Coding Autobiographical Episodes for Themes of Agency and Communion

Dan P. McAdams
(With assistance from Bonnie Kaplan, Mary Anne Machado and Yi Ting Huang)
Northwestern University
Revised: October 17, 2002

David Bakan (1966) introduced the concepts of agency and communion in the following passage:

I have adopted the terms “agency” and “communion” to characterize two fundamental modalities in the existence of living forms, agency for the existence of an organism as an individual, and communion for the participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part. Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in the sense of being at one with other organisms. Agency manifests itself in the formation of separations; communion in the lack of separations. Agency manifests itself in isolation, alienation, and aloneness; communion in contact, openness, and union. Agency manifests itself in the urge to master; communion in noncontractual cooperation. (pp. 14-15).

These two generic “modalities in the existence of living forms” may also be viewed as two thematic clusterings in life narratives, each articulating important life goals, strivings, needs, and desires. Following the work of Bakan and many others, McAdams (1985; McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996) has suggested that agency and communion are the two central superordinate thematic clusterings in life narratives. People’s life stories differ with respect to the salience of agency and communion themes, and those differences are measurable. This manual is designed to enable the researcher to capture some of those individual differences in the thematic coding of particular life narrative episodes. It describes a simple and reliable method for coding the salience of agency and communion themes in written or verbal accounts of especially significant autobiographical events, or what McAdams (1985) calls “nuclear episodes” in life stories.

The coding system is designed to detect the salience of agency and communion themes in accounts of discrete life-story episodes, such as life story “high points,” “low points,” “turning points,” and “earliest memories.” Such accounts may be collected through life-narrative open-ended questionnaires or through interviews. In general, the coding scheme works best when subjects describe particular events in their lives that they find to be especially personally meaningful -- events that the subjects themselves may see as having had an important impact on their identity. For each event, subjects are typically asked to describe (verbally or in writing) what happened in the event itself, who was involved, what the subject was thinking and feeling during the event, and what (if anything) the event means in the context of the subject’s own self-defining life story. Subjects may describe events that are either positive or negative in emotional tone. In general, however, the categories described below refer to positively-valenced themes in life narrative.

In coding an account for themes of agency and communion, the scoring unit is the episode itself. Each episode is coded for the presence (score +1) or absence (score 0) of eight different themes, four under the heading of agency and four under the heading of communion. The four agency themes are: (1) Achievement/Responsibility (AR), (2) Power/Impact (PI), (3) Self-insight (SI), and (4) Status/Victory (SV). The four communion themes are: (5) Love/Friendship, (6) Dialogue (DG), (7) Caring/Help (CH),
and (8) Unity/Togetherness (UT). The coder must determine whether or not the story contains evidence of each of the eight themes. If evidence exists for the theme in the episode, then the theme receives a score of +1 for the corresponding episode. If no evidence exists, the theme receives a score of 0 for that episode. A theme is scored only once per episode. Theme scores may then be summed across agency and across communion categories within an episode, to provide summary scores for agency and communion respectively. Thus, the highest possible score for agency or communion for a given episode would be “4.” The lowest score would be “0.”

The coding system for agency and communion is a conservative scheme. The scorer should not give a point (+1) for a given theme in a given episode unless there is clear and explicit proof of the theme’s existence in the episode. The scorer should be careful not to read anything into the literal description of the account. The scorer should avoid clinical inferences and extensions beyond the written or spoken word.

Two independent coders should score episodes, and then correlation coefficients should be calculated to determine intercoder reliability. Reliabilities may be calculated for each theme score, summed across however many episodes a subject describes, and for the total agency and total communion scores, summed across episodes. Scorers may need to work together in early phases of coding in order to build up a common understanding, so that eventually their independent codings will show acceptable reliability.

