Harmonizing Hearts: High-Quality Listening and Kama Muta Among Listeners and Speakers

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Kama Muta, a relatively new construct, is an emotion of social connection that describes the feeling of being moved to love through five key dimensions. Despite the growing body of research on the beneficial outcomes of Kama Muta, little is known about its antecedents. To fill this gap, this research focuses on the emergence of Kama Muta during social interactions by specifically examining what triggers this emotion in conversations. The theory on Kama Muta suggests it emerges in response to sudden relationship intensification. We propose that, in conversation, this intensification is most likely triggered by high-quality listening. We examined whether high-quality listening, characterized by undivided attention, understanding, acceptance, nonjudgment, and positive intentions, is associated with Kama Muta for both speakers and listeners. Data were collected across three studies (total $N = 1{,}126$), employing scenarios (Study 1), recall (Study 2), and live online conversations conducted via Zoom (Study 3). We found general support for our hypotheses. Specifically, both speakers (Studies 1–3) and listeners (Studies 2–3) experiencing high-quality listening reported greater Kama Muta compared to those exposed to lower quality listening. The consistency of these results varied across different dimensions of Kama Muta. This work offers novel insights into a previously unexplored social behavior that can act as an antecedent of Kama Muta and contributes to the listening literature, which has predominantly focused on the effects on speakers. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

Keywords: Kama Muta, listening, interpersonal interaction, emotions

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You're at your mother's funeral, desolate with grief, but now fondly remembering the songs she sang you as she brushed your hair. When her best friend stands up to speak of her memories of your mother, you realize how much she loved her, too. And looking around, you appreciate how in life and now in death, your mother always brought everyone together—she was the link that connected everyone and still is. (Fiske, 2020, p. XII)

The above quote is one of many examples of intensified "togetherness" creating positive emotion (Swarbrick et al., 2021). English speakers sometimes say they feel moved to tears, emotionally touched, or that something warmed their hearts. Other languages use similar passive contact metaphors to refer to this state (Zickfeld et al., 2019). Individuals commonly express sensations of emotional inundation, including tear-jerking, poignant

experiences, and feelings of nostalgia, sweet sorrow, and rapture from divine love. No singular, distinct term in English encapsulates these various emotional experiences. Fiske et al. (2016) argued that these experiences constitute aspects of a broader emotional experience that they label "Kama Muta" (Fiske et al., 2016).

What Is Kama Muta?

Kama Muta is Sanskrit for "moved by love" and is defined as a "distinct positive social-relational emotion evoked by experiencing or observing a sudden intensification of communal sharing" (Zickfeld et al., 2019, p. 403). As an emotional experience, it is common and essential in everyday life and pivotal moments across diverse cultures. This emotional experience has been relatively understudied and has

only recently started to receive more focused empirical attention (Fiske et al., 2016). Kama Muta is an emotional episode that typically involves a coordinated pattern of changes across multiple domains, including physiology, cognition, and behavior. This pattern can be classified as an instance of emotion when specific attributes are present (Fiske et al., 2016). The construct is composed of five dimensions: communal sharing, positive valence, bodily sensation, devotion motivation, and labeling (Zickfeld et al., 2019). We next elaborate on each dimension.

The first dimension involves the sudden intensification of a *communal sharing* relationship (Pizarro et al., 2021). The suddenness of this intensification is a defining feature of Kama Muta, whether it occurs in the participant's own relationships or when observing the relationships of others, whether it is real, fictional, or imagined. Communal sharing refers to a mental representation of social relationships characterized by shared norms, mutual intentions to fulfill each other's needs, and expressions of connection. This dimension captures the complex and multifaceted nature of social relations and how they are expressed and maintained (Simão & Seibt, 2014) through communal acts of kindness and compassion. Examples of sudden intensification include moments of heartfelt support, spontaneous acts of kindness, and immediate expressions of care that deepen emotional bonds. For instance, comforting a friend in distress, where one offers both emotional and practical support, can evoke Kama Muta by suddenly reinforcing the communal bond. Similarly, celebrating milestones together, such as weddings, graduations, or the birth of a child, can create an instant surge of shared joy that amplifies the sense of togetherness and mutual care (Fiske, 2020).

The second dimension is *positive valence*. Although experiencing Kama Muta may involve feelings of both happiness and sadness, the overall feeling is perceived as positive. Fiske and colleagues argued that individuals actively seek Kama Muta, want to provide it to others, and desire to experience it together with others (Fiske et al., 2019).

Third, Kama Muta is often experienced alongside distinct *bodily sensations*. In less intense instances of this emotion, individuals may not report experiencing any of these. However, when Kama Muta is felt intensely, many describe bodily sensations such as moist or teary eyes, goosebumps, warmth in the chest area (often described as a sensation in the "heart"), or even choking up (Zickfeld et al., 2020). These physical sensations can be a crucial aspect of the Kama Muta experience in that they enhance the intensity of the emotional response and contribute to its distinctiveness (Fiske, 2020).

