Ideological Views in Emerging Adulthood: Balancing Autonomy and Community

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Ideological views of 140 emerging adults (ages 20–29) were explored, using the ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. Two questions were asked as part of an interview: "When you get toward the end of your life, what would you like to be able to say about your life, looking back on it?" and "What values or beliefs do you think are the most important to pass on to the next generation?" Overall, emerging adults used Autonomy and Community in roughly equal proportions, whereas Divinity was used relatively infrequently. Use of Autonomy was negatively correlated with use of Community on both questions, but the correlations were modest, and some emerging adults were able to reconcile the two ethics. Qualitative examples are presented to illustrate the findings of the study, and the findings are discussed in the context of claims about American individualism.

KEY WORDS: Individualism; collectivism; community; identity; young adults.

In recent decades, a distinct period of the life course has opened up in American society extending from the late teens to the mid-to-late twenties. As recently as 1960, the median marriage age was about 20 for women and 22 for men; by 1997, it had risen to 25 for women and 27 for men, a remarkable shift over a period of less than forty years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). Similar shifts have taken place in other areas—toward a higher median age of first childbirth, a higher proportion of young people attending higher education after high school, and a higher proportion of those with undergraduate degrees pursuing postgraduate education (Arnett, 2000). The overall result of these changes is that it is no longer normative for the late teens and early twenties to be a period of intensive preparation for imminent entry into adult roles. On the contrary, the new norm is that these are years of experimentation and exploration of a variety of life possibilities, as enduring decisions are delayed for many young peo-

ple into the mid-to-late twenties. As it has developed in recent decades, this period has been referred to by a variety of terms, most recently as *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 1998, 2000).

Experimentation and exploration are a key part of emerging adulthood, in love and work and also with respect to developing an ideology or worldview. Erikson (1950, 1968) was the first theorist to observe this. He considered developing an ideology to be an essential part of identity development, along with making explorations and choices in love and work. "An ideological system," he stated, "is a coherent body of shared images, ideas, and ideals [that] provides for the participant a coherent, if systematically simplified, over-all orientation in space and time, in means and ends" (Erikson, 1968, pp. 189–90). Furthermore, although he specified adolescence as the time when issues of identity were at the forefront, he also recognized that many industrialized societies were beginning to allow an extended *psychosocial moratorium* beyond adolescence during which the identity explorations of adolescence continued and even intensified, with respect to love, work, and ideology (Erikson, 1968). Similarly, Keniston (1971) emphasized ideological development as central to the late teens–early twenties period he termed "youth."

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His primary focus was on the ideological explorations of young people as they confronted the explosive social issues of the late 1960's and early 1970's in the United States.

Recent studies have indicated the importance of ideology as a focus of development for the current generation of emerging adults. Forming an ideology involves making judgments about beliefs and values, and several studies have shown that to ''decide on one's own beliefs and values'' is a crucial part of becoming an adult (Arnett, 1997, 1998; Greene, Wheatley, & Aldava, 1992; Scheer, Unger, & Brown, 1994). Studies also indicate that a majority of young people in American society do not consider themselves to have become fully adult until they reach their late twenties (Arnett, 1997, 2001). This suggests that, for many young people, deciding on their own beliefs and values—developing an ideology—is a process that is continuing during their late teens and twenties (see Arnett, 2001). In fact, it is qualities such as deciding on their own beliefs and values, and not role transitions such as marriage or finishing education, that are most important to emerging adults in marking their transition to adulthood (Arnett, 1997, 2001).