**Themes of Agency**

Agency encompasses a wide range of psychological and motivational ideas, including the concepts of strength, power, expansion, mastery, control, dominance, autonomy, separation, and independence. Most accounts of important autobiographical experiences are couched in agentic terms to one degree or another. After all, the subject is telling the researcher about an important experience for the self, so we should not be surprised if the account entails at least a modicum of self-celebration, self-focus, self-expansion, and so on. The necessary focus on the self, therefore, encourages a rhetoric of agency in most autobiographical accounts, especially among contemporary citizens of Western societies, imbued with an ethic of individualism. For example, many turning point episodes will tell how a person moved from dependence to “autonomy.” The attainment of autonomy in human development is a very common theme among Westerners, especially those in the middle classes. The four agentic themes articulated below, however, go above and beyond the typical agentic rhetoric of autobiographical expression. They express highly agentic ideas that, even by the cultural standards of contemporary self rhetoric, stand out as especially indicative of Bakan’s concept of agency in human lives.

1. **ACHIEVEMENT/RESPONSIBILITY (AR).**

   The protagonist in the story reports substantial success in the achievement of tasks, jobs, instrumental goals, or in the assumption of important responsibilities. He or she feels proud, confident, masterful, accomplished, or successful in (1) meeting significant challenges or overcoming important obstacles concerning instrumental achievement in life and/or (2) taking on major responsibilities for other people and assuming roles that require the person to be in charge of things or people. Most often these accomplishments and responsibilities would occur in achievement settings, such as school or work, rather than in more personal settings, such as with reference to spiritual or romantic goals. This category requires that the protagonist strive to do things, produce things, or assume responsibilities in such a way as to meet an implicit or explicit standard of excellence. In this sense, AR
bears strong resemblance to the “achievement motivation” scoring categories in McClelland and Atkinson’s coding system for TAT stories (McClelland et al., 1953).

**Examples of AR:**

A student works hard to perfect a short story for a class assignment. He spends hours polishing word choice, getting the imagery right, and so on.

An executive meets his annual goals for the company.

A young boy builds a tree house, and he is very proud of his accomplishment.

A student masters a class on computer programming.

A secretary takes over an office and turns it into a model of efficiency and productivity.

After having their first child, a couple now realizes the significant financial responsibilities they have assumed.

A woman endeavors to interact with her colleagues in a “healthy and productive manner.” Here the explicit reference to being productive in the workplace qualifies the response for AR.

A woman describes her movement from college to graduate school: “I was able to settle down and become focused and to become productive in a much more real way than up until then. I had always produced a lot of stuff academically; I’m also the kind of person who is constantly productive with something, or at least I used to be that way. I would have six projects going on at once.” But now she was able to become more focused on one project at a time, which enhanced her productivity.

A father reflects: “You’re the head of the family and you’re responsible for a lot more than you were before. It’s a real maturing experience.”

A group of young adults builds a community in the wilderness: “We were building a community. We were really working with our muscles, you know, passing buckets of cement.”

A man is accustomed to failing, but he achieves success in an important business venture, building his confidence.

An author publishes her first short story.

A middle-aged mother reflects on her children, who have recently left for college. She decides that she has done an “excellent job” as a caregiver. Even through this is an interpersonal rather than instrumental task, the writer explicitly couches it in achievement terms -- as a job well done.

A pilot completes his first solo flight.

Studying a foreign culture for many years, an anthropologist comes up with a new way of seeing the culture, solving an intellectual problem which she had puzzled over for a long time.
First day on the job, a nurse confronts a difficult assignment, but she is successful in completing the task.

At the age of 65, a man runs in his first marathon.

A young man is kicked out of his house by his parents. He struggles to survive, but eventually he becomes ”a successful and responsible adult.”

A woman is proud of her college achievements -- in academics as well as in clubs and associations on campus.

A man reports after his divorce: “I challenge myself to the limit academically, physically, and on my job. Since that time I have accomplished virtually any goal I set for myself. I have never been happier.”

A woman reports after her divorce: “In order to survive financially and support these children, I decided to enroll in a graduate program in counseling psychology at a major university. I was accepted and began the program with great determination ... I felt the failure of marriage was reversed by the success of completing a graduate degree through years of difficult and intellectually stimulating study.”

