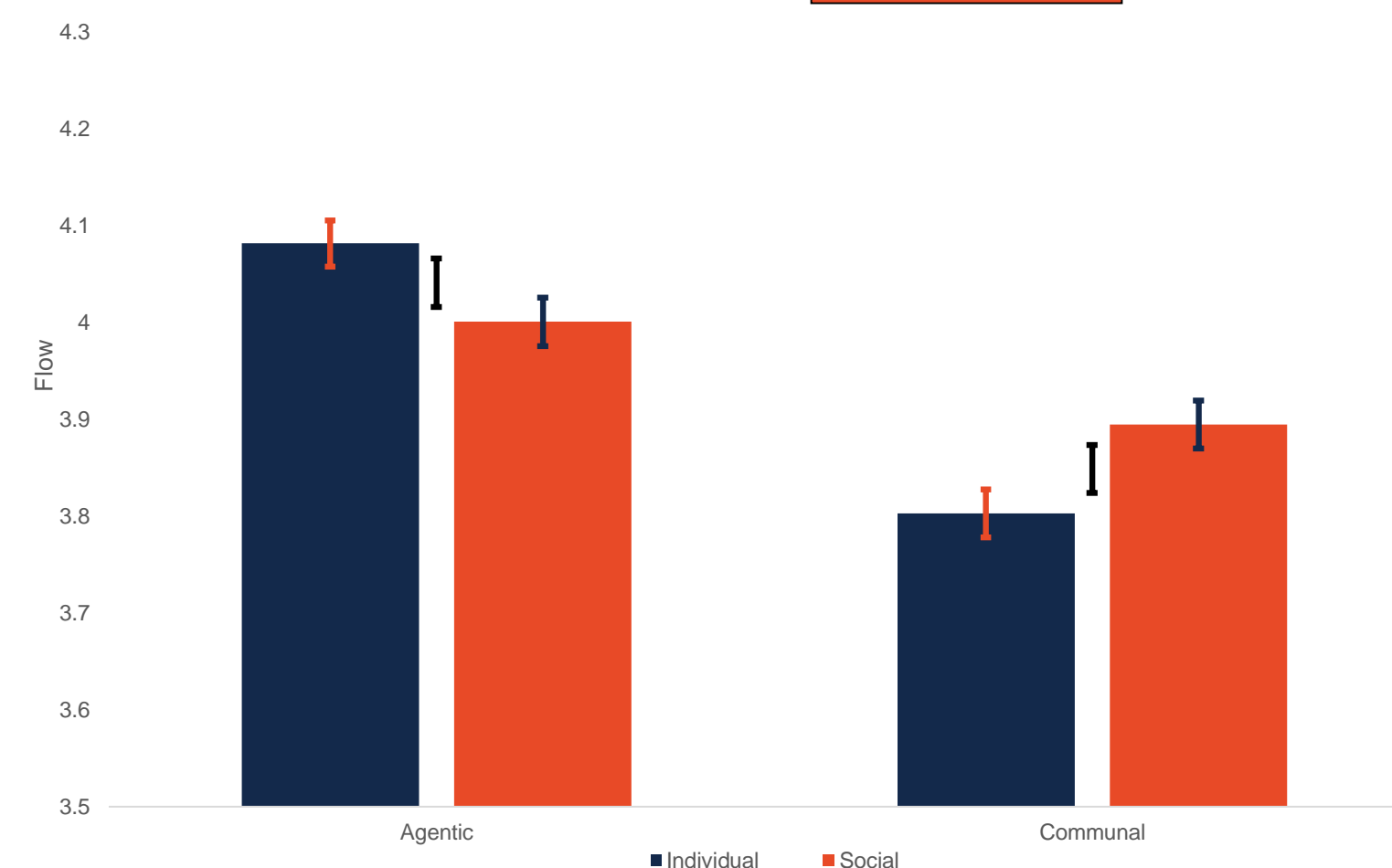


Figure 1. Mean levels of Flow as a function of Purpose and Context (error bars are plotted for means and within-subject differences).