One way to examine ideological thinking during emerging adulthood is in terms of Shweder's ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Jensen, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). These three ethics have been proposed as a conception of the ways that people of diverse ages in diverse cultures may structure their beliefs, values, and moral views. The ethic of Autonomy defines the individual as the primary moral authority, unrestricted in choices except by his or her own preferences. Beliefs and values in this ethic center on individual rights, especially the belief that individuals should be free to do as they like so long as their behavior does no direct harm to others. In contrast, the ethic of Community defines individuals as members of groups to which they have commitments and obligations. The responsibilities of roles in the family, the community, and other groups are the basis of one's beliefs and values. The ethic of Divinity defines the individual as a spiritual entity, subject to the prescriptions of a spiritual or natural order. An ethic of Divinity includes beliefs and values based on traditional religious authorities and sometimes on religious texts (e.g., the Bible, the Koran).

Several studies have shown the usefulness of this approach for describing the moral and ideological views of young people in their late teens and twenties.

Jensen (1995) found that young people aged 19–24 relied strongly on the ethic of Autonomy in explaining their moral views, whereas they invoked the ethic of Community less often, and the ethic of Divinity very little. In contrast, midlife and older adults used the three ethics about equally. Similarly, Haidt, Koller, and Dias (1993) examined the views of emerging adults living in an American city and two Brazilian cities with respect to a variety of moral issues. They found that college students in both countries made frequent use of the ethic of Autonomy and were less likely to use the ethics of Community or Divinity. However, they also found that noncollege emerging adults of lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds used Community more than Autonomy in both countries.

The findings that the ideologies of emerging adults in the United States are strongly based in Autonomy can be explained by two factors, one cultural and one developmental. Culturally, it has often been noted that American society is highly individualistic, especially in the higher social classes (e.g., Alwin, 1988; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Triandis, 1995). Middle-class Americans of all ages have been found to place a high value on individual rights and individual freedoms, the kinds of values that comprise the ethic of Autonomy. Developmentally, emerging adulthood is a period in which the focus is on self-development in many respects (Arnett, 1998, 2000). Obligations to family of origin are left behind (or at least attenuated) when the young person leaves the family household; obligations to a spouse and children have not yet been assumed. During emerging adulthood, the focus is on self-exploration and on making individual decisions about preferences in love, work, and ideology. This focus would seem to lend itself to values of Autonomy.

At the same time, however, there is evidence that the focus on Autonomy during this period does not entirely exclude other considerations. Although Jensen (1995) found that the emerging adults in her study relied most on Autonomy in explaining their moral views, Community justifications were also invoked quite frequently. As noted, although college students in the Haidt *et al.* (1993) study relied mostly on Autonomy, the emerging adults from lower SES backgrounds used Community more than Autonomy. Also, in research on conceptions of the transition to adulthood, individualistic criteria such as ''decide on one's own beliefs and values'' and ''accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions'' rank highest, but more community-oriented criteria are

also mentioned frequently, such as consideration for others (Arnett, 2001). However, Divinity has been found to be used relatively rarely by emerging adults in studies involving the three ethics, except by those who have been previously identified as religiously conservative (Jensen, 1997a). (And even among religious conservatives, emerging adults emphasize Autonomy more than midlife or older adults [Jensen, 2000]).

In the present study, the three ethics were used to analyze emerging adults' responses to two interview questions that reflected their ideological views:

1. When you get toward the end of your life, what would you like to be able to say about your life, looking back on it?
2. What values or beliefs do you think are the most important to pass on to the next generation?

These questions were not originally designed to be related to each other, and neither was designed for the explicit purpose of exploring the ideological views of emerging adults. However, it was observed during the course of interviews with emerging adults that the questions typically evoked responses that seemed to tap their fundamental ideological views. Subsequently, it was decided to analyze the responses in terms of the three ethics to see what such an analysis might reveal about the ideological views of emerging adults in the United States.