Fourth, Kama Muta generates *devotion motivation* and a commitment to sustain, strengthen, or engage in specific behaviors during a relationship, such as touching, sharing meaningful experiences, or being physically close to others (Fiske et al., 2016). These behaviors enhance togetherness in the relationship (Pizarro et al., 2021).

The fifth dimension, referred to as *labeling*, highlights the complexity of communicating the Kama Muta experience since very few languages have a specific label or term (Fiske, 2020). In English, individuals use various expressions such as "being moved," "being touched," "having a heartwarming experience," or "feeling tenderness," depending on the context. However, these terms are also used to describe other emotions, making them imprecise Kama Muta labels. Each language has its own set of lexemes that could denote Kama Muta, but they partition the emotional domain differently and have varying levels of specificity (Seibt et al., 2018).

The configuration of all five dimensions (communal sharing, positive valence, bodily sensations, devotion motivation, and labeling) constitutes experiencing Kama Muta (Fiske et al., 2017, 2019). Kama Muta is a social emotion generated and oriented by the social relationships in which it emerges, like other social and moral emotions. Kama Muta is influenced by the social systems, languages, relationships, institutions, technologies, norms, religions, and practices in which it occurs (Fiske et al., 2017).

Kama Muta can arise in everyday situations, even those not explicitly designed to evoke it. For instance, it may occur during moments like reuniting with a loved one, helping strangers, or sharing kindness. However, what underlies these diverse examples is the intensification of a communal sharing relationship. Even everyday conversations can evoke Kama Muta if they strengthen this relational bond. This context is particularly relevant to our interest in how certain interactions, especially those involving high-quality listening, are more likely to evoke Kama Muta. Despite its everyday occurrence, little is known about how Kama Muta is triggered, which motivated our interest in exploring these dynamics further.

High-Quality Listening and Kama Muta

High-quality listening is composed of three dimensions: attention, comprehension, and positive intention (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Attention involves concentrating on the speaker's message while avoiding external distractions, such as text messages and other individuals in the vicinity, and internal distractions, such as unrelated thoughts. Listeners can demonstrate their attention to the speaker's content through backchannel behaviors comprising both verbal and nonverbal reactions that signify interest without disrupting the speaker's flow (Bavelas et al., 2000; Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015). These behaviors encompass essential nonverbal cues such as maintaining eye contact, adopting an open posture, and displaying appropriate facial expressions.

Comprehension refers to the effort that listeners make while attempting to understand their speakers. Listeners convey comprehension through a variety of behaviors. The most prominent are reflections (Kluger & Nir, 2010) and open question-asking, which encourage the speaker to elaborate (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018; Van Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023).

Positive intention, the third dimension, involves adopting and conveying a nonjudgmental approach toward the speaker. This approach makes speakers feel psychologically safe and free of self-presentation concerns (Itzchakov et al., 2017; C. Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991; C. R. Rogers, 1962). Positive intention can also be communicated by framing advice as questions (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018; Van Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023). In other words, instead of saying, "I think you should do X," ask, "Would it be helpful for you to do X?" This approach helps speakers feel less coerced or judged (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2018). Another behavior that conveys positive intention is validation, which involves acknowledging the speaker's self-disclosure (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021). Validation shows appreciation of the shared content without necessarily agreeing with the speaker's perspective; for example, "Thank you for sharing this with me; it must have been difficult for you" (Itzchakov, Reis, & Weinstein, 2022; Weinstein et al., 2022).

Although listening is often described in terms of observable verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, nodding, body

posture, and paraphrasing, growing evidence suggests that listening is fundamentally a subjective experience. That is, it is not simply a matter of what the listener does, but how the speaker holistically interprets and experiences those behaviors (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Importantly, it is the speaker's perception of being listened to that predicts the speaker's outcomes. Examples include well-being (Itzchakov, Weinstein, & Cheshin, 2022; Weinstein et al., 2021), psychological needs (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Itzchakov, Weinstein, Saluk, & Amar, 2023; Weinstein & Itzchakov, 2025), open-mindedness (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2018; Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2018), psychological safety (Castro et al., 2018; Itzchakov, Weinstein, Vinokur, & Yomtovian, 2023), and attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2018; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017a; F. K. T. Moin et al., 2025).