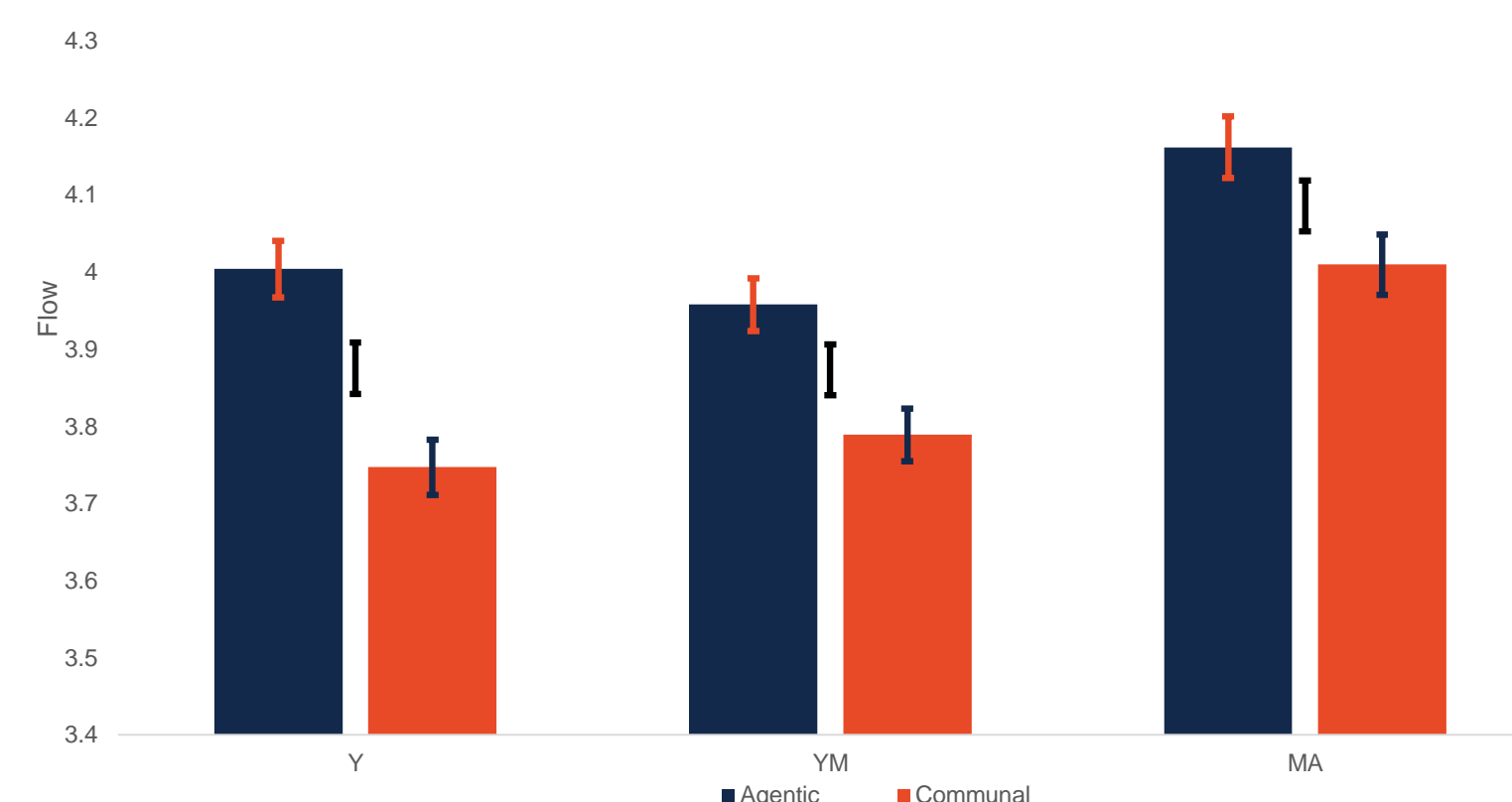


Figure 2. Mean levels of Flow as a function of Purpose and Age (error bars are plotted for means and within-subject differences).

Table 4 Correlations

	Age	Flow	AFA	AF	CF	FTP	Ind
Flow Total (Flow)	0.19 **						
Agentic Flow Adv (AFA)	-0.08 *	-0.05					
Agentic Flow (AF)	0.14 **	0.89 **	0.40 **				
Communal Flow (CF)	0.20 **	0.89 **	-0.48 **	0.58 **			
Future Time Perspective (FTP)	-0.19 **	0.30 **	-0.01	0.27 **	0.26 **		
Individualism (Ind)	-0.11 *	0.21 **	-0.04	0.17 **	0.20 **	0.20 **	
Collectivism (Col)	0.12 *	0.33 **	-0.17 **	0.24 **	0.36 **	0.22 **	0.28 **

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

FTP (cf. Table 4). However, the age-related increase in Col did not mediate the age difference in the AFA.

CONCLUSIONS

- Consistent with the idea that Flow promotes mastery, Flow was
 - greater among those with a sense of an expansive temporal horizon.
 - heightened for behaviors with agentic motives.
- Consistent with SST, both aging and collectivistic values independently decreased the agentic flow advantage. Surprisingly, the age-related foreshortening of the temporal horizon (as measured by FTP) did not impact the Flow experience.
- Future research could explore how the influence of social motives on Flow changes based on the perceived closeness of the target (e.g., cooking for a close family member; cooking for strangers at a volunteer event).

- Flow was greater for agentic compared to communal activities, $F(1, 707) = 102.13, p < .001$, but this effect was moderated by context, $F(1, 704) = 19.87, p < .001$ (Figure 1).

- The MA group experienced higher levels of Flow than the Y and YM groups, $F(2, 704) = 13.18, p < .001$. The agentic Flow advantage decreased with age, $F(2, 704) = 3.28, p = .038$ (Figure 2).

- The Agentic Flow Advantage (AFA = (AF-CF)/CF) was negatively correlated with values for Col (which was negatively correlated with age), but AFA did not correlate with