Based on previous research and theory as described, it was hypothesized that Autonomy would be used more than Community, and Community more than Divinity. A variety of other hypotheses about possible relationships between use of the three ethics and other variables were suggested by previous research. Gender has been much discussed in relation to moral and ideological views (e.g., Gilligan, 1982), but most empirical research has found few gender differences in moral reasoning (Walker, 1984). SES has been founded to be positively correlated with use of Autonomy (Haidt *et al.*, 1993) and to individualism (Hofstede, 1980), and negatively related to use of Community (Haidt *et al.*, 1993). Individualism has been found to be negatively related to the likelihood of being married in the early twenties (Dion & Dion, 1991), which suggests that use of Autonomy may be more common among unmarried emerging adults. Becoming a parent has been found to temper individualism and propel young people toward a more community-oriented ideology (Arnett, 1998; Galinsky, 1981).

In sum, the hypotheses of the study were:

1. Autonomy would be used more than Community.
2. Community would be used more than Divinity.
3. There would be no gender differences in ideological views.
4. SES would be positively related to use of Autonomy, and negatively related to use of Community.
5. Autonomy would be used more often by unmarried persons.
6. Community would be used more by emerging adults with at least one child.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 140 emerging adults (ages 20–29) residing in a medium-sized Midwestern city. Demographic information on the sample is shown in Table I. Most (94%) were white and they were about evenly divided between males and females. Sixty percent were married, and about one-fourth had one or more children. Nearly all were employed full- or part-time, and about one-third were attending school full- or part-time. Their social class backgrounds (as reflected in their mothers' and fathers' educational levels) were diverse.

To obtain the sample, class lists of alumni were obtained from local high schools, and anyone within the designated age group who was still living in the area and could be located through the phone book was contacted by letter. This method was used to acquire a sample with educational and economic diversity (i.e., rather than college and graduate students). The letter explained the purpose of the research, and requested participation in the study. A follow-up phone call was made to invite participation, and to set up appointments for those interested. The participation rate was 72%. Each person was offered $20 for participating.

Questions

The interview was structured and covered a wide variety of topics. Most interviews lasted around an hour, but they ranged in length from 30 minutes to

Table I. Background Characteristics

	Percent		Percent
Gender		Employment	
Male	53	Full time	67
Female	47	Part time	24
Ethnicity		None	9
White	94	Marital status	
Black	5	Married	60
Other	1	Single	40
Educational Attainment		Current educational status	
High school degree or less	16	In school full-time	28
Some college	52	In school part-time	8
College degree	19	Not in school	65
Some graduate school or degree	13	Number of children	
		None	73
		One	14
		Two or more	13
Mother's education		Father's education	
Less than high school degree	8	Less than high school	8
High school degree	23	High school degree	24
Some college	23	Some college	15
College degree	27	College degree	24
Some graduate school or degree	19	Some graduate school or degree	30

more than 2 hours. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Responses to two of the interview questions were analyzed for the purpose of this study. The first question, ''When you get toward the end of your life, what would you like to be able to say about your life, looking back on it?'' tapped participants' fundamental values for their own lives. The second question, ''What values or beliefs do you think are the most important to pass on to the next generation?'' concerned their views of the values that it would be desirable for society as a whole to embrace.

Coding

The Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Shweder *et al.*, 1997) were assessed following a coding manual formulated by Jensen (1991) and used in previous studies of the three ethics (Jensen, 1995, 1997a, 1997b). Responses to the two questions were coded separately. Each response was coded for the use of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. If *any part* of the response indicated use of a particular ethic, the ethic was coded as used by that participant for that question. The coding of responses was not mutually exclusive; it was possible for a response to be coded for Autonomy as well as for Community, or Community and Divinity, and so on.

The coding criteria for each of the three ethics were as follows.

Autonomy

A response was coded for Autonomy if it focused on the person's own needs, desires, and interests. This included statements regarding individual accomplishments (e.g., ''I'd like to be able to say that I achieved all that I set out to do'') and personal experiences (e.g., ''Just that I had fun, took a lot of nice vacations''), and also statements that asserted autonomy-related virtues (e.g., ''I'd tell them to be true to yourself and to have respect for yourself'').