Like the outcomes of high-quality listening, Kama Muta manifests when social bonds are strengthened or deepened through the shared experience of emotions and mutual identification (Fiske, 2020). Furthermore, similar to Kama Muta, listening is an episodic experience that creates "togetherness" between the speaker and the listener (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). "Togetherness" is a state of high-quality connection and chemistry between individuals during a conversation (Reis et al., 2022) marked by shared attention, mutual understanding, and positive emotional resonance (Major et al., 2018). Togetherness includes high-quality listening that deeply engages the speaker and listener and produces the feeling that time is suspended and the speaker and listener are fully immersed in each other's perspectives. Togetherness promotes psychological safety, authenticity, and positive emotions, even in difficult or stressful conversations (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

Empirical evidence for the hypothesized effects of high-quality listening on Kama Muta comes from work suggesting that when speakers receive high-quality listening, they feel a greater sense of closeness with their listeners, such as enhanced relatedness (Weinstein et al., 2021, 2022; Weinstein & Itzchakov, 2025), intimacy (Kluger et al., 2021; F. K. T. Moin et al., 2025), and psychological safety (Castro et al., 2016; Itzchakov, Weinstein, Vinokur, & Yomtovian, 2023; Itzchakov & DeMarree, 2022). The positive, intimate, and nonjudgmental atmosphere that high-quality listening creates should promote Kama Muta for speakers and listeners because it generates a positive shift in social relationships in which individuals become socially closer (Itzchakov, Reis, & Weinstein, 2022). Moreover, when individuals become socially closer, be it because they discover shared interests, shared destiny, and other sources of mutual sympathy and empathy, they also tend to listen more attentively to each other (Bodie, 2023; Clark & Reis, 1988). This positive shift is needed for the emergence or intensification of *communal sharing*, which is the first dimension of Kama Muta.

The *positive valence* dimension of Kama Muta involves the experience being perceived positively, which can be induced by speakers who feel listened to in a high-quality manner. Listening creates a sense of togetherness characterized by communal sharing and positively affects listeners and speakers (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; see also Lemay et al., 2023). Listeners who engage attentively with their speakers send a metamessage of "you are competent," which fosters a supportive environment (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). A meta-analysis of listening found that the average effect size of being listened to on speakers' positive affect is $r = .40$ across 2,310 participants in 13 studies (Kluger et al., 2023).

By contrast, the *bodily sensations* of Kama Muta, which include feelings of heartwarming, energy, and sometimes chills (Fiske et al., 2019), may be harder to achieve during listening because such physical reactions are intensely positive and require profound listening that fosters a strong bond between the speaker and listener. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that high-quality listening can at least partially generate bodily sensations for listeners and speakers. For instance, the feedforward interview, which relies on providing high-quality listening (Kluger & Nir, 2010), includes questions about physical reactions to positive events and, when the listening quality is sufficient, can facilitate these reactions (Budworth et al., 2015; Kluger & Van Dijk, 2010; Rechter et al., 2025). Supporting evidence also comes from listening training studies where attendees reported an increased sense of relational energy (Itzchakov, Weinstein, Vinokur, & Yomtovian, 2023), which is defined as psychological resourcefulness derived from interpersonal interactions (Owens et al., 2016) and may signify that interactions are a source of emotional energy (Baker, 2019).

Devotion motivation is also present in listening. Specifically, high-quality listening can let the speaker open to becoming vulnerable (Kluger & Mizrahi, 2023). Because listening is a reciprocal process (Kluger et al., 2021), speakers may reciprocate this openness by increasing their devotion.

Finally, receiving and experiencing high-quality listening can elicit a profound emotional response characterized by being moved, touched, and experiencing heartwarming or poignant sensations, which is the *labeling* dimension of Kama Muta (Zickfeld et al., 2019). When a conversation partner listens with empathy and understanding, it creates a deeply meaningful connection between the speaker and the listener, fostering a sense of validation and acceptance (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017b, 2018, 2019). This emotional resonance can evoke tenderness, rapture, and a sense of being touched. Feeling honestly heard and understood can evoke a cascade of positive emotions, leading to a transformative experience that touches the core of one's being and reinforces the bonds of human connection. Recent work found that feeling listened to increased positivity resonance (Itzchakov et al., 2024; T. Moin et al., 2024), which includes many of the strong social emotions described in the fifth dimension of Kama Muta (Otero et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2022). Overall, this led to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The experience of high-quality listening versus lower quality listening will increase the speaker's feeling of all five Kama Muta dimensions: physical sensation, communal sharing, devotion motivation, positive valence, and labeling.

Hypothesis 2: The experience of high-quality listening versus lower quality listening will increase the listener's feeling of all five Kama Muta dimensions: physical sensation, communal sharing, devotion motivation, positive valence, and labeling.