“This was my senior recital. I began my first piece. I played it with all my heart. I never felt so proud of myself before. I wanted to do a terrific job and I did.”

“My important goal is finding a job. I just went to my first interview. I managed to calm myself down and answer the question professionally. In general, the experience was pretty positive and will help in future interviews.”

“Right now the single most important goal to me is getting into medical school. In the summer, I voluntarily joined an apprenticeship program where I was to help out and learn at the hospital in the surgery department. If I had not finished the program, I would not have something to submit to the medical schools, showing them what I did.”

“The earliest memory I have is the day I first dressed myself. It was a huge accomplishment for me because I did something on my own that I always needed help for.”

I chose to come to this university over others, and I chose to work hard and enter a competitive environment rather than enter a school where I could have more fun and work less.”

“I remember learning how to ride a bike at age seven.”

“One of my goals is to get involved in the deaf community and increase my sign language proficiency. Last year I was taking my first American Sign Language classes. A year later, I am conversing with people by signing in front of a group.”

“My freshman and sophomore year were very tough academically. So I took biology the summer after my sophomore year and it actually went okay. This was the summer when I learned how to study.”

“Every Saturday of home game the marching band performs a highly demanding thirteen minute show that requires us to push ourselves to our limits. I loved the performance exhilaration and constantly challenging myself to perform better than before—to push my limits and grow as an individual.”
"The birth of my younger brother was a new addition to our family. I was no longer the youngest child. It was my turn to carry some responsibility."

"When I was three, I was lying on the floor of our kitchen writing my name with a red crayon. I learned how to read and write at an early age."

"I think winning the 1990 Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching was my high point because I was the one who accomplished it."

"A turning point occurred for me in 1984 when my daughter was born. I then realized that becoming a father was a huge responsibility and took a lot of work and patience."

"The day I graduated from graduate school was a very special day in my life...I felt very excited and proud to have finished my degree...I took a risk to go back to school and I did it."

2. POWER/IMPACT (PI).

The protagonist asserts him- or herself in a powerful way and thereby has a strong impact on other people or on the world more generally. The impact may take the form of aggression (physical or verbal), retaliation, argument, persuasion, control, or attempting to make a strong impression on others. The protagonist feels strong, masterful, powerful, or especially effective in exerting his or her will to change things in the environment. The change may be destructive or positive. Positive change may come from leadership or other effective actions that mobilize people to do things in accord with the wishes or plans of the protagonist. This category resemble the “power imagery” prime category in the TAT-based scoring system for power motivation (Winter, 1973).

Examples of PI:

A politician pushes through a piece of legislation.

A woman persuades her friends to change their views about a controversial topic.

A graduate student impresses her advisor.

A bully beats up other children on the playground.

A woman slaps her husband.

Somebody saves somebody else’s life.

A preacher’s sermon is so convincing that many people in the congregation go through a conversion experience.

The lawyer convinces his client to accept the terms offered by opposing counsel.

"I had a toy my friend wanted, but I had it first so she bit me and took the toy. I bit her back."
“I was a lifeguard during the summer. As I was looking around the pool sitting in my chair, I suddenly notices an overturned raft with a little boy struggling next to it. I just quickly jumped in the water, grabbed the kid within a couple of seconds, and gave the kid to his father.”

“My family was pressuring me and I was not feeling happy or capable of emotional stability. I somehow ended up getting into an argument with my brother and mom and bursting into tears and shaking all the while saying, ‘Look if you guys don’t back off and stop pressuring me, I’m going to go nuts and you’re going to have to pay for a psychiatrist.’ I think they realized that I put enough pressure on myself without their added help.”

“My good friend got alcohol poisoning. I took charge of the situation and took her to the emergency room.”

“I am a woman of convictions who needs to feel as independent as possible. Accordingly, I began to feel hampered by my boyfriend’s expressions of love. I decided to break up with him. This incident shows that I can be assertive and will do what is best for me no matter how much it hurts.”