Community

A response was coded for Community if it focused on the needs, desires, and interests of others. This included statements related to family (e.g., ''That I was a good father to my kids'') and other specific persons or groups (e.g., ''To be a faithful and loyal friend'') as well as more general statements of consideration for others (e.g., ''Being good to the people around you'').

Divinity

A response was coded for Divinity if it focused on religious authorities, religious texts, or religious beliefs. This included references to specific religious traditions (e.g., ''Take time to sit down and read the Bible'') as well as more general statements of religious beliefs (e.g., ''Just to believe in God'').

The responses were coded independently by the three authors. Percentage agreement (corrected with Cohen's kappa) was 84%. The codes used in final analyses were those derived by consensus of the coders after discussing each response on which they differed.

RESULTS

In response to the first question (''When you get toward the end of your life, what would you like to be able to say about it?''), nearly three-fourths of the participants gave an Autonomy response (Table II). Half the participants offered a Community response, and only 6% of responses were coded for Divinity. In response to the second question (''What values or beliefs do you think are the most important to pass on to the next generation?''), half of the participants used the ethic of Autonomy and a similar proportion used the ethic of Community, whereas 21% used Divinity.

Prevalence of Ethics

Cochran's Q followed with McNemar tests were used to test the hypothesis that the ethic of Autonomy was used more than Community and Community more than Divinity. Cochran's Q was used because it is appropriate for analyses for which parti-

Table II. Use of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity

Ethic	Question 1: ''When you get toward the end of your life . . .'' (%)	Question 2: ''What values and beliefs . . .'' (%)
Autonomy	72	50
Community	50	53
Divinity	6	21

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100 because it was possible for different statements within a participant's response to receive different codes.

cipants may differ in the number of data points they have; in the present analyses, participants could differ in the number of codable statements they had made in response to the questions. Cochran's Q indicated that the ethics were not used randomly in response to either question ($p < .0001$). McNemar tests were used to delineate the sources of the variation.

Analysis of responses to the first question (''When you get toward the end of your life . . .'') indicated that Autonomy was used significantly more often than Community ($p < .01$). Autonomy was used significantly more often than Divinity ($p < .001$), and Community was also used more often than Divinity ($p < .001$). Analysis of responses to the second question (''What values or beliefs . . .'') revealed that the prevalence of Autonomy and Community was not significantly different. Again, Autonomy was used more often than Divinity ($p < .001$) and Community was also used more often than Divinity ($p < .001$).

Combinations of Ethics

Another question of interest was the question of whether use of one ethic would be incompatible with use of the other two ethics. The results indicated that the ethics were compatible for a substantial minority who combined two ethics, and a small proportion who combined all three ethics in response to one question (Table III). In response to each question,

Table III. Use of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, Together and Separately

Ethic	''When you get toward the end of your life . . .'' (%)	''What values and beliefs . . .'' (%)
Autonomy alone	46	29
Community alone	19	28
Divinity alone	2	6
Total, one ethic	67	63
Autonomy & Community	30	20
Autonomy & Divinity	0	6
Community & Divinity	3	9
Autonomy, Community & Divinity	2	5
Total, combined ethics	35	40

Note. Numbers do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

over one-third of the participants offered responses that combined ethics. However, overall the ethics of Autonomy and Community were negatively correlated for both questions (Question 1, $r = -.33$, $p < .001$; Question 2, $r = -.27$, $p < .001$). The relationships of Autonomy and Community with Divinity were inconsistent. In response to the first question, Divinity was positively correlated with Community ($r = .17$, $p < .05$) but negatively correlated with Autonomy ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$). However, it should be emphasized that Divinity was rarely used in response to the first question, so these correlations should be interpreted with caution. There were no significant correlations between Divinity and the other two ethics in responses to the second question.

Relation of Ethics to Demographic Variables

A variety of variables were examined in relation to the three ethics, to test the hypotheses that gender would be unrelated to use of the ethics, that SES would be positively related to use of Autonomy, that being unmarried would be positively related to use of Autonomy, and that being a parent would be posi-

Table IV. Relation Between Other Variables and the Three Ethics, Question One ("When you get to the end of your life, what would you like to be able to say about it?")

Variables	Autonomy	Community	Divinity
Male	65	49	4
Female	80	51	8
Chi-square	3.93[a]	0.06	0.84
Both parents			
high school or less	70	56	17
One or both college	73	46	4
Chi-square	0.09	0.77	5.09[a]
High school or less	55	46	18
Some college or more	75	50	3
Chi-square	3.92[a]	0.18	7.44[b]
Married	72	55	8
Single	72	47	5
Chi-square	0.01	0.77	0.44
No children	72	50	4
One or more children	74	50	11
Chi-square	0.08	0.01	2.19

Note. The numbers indicate the percentage of participants using each ethic.
[a]$p < .05$.
[b]$p < .01$.

Table V. Relation Between Other Variables and the Three Ethics, Question Two ("What values or beliefs are most important to pass on to the next generation?")

Variables	Autonomy	Community	Divinity
Male	54	54	18
Female	48	52	26
Chi-square	0.56	0.04	1.51
Both parents			
high school or less	48	48	35
One or both college	51	60	17
Chi-square	0.05	1.12	3.68[a]
High school or less	50	55	36
Some college or more	51	53	19
Chi-square	0.01	0.02	3.4[b]
Married	42	60	32
Single	57	49	15
Chi-square	2.96[b]	1.57	5.98[c]
No children	54	53	17
One or more children	45	55	34
Chi-square	0.84	0.09	4.93[a]

Note. The numbers indicate the percentage of participants using each ethic.
[a]$p < .10$.
[b]$p < .05$.
[c]$p < .01$.
[d]$p < .001$.

tively related to use of Community. Chi-square tests were used for all comparisons (Tables IV and V). As a preliminary analysis, the two groups being compared for each hypothesis were compared for number of codable statements per person, using t-tests. The only significant result was that for the first question, women had more codable responses than men.

In chi-square tests comparing men and women, women used Autonomy more in response to the first question. However, as noted, women also had more codable statements than men. For this reason, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with the total number of codes for each person used as a covariate. The gender difference disappeared when total number of codable statements was controlled in the ANCOVA.

SES background was assessed by combining the categorical education levels of the participant's mother and father. Although it was hypothesized that SES would be positively correlated with Autonomy and negatively correlated with Community, there was no relationship between SES background and Autonomy or Community. No hypothesis regarding SES

and Divinity was proposed, but it was found that those who were of the lower SES levels (as reflected in their parents' educational attainment) used Divinity more than those in the higher SES levels.

Another way to analyze SES is by using participants' levels of educational achievement. It was predicted that those with higher levels of education would be more likely to use the ethic of Autonomy and less likely to use the ethic of Community. Findings revealed some support for this, with regard to Autonomy in response to the first question. Among those with no more than a high school education, 55% used the ethic of Autonomy, but among those with at least some college education, 75% used the ethic of Autonomy (see Table IV). However, participant's educational achievement was unrelated to use of Commmunity. Educational achievement was also related to use of the ethic of Divinity, with those with less education using Divinity significantly more often in response to the first question and with a trend in the same direction in response to the second question.

Hypotheses were also made about marriage and parenthood status in relation to the three ethics. As expected, unmarried persons were somewhat more likely to use Autonomy, but only in response to the second question, and it was only a statistical trend (see Table V). Married persons were also more likely to use the ethnic of Divinity (in response to the second question), which was not hypothesized. It was also hypothesized that having had a child would predict greater use of Community, but this hypothesis was not supported. However, those who had children were more likely to use Divinity in response to the second question (see Table V).