“I went out on my first real date when I was sixteen years old. I remember my grandmother being really strict and saying that I could not go out with anyone. But I rebelled and sneaked out of the house at night when my grandmother was asleep to date this guy.”

“As we were leaving the bar, one of my girlfriends was being harassed by an intoxicated male. In an effort to defend her, me and several of my fraternity brothers spoke up and thus started a fight.”

“There was alcohol at this party and almost everyone was becoming rather intoxicated. Even though I knew I would be made fun of, I refused to let any of my friends drive home.”

“I find it important to set a positive first impression to people who have never met a Jew. There are moments when it is harder but in general all of these experiences have made me realize that it is important to do everything in my power to change myself and therefore influence others.”

“Moving to college was a very high point in my life. This was the first time in my life I was going to be on my own and that gave me a great joy. I knew that the homesickness would go away because I was strong and was going to make it on my own.”

“I took part in a show where I was in one of the dance numbers. I always wanted to do it my way. I have been like that for as long as I can remember. I am very high in power motivation. I like being in charge or in control. When I am not, it bothers me and I react against those who are.”

“I remember walking home from first grade with my brother. He told me ‘there is no such thing as Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.’ I was devastated – but I wasn’t a crybaby so I didn’t tell my mom and instead I went to school the next day and told everyone else. If my childhood was going to be ruined, I decided everyone else’s should be.”
"In eighth grade, I got in a huge fight with a bully that had given me a hard time for a couple of years. But this day he kept pushing all my buttons so I picked a fight. He had beaten me down long enough so I took control of the situation. He didn’t pick on me anymore because I had shown him up in front of a bunch of people.”

"I attended an international peace conference in Venice, Italy. I realized how many other young people like myself wanted to affect change in their community.”

"I am glad my eyes were opened early to the fact that there were a lot of prejudiced people in my class. Later in junior high, I would break out of my usual silence when people would make racist remarks in class or tell a racist joke. It was at this point that I would speak out and try to make people realize they were wrong.”

"When we agreed to pledge a fraternity, most of us expected some sort of hazing to come along with it. One night, the fun was pushed to its limits. I decided something needed to be done. The next day, I called the national headquarters. For the first time, I stood up for what I believed in.”

"...I told him I would make up a bed in the living room and that he was to leave the next day...Ever since then I’ve had increasing confidence in my capabilities...I really believe this comes from an inner strength which some find in religion but I think I find in myself.”

"I was always defending my mother and raging against (my father) and his drinking.”

"I see this event as the first time that I can remember directly questioning and confronting authority with logic and reason...I now feel that this event had a strong bearing relative to my view of authority which does not like to be questioned...Never again would I allow any authority over me to go unexamined.”

3. **SELF-INSIGHT (SI).**

The story protagonist attains a clear, new, and important insight about him or herself through the event. As a result of this experience, the protagonist feels that he or she has become wiser, more mature, or more fully actualized as a person. The insight may be seen as a transformation in self-awareness or a leap forward in self-understanding that entails the realization of new goals, plans, or missions in life -- a significant insight into one’s identity.

*Examples of SI:*

A subject responds that her most important goal in life is the attainment of wisdom, which she describes as “the re-creation of myself as a better person.”

A woman comes to see her life’s mission as being an artist. She quits her job, sets up a studio, and strives to actualize her dream. (also scores for AR.)

A young man experiences a religious conversion which provides him with new insight into his own life.
A middle-aged man realizes that he is being exploited by his current employer. He breaks away from the firm and embarks upon a new line of work, more in keeping with his life goals.

A woman comes to the conclusion that she has wasted 20 years of her life in a desperate drive for material well-being. She decides to dedicate her life to helping others.

Inspired by reading Freud, a young man comes to the realization that he wants to be a psychotherapist.

After a near-death experience, a man comes to a new understanding of the quality of life. He pledges to slow down, enjoy his family more, take everything one day at a time.

After the death of his son, a man changes his “philosophy of life.”

“I had a series of meaningless college relationships until I realized it was better to be in no relationship than in a bad meaningless one.”