DISCUSSION

A Balance of Autonomy and Community

It was expected that the ideological views of the emerging adults in this study would emphasize the ethic of Autonomy. This was based on previous research on use of the three ethics among young people (Jensen, 1995; Haidt et al., 1993) as well as on theoretical ideas about the individualism of American society (Bellah et al., 1985) and the self-orientation of the emerging adulthood period (Arnett, 1998, 2000). However, the results of emerging adults' responses to the two questions that were the focus of this study showed a more or less equal balance between Autonomy and Community. It is true that in response to

the first question, Autonomy responses were given significantly more frequently than Community responses. However, Autonomy and Community responses were stated with equal frequency in response to the second question, and, even in response to the first question, Community responses were given by about half the participants. It could be argued, too, that the phrasing of the first question may have pulled for Autonomy responses. "When you get toward the end of your life, what would you like to be able to say about your life, looking back on it?" is arguably a self-directed question about ideological views. In this light, it is especially notable that half of the responses reflected use of the ethic of Community.

This finding, of a more or less equal balance between Autonomy and Community responses, is somewhat at odds with previous studies, which have found emerging adults to rely especially on the ethic of Autonomy (Jensen, 1995; Haidt et al., 1993). However, the preeminence of Autonomy has been found especially among college students—undergraduates in the Haidt et al. (1993) study, and undergraduate and graduate students in the Jensen (1995) study— whereas the sample in the present was drawn from the community and contained only a minority of people who were college students. The present and other studies have found that educational attainment is positively related to individualism and use of Autonomy (e.g., Hofstede, 1980). Among the noncollege emerging adults in the Haidt et al. (1993) study, it was Community rather than Autonomy that was preeminent. The college setting tends to be a setting in which intellectual autonomy is esteemed and promoted (Perry, 1970/1999), which makes use of the ethic of Autonomy more likely. The balance between Autonomy and Community in the noncollege sample of the present study is probably a more accurate reflection of the ideological views of emerging adults in the general population than a study of college students alone would provide.

Views of Autonomy and Community were generally unrelated in the present study to characteristics such as gender, social class background, marital status, and parenthood status. Perhaps especially notable is the lack of relationship between Autonomy and Community and the role transitions of marriage and parenthood. Evidently, ideological views related to Autonomy and Community are formed in emerging adulthood independently of these transitions. The formation of ideological views in emerging adulthood is an important developmental transition in its own right (Erikson, 1968), one that has been shown to be

a key part of emerging adults' views of what it means to make the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 1997, 1998).

Qualitative Illustrations

To obtain further insights into the use of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity in the ideological views of emerging adults, qualitative examples from the interviews are presented. These examples demonstrate the kinds of views that are reflected in emerging adults' uses of the three ethics. The examples also show the complexity of their ideological views, including the ways that some emerging adults combine different ethics, whereas others embrace a particular ethic while explicitly rejecting one or both of the others.

Emerging adults' uses of the ethic of Autonomy reflected the two distinct aspects of American individualism described by Bellah *et al.* (1985). *Expressive individualism* emphasizes the value of personal experience, enjoyment, and self-development. This kind of ideology was reflected in the response of this 24-year-old man, who responded to the question "When you get towards the end of your life . . .?" by stating:

> Probably that I had a good time, because if I'm having a good time, I'm happy, and that's pretty much what I've gathered that everybody wants to do is just live a happy life. You know, it's not going to be free from grief at all times, but I'd say just that I had fun. I'm a fun seeker.

Similarly, a 27-year-old woman stated that at the end of her life she would like to be able to say:

> That I lived it to the fullest. There's just so much out there to enjoy and experience. I want to look back and say I traveled, I ate bizarre food, I met the neatest people . . . I want to say I ran a marathon this year, I went kayaking this year, and I sky-dived . . . because I think all those experiences give some sort of color and taste to your life.

The other aspect of American individualism described by Bellah *et al.* (1985) is *utilitarian individualism*, which focuses on the desire for personal achievement and attaining personal goals. This kind of individualism was also stated in response to the question "When you get to the end of your life. . . . ?", for example by this 26-year-old man:

> I would hope that I have achieved all that I thought I could. I want that $250,000 house, four-car garage, fifty acres of land, and to be able to go on vacation for a month out of the year.

In response to the second question, about values and beliefs to be passed on to the next generation, Autonomy responses tended to be in the form of specifying Autonomy virtues such as self-esteem and independence. A 27-year-old woman demonstrated this ideological view, stating that she believed that the most important value to pass on to the next generation is

> Loving yourself and being able to live with yourself. I think you should go to bed every night with self-love, and I don't think a lot of people have that. I think that's the only true road to happiness, is being happy with yourself.

Ideological views reflecting expressive individualism were also stated in response to this question, such as by a 27-year-old man who said he would like to pass on the value of "Living life to the fullest. You only live once. If you're happy doing what you're doing, keep doing it."

With respect to Community responses, emerging adults tended to respond to the first question, "When you get toward the end of your life . . .", with Community responses related to specific personal relationships, especially family relationships. For example, a 27-year-old man stated that, toward the end of his life, he would like to be able to say "that I made everybody happy in my family, and did everything they would have liked to see me doing." Similarly, the response of a 26-year-old woman was: "I'd like to say that I did something with my life. Not necessarily for myself, but for other people and for my family."

For the second question, about the values and beliefs to be passed to future generations, Community responses were more likely to stress promoting improved relations among people in general. In the words of a 24-year-old man:

> I think it's important to pass on a sense of responsibility to the people around you. We wouldn't have the problems with crime and drugs if people were sensitive to the people around them.

Divinity responses were rare. They were used by only 6% of emerging adults in response to the first question, "When you get toward the end of your life . . .?" Even for the second question, which explicitly asked about the values *and beliefs* they would like to pass on to the next generation, responses using the ethic of Divinity were uncommon, used by only 21% of emerging adults. Some participants used the question as an opportunity explicitly to reject the

importance of religious beliefs in favor of Autonomy values, for example in this young woman's response:

> I think I would pass on other values and beliefs other than religious beliefs . . . I would pass on values of self-esteem rather than religious values.

Nevertheless, 21% is a substantial proportion of emerging adults. It is interesting to note that the 21% proportion using Divinity in response to the second question is close to the percentage of persons with fundamentalist or "orthodox" religious views found in studies of the American population as a whole (Riechley, 1990). The views of the emerging adults who used the Divinity ethic in response to the second question reflect the conservative religious views of the religiously conservative one-fifth of the American population. For example, a 29-year-old man said that, with respect to the values and beliefs to be passed on to the next generation, the most important to him was "The belief that God is the savior of the world, and if you believe in Him, you'll have everlasting life."

Combining Ethics

One of the questions of interest in the study was the extent to which the three ethics were compatible. This question has been discussed by scholars, especially with respect to the relation between Autonomy and Community or individualism and collectivism. Some scholars see individualism and collectivism as inherently oppositional and therefore incompatible (e.g., Bellah *et al.*, 1985; Triandis, 1995). In this view, emphasizing the needs and rights of the individual inevitably means undermining the extent to which people feel they have responsibilities and commitments to others, and emphasizing communal and collective values inevitably means tempering the autonomy of individuals. Other scholars have argued that this is a false dichotomy, and that individualism and collectivism are in fact reconcilable.

The results of the present study appear to fall on a middle ground: Autonomy and Community appear to be compatible for some emerging adults but not for others. Use of the two ethics was negatively correlated for both questions, but the correlations were modest ($-.33$ in response to the first question; $-.27$ in response to the second). Examples from the interviews demonstrate how some emerging adults incorporated both ethics into their ideological views,

whereas others explicitly embraced one of the ethics while rejecting the other.