“Being here for two years, I definitely feel that I have grown as a person and am in the process of establishing an identity of what kind of person I am.”

“For a long time, I had planned on being pre-med. The first day of my first chemistry exam, I was near failure. I felt at that time that I had known what I wanted to do with my life, but after that test I realized it was something I had made up.”

“I had been struggling with manic depression. I prayed to God, telling Him about my misery. I opened my Bible to John 4, read it and not only saw myself but the Savior who loved me and was able to fill the void in my life. I’ve never been the same since that day. God showed me that He wanted to give me a brand new identity that wouldn’t condemn me.”

“One afternoon, as we were walking through a park, we saw a couple of children playing. I realized that afternoon that I wanted to have children and a family more than anything else in life. Talking with relatives who were doctors, I began to understand how much different reality would be from the dream I had if I were to become a doctor. I learned that I valued family more than money, prestige, or any other possession I may have.”

“The day of my dad’s funeral, I looked out into the crowd and realized just how full the church was. Everyone I knew was there and hundreds I didn’t. I was completely awed and it was then that I realized that I never really knew my father. My perspectives on life, faith, and family were never to be the same.”

“...I became conscious, I feel, for the first time, that the price of loving so completely, so unconditionally, is that...I would feel excruciating pain if she were to die or be separated from me forever. This event is significant because I felt so alive—so capable of being loving without consciousness about acceptance/non-acceptance and other self-centered thoughts.”

“I realized then that I was capable of achieving anything I desired academically. I didn’t have to accept as gospel truth the negative opinions of others concerning my abilities. From then on I knew I could fly and I did.”
4. STATUS/VICTORY (SV).

The protagonist attains a heightened status or prestige among his or her peers, through receiving a special recognition or honor or winning a contest or competition. The implication in SV is that status or victory is achieved vis a vis others. There is always an interpersonal and implicitly competitive context in SV. Typically, the person “wins.” There is victory or triumph. SV refers to significant recognition, especially prestigious honors, and various kinds of victories over others. Simply “doing a good job,” getting good grades, or successfully achieving a goal is not enough to score for SV.

Examples of SV:

A young woman is elected homecoming queen.

An actor wins a coveted lead part in an upcoming play.

A student graduates from college with special honors (e.g., magna cum laude).

A person receives an award for outstanding achievement.

The quarterback completes a crucial pass, which gives his team the victory in the football game.

A musician receives a standing ovation.

A professor is honored at a party for receiving tenure at the university.

An aspiring writer is granted admission to a prestigious graduate program.

A swimmer wins a race.

A lawyer wins a case.

A person is granted an important position or awarded a prestigious job.

A high school student gains admission to a good university.

A student wins a scholarship or grant.

“I got accepted to the University of Pennsylvania. It was expensive but had a good reputation.”

“One game we played a rival high school who is always a tough opponent. I saw the ball go into the corner of the net and the arms of all my teammates in the air and embracing me. We won the game. The game-winning goal made me feel proud and very good about myself.”

“A peak experience occurred when I participated in the Martin W. Essex School for the gifted and talented. It was a summer program for sixty high school seniors who were selected based on academic excellence.”

“My high school’s varsity boys basketball team was in the finals of the state basketball tournament for the first time in the history of the school.”
"The speech coach was finally able to convince me to attend the Iowa high school individual event speech contest my junior year. I presented a speech I had written for her speech class in the category of original oratory, earning the right to perform at the all-state speech festival."

"In eighth grade I tried out for high school cheerleading and was one of the three girls from my class to make football and basketball cheerleading."

"Ten days ago, I swam what they call a perfect meet. I entered and won eleven individual events...Thus, I won the high point award, not only for my team but for the female of the entire meet."

"I was being presented with a little cup for “camper of the year” in my age group...I was singled out for something very special that meant people liked me."

**Themes of Communion**

Communion encompasses psychological and motivational ideas concerning love, friendship, intimacy, sharing, belonging, affiliation, merger, union, nurturance, and so on. At its heart, communion involves different people coming together in warm, close, caring, and communicative relationships. McAdams’s (1980) thematic coding system for “intimacy motivation,” employed with TAT stories, is explicitly modeled after Bakan’s conception of communion, as well as related ideas in the writings of Maslow (being-love), Buber (the I-Thou relation), and Sullivan (the need for interpersonal intimacy). The four communion categories below represent a distillation and sharpening of the ten categories employed by McAdams in the TAT coding system for intimacy motivation. In addition, the four categories for communion draw more generally from Murray’s (1938) communal concepts of “need for affiliation” and “need for nurturance.”

5. **LOVE/FRIENDSHIP (LF).**

A protagonist experiences an enhancement of love or friendship toward another person. A relationship between people becomes warmer or closer.

*Examples of LF:*

Two friends feel that they grow emotionally closer to each other after spending time together on a vacation.

A man proposes to a woman. (Or vice versa.)

A woman describes her marriage to a wonderful man as the high point of her life.

A man marvels at the love and commitment his wife has given him over the past 40 years.

A young couple enjoy lovemaking on a Saturday afternoon.

An older woman teaches a young man about sex and love.

A woman is strongly attracted to a man in her class. He finally asks her out.
A couple reflects on their happy honeymoon.

A college student takes a friend to a formal dance: “I went to the formal with my friend, Melissa, even though she had a boyfriend. I felt incredibly happy during the slow dance with her. As I held her close and tight, I felt her acceptance and happiness with me. We felt truly comfortable and happy with each other, as friends. Even though there was no direct romantic relationship between us, I sense a mutual true love.”

A person remarks on a good friendship he has experienced.

“We spent the previous year building up a strong friendship at school in London.”

“This simple phone conversation was the start of a new relationship with my mother.”

“I value close relationships.”

“This girl and I knew we liked each other. During our two weeks at camp, we carried on whatever semblance of a relationship 10-year-olds can carry on.”

“I chose marriage and there have been illness-related complications. However, we will celebrate our 20th anniversary and I know I made the right decision. The quality of our relationship transcends the illness. Perhaps the illness has even brought us closer.”

“...I befriended a priest...who was temporarily assigned to my parish. We were bonded together by our mutual love of music. We used to really “hang out.”

6. DIALOGUE (DG).

A character in the story experiences a reciprocal and noninstrumental form of communication or dialogue with another person or group of others. DG usually takes the form of a conversation between people. The conversation is viewed as an end in itself (justified for its own sake) rather than as a means to another end. Thus, such instrumental conversations as “interviews” or “planning sessions” do not qualify for DG because they are undertaken for noncommunal reasons (e.g., to obtain information or make plans). Furthermore, highly contentious or unpleasant conversations -- such as hostile arguments or exchanges in which people do not seem to be listening to each other -- do not qualify for DG. In order to score for DG, a conversation need not be about especially intimate topics, though of course it may be. A friendly chat about the weather, for example, would qualify for DG. What is important to note is that the communication between the protagonist and other characters in the story is reciprocal (mutual), nonhostile, and viewed as an end in itself rather than a means to an instrumental end. Note also, that conversations for the express purpose of helping another person (e.g., providing advice, therapy) do qualify for this theme.

Examples of DG:

“We sat across from each other and tossed ideas back and forth, ideas of what we thought the plays were about.”

“Sara and I had been writing letters to each other all summer.”
"We drank a carafe of wine and had a memorable conversation about love and parents."

"My peak experience was both a time of sadness and joy. Sadness because my friend told me she had cancer. Joy because we had opened up to each other and it was a beautiful experience."

"My mother and I talked in depth about the problems my brother was having. I felt like so much of who I have become is like my mother. I felt warmth and closeness when we said good-bye." (also scores for LF).

"On the last night, three of us plus or facilitators gathered around a circle with a single candle in the middle. We all went around to express our feelings of what peace was, what we learned from this unprecedented event..."

"When I was in preschool I recall sitting on my teacher’s lap during a recess time and I remember her telling me..."