When asked what values she would want to pass on to the next generation, one 26-year-old woman combined Autonomy and Community in this way:

> Just that they value themselves first of all and then they value the other people around them. To respect theirself [sic] and therefore respect the other people around them.

Another participant, a 26-year-old man, stated that Autonomy was in fact a prerequisite for Community. In his view, the most important value/belief to pass on to the next generation was:

> Having a sense of purpose in yourself. I think a lot of people view taking care of themselves as being selfish, or doing things for themselves as selfish. But I have a perspective that if you don't take care of yourself, you can't help anybody else, and you can't take care of anybody else.

In contrast, other emerging adults made it clear that, from their perspective, the Ethics of Autonomy and Community were in opposition. Usually this meant rejecting Autonomy in favor of Community, as in the view of a 24-year-old man who stated, "I think we've become so egocentric that caring for others and responsibility for others deteriorates, and so does society." A similar view was evident in the beliefs this 28-year-old woman wanted to pass on to the next generation:

> It's that everything you do or say or believe or feel, every action, every thought, every movement you make affects everyone else. And that we are all interconnected. That's probably it. With such a "self" kind of society, you know "you're first, you're number one, you're the best, no one will take care of you if you don't take care of yourself" and it's all so self, self, self, and look what's happened. . . . We're so into making a name for ourselves and doing for ourselves that nobody is helping anybody else.

Overall, then, it could be concluded that for the emerging adults in this study, Autonomy and Community were *oppositional but not mutually exclusive*. There was a certain dissonance between these two ideological views, and some emerging adults clearly believed that one should be favored over the other. However, others were able to combine the two ethics into one ideology.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

What can we say about the ideological views of young people in their twenties in American society, on the basis of the data presented here? One clear theme is that their views are diverse. The much-discussed individualism of American society is certainly present here. There are many young people who see concern for the self and love for the self and elevation of the self as virtues, not only for their own lives but as the values they would hope to instill in the next generation. For these young people, the ethic of Autonomy is the ideological basis for their lives. However, nearly as prevalent is the use of the ethic of Community, the view that duty to family, consideration of others, and concern for others should be the preeminent ideological principles that guide our lives. Bellah *et al.* (1985) claim that Americans have a ''first language'' of individualism when they speak of moral concerns, but the results here suggest that this claim may be overstated. For many emerging adults, their first moral language is not the individualistic language of the ethic of Autonomy but the other-oriented language of the ethic of Community. Other emerging adults are able to combine values of Autonomy with values of Community, and view them as not mutually exclusive but in fact as mutually reinforcing.

In general, however, use of Autonomy is negatively correlated with use of Community, and some emerging adults explicitly reject one in favor of the other. Those who favor the ethic of Autonomy are sometimes skeptical of calls to mute self-interest and self-love in favor of the interests of others. Those who favor the ethic of Community sometimes disparage the ethic of Autonomy and see it not as a sign of healthy self-esteem but as a reflection of a selfishness that has become a destructive force in American society. Perhaps this reflects an ideological cleavage among the current generation of emerging adults, a struggle, not yet fully articulated, over the ideological direction of their generation. Alternatively, the divergence in views may simply reflect the ideological pluralism of American society, the latest chapter in a long-running debate over the proper balance of individual and community moral concerns that dates back at least to Toqueville's observations on American individualism two centuries ago.

Emerging adulthood is a period of life in which young people seek to sort through the range of ideological possibilities present in their society and choose an orientation that will provide them with a guide to life (Arnett, 1998, 2000; Erikson, 1968).

They view this process, of deciding on their beliefs and values, as a key part of becoming an adult (Arnett, 1997, 1998; Greene *et al.*, 1992; Scheer, Unger, & Brown, 1994). The present study shows the variety of ideological perspectives they may form from the possibilities available to them in a pluralistic society in which views of both Autonomy and Community are prominent, and in which views of Divinity are strongly held by a substantial minority.

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