"I ran up the driveway into the house and picked up the phone. No one was home to share my moment with me, so I called my mom at work."

"My aunt had just had a baby girl, my cousin, and she asked me to be the godmother. I agreed without even thinking about what it meant to me."

"We had a great time, sitting around drinking wine after dinner and just talking into the night."

Sometimes a communication can be nonverbal, as in this example of DG: “She did not have to say a word. I knew instinctively what she meant.”

7. CARING/HELP (CH).

The protagonist reports that he or she provides care, assistance, nurturance, help, aid, support, or therapy for another, providing for the physical, material, social, or emotional welfare or well-being of the other. Instances of receiving such care from others also qualify for CH.

Examples of CH:

Many accounts of childbirth score for CH, as well as accounts of adoption. In order to score, the subject must express a strong emotional reactions of love, tenderness, care, nurturance, joy, warmth, or the like in response to the event.

Accounts of taking care of children as they grow up, meeting their needs and looking after them during difficult times, typically score for CH. Also included here are accounts of providing needed financial support, as in the role of the family breadwinner.

Providing assistance or care for spouses, siblings, parents, friends, co-workers, and colleagues may be included, as well. Mere technical assistance, however, does not qualify for CH. An emotional quality of caring must accompany the assistance, which is usually associated with providing counseling or therapy concerning life problems or interpersonal difficulties.
Developing empathy for other people, even if it is not acted upon in a given event, scores for CH. In one example, a woman describes reading a particular novel when she was a girl and developing an empathic attitude toward impoverished and oppressed people as a result.

"After I was sexually assaulted, my world was torn apart. The only thing that was stable in my life was the support I received from my mother."

"I like the feeling of being a vocal advocate and I would like to help others with similar problems."

"I held his hand to help him over the rocks safely."

"So I decided to have them settle their differences by taking them back to my room and for the next few hours, I had them talking and explaining each other’s hatred, why there was miscommunications."

"My dad heard me and helped me. He helped me not only with the fly, but with my panic. He was caring, confident, and knew what to do."

"Near the end of 1967...a group of Black men decided to form an organization to help Black youth...My thinking at that time was, yes, there is a need to be a role model for our boys."

8. **UNITY/TOGETHERNESS (UT).**

Whereas the communal themes of LF, DG, and CH tend to specify particular relationships between the protagonist and one or a few other people, the theme of Unity/Togetherness captures the communal idea of being part of a larger community. In UT, the protagonist experiences a sense of oneness, unity, harmony, synchrony, togetherness, allegiance, belongingness, or solidarity with a group of people, a community, or even all of humankind. A common manifestation of this theme involves the protagonist’s being surrounded by friends and family at an important event (e.g., a wedding, graduation), experiencing strong positive emotion because a community of important others have joined him or her at this time. However, there are many other manifestations of UT, as well.

*Examples of UT:*

"I was warm, surrounded by friends and positive regard that night. I felt unconditionally loved." (Also scores for LF.)

Some accounts of weddings may qualify for both LF and UT. The developing love relationship between spouses provides evidence for LF while the wedding’s bringing together of many friends and family members may provide evidence for UT.

*Examples of being accepted, cherished, or affirmed by friendship, family, or other social groups qualify for UT.*

"The most important part of the day was being surrounded by my peers who I loved... I finally felt completely comfortable with my classmates. I could call them my friends..." (Also scores for LF.)
"The bonds of sisterhood can never be broken. After a week and a half trampling around in the cold chitchatting for sorority rush, my Rho Chi Heather handed me the envelope and inside I saw it – the invitation to be a sister of Alpha Phi ... What this says about my personality is that I love to belong ..."

"This event showed me how much I cared for not only my dad but my mother and entire family as well."

"I remember when I joined the Cub Scouts... The uniforms that the scouts wore were blue. I couldn't wait until I received my uniform. It made me feel important and a part of something."

"We looked up and looming next to us, literally; was the Acropolis... I recall feeling both small and big in the sense of belonging to a society that was responsible for this tremendous architecture."

References