Overview of the Present Studies

We conducted three studies to test whether high-quality listening increases speakers' and listeners' Kama Muta across different topics. Study 1 was an imagined scenario study ($N = 293$) in which participants were first asked to remember an experience they regretted. They were then randomly assigned to imagine talking about the experience with a friend who exhibited high-, moderate-,

or low-quality listening. Study 2 was a recall study ($N = 513$) that used a 2 × 3 between-participant design, crossing conversational role (speaker vs. listener) and listening quality (high, moderate, low). Specifically, participants were asked to recall either sharing (speaker role) or listening (listener role) to a positive experience where they received or provided high-, moderate-, or low-quality listening levels. Study 3 ($N = 320$) was a live computer-mediated conversation between two naïve participants that relied on variability in naturally occurring listening quality. In the conversation, participants were randomly assigned to dyads and designated either as the speaker, who disclosed a meaningful experience to the other participant, or as the listener. An independent observer was also present during the conversation and rated the quality of listening. All three studies obtained institutional review board approval. We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study.

Although we provide a detailed overview of the behavioral components of high-quality listening in the introduction, the present studies assessed listening through participants' subjective perceptions rather than through behavioral coding. This approach is consistent with most listening research (e.g., Castro et al., 2018; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017a; Itzchakov et al., 2018; Kluger & Zaidel, 2013; Lehmann et al., 2023; Lloyd et al., 2015; T. Moin et al., 2024; Rave et al., 2022; Weinstein & Itzchakov, 2025; Weis-Rappaport & Kluger, 2024), which conceptualizes listening as a multidimensional construct that involves overt and covert behaviors by the listener, but its psychological impact is primarily shaped by how it is subjectively experienced (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Our studies focused on the downstream effects of feeling listened to (for speakers) and of engaging in listening (for listeners). As such, measuring participants' perceptions of listening quality was the most appropriate approach.

Transparency and Openness

Data were collected in 2022. We analyzed the data using the SPSS Version 27. This study's design and analysis were not preregistered. We report all measures and exclusions for each study. All data, study materials, and codes are publicly available at https://osf.io/z6ekh/ (Saluk et al., 2025; May 7).

Study 1

Method

Participants

We recruited 310 participants from Prolific Academic in exchange for a monetary reward. We determined this sample size to ensure sufficient power of 80% to detect a moderate effect size at $\alpha = .05$ based on a between-participant design with three conditions. We excluded 17 participants who did not answer the attention question correctly. The final sample size was $N = 293$ ($M_{age} = 36.71$, $SD = 14.51$, 77.2% female). A sensitivity analysis indicated that the weakest effect size that this sample size could detect in a between-participant design with three groups, with a power of 80% and $\alpha = .05$, was Cohen's $f = 0.18$ (Faul et al., 2007).

Procedure

After completing the consent forms, we randomly assigned the participants to the high-, moderate-, or low-quality listening conditions. In each condition, the participants recalled an experience they regretted and described this experience in an essay.

An example essay of regret experience was as follows:

> When I was dating my Ex, I was unsure about our relationship and I had moved far away and went out to the bar with a few friends I had just met. I ended up going home with a guy from the bar and breaking up with my boyfriend the next morning. I felt so guilty about it but still never told him the truth.

Subsequently, the participants were asked to imagine talking about their experience to a friend exhibiting high-quality, moderate-quality, or low-quality listening. The listening quality was operationalized based on validated listening protocols from previous listening studies (e.g., Itzchakov et al., 2020, 2024; Itzchakov, Weinstein, Saluk, & Amar, 2023). Specifically, the participants in the high-quality listening group read the following scenario:

> For the next minute or two, take the time to imagine that you are speaking to a friend about the *experience you just described*. While you are talking, you feel that your friend tries to understand your views and experiences in a nonjudgmental way. Moreover, your friend's reactions, questions, and comments show a genuine interest in you and your feelings, in what you have to say about your experience. During the conversation, your friend seems empathic, attuned to your feelings, and shows an understanding of the experiences that you have shared. Your friend's behavior also conveys interest and openness, and you notice that they make eye contact and have an open posture, leaning towards you and nodding as you speak. You also notice that the friend receives several text messages and calls throughout the conversation but does not respond to any of them.

Participants in the moderate-quality listening read the following scenario:

> For the next minute or two, take the time to imagine that you are speaking to a friend about the *experience you just described*. At the beginning of the conversation, while you are talking, you feel that sometimes your friend tries to understand your views and experiences, but on a few occasions, you feel that your friend seems to become uncomfortable or distracted by what you said. Yet, your friend's reactions, questions, and comments show you that they have some interest in your story, though maybe not as much as you would like. You notice that your friend's behaviors convey that they are open-minded, and you notice them nodding their head on a few occasions. Also, throughout the conversation, the friend receives several text messages and calls. The friend does not take the calls but responds to some of the text messages.

Participants in the low-quality listening read the following scenario:

> For the next minute or two, take the time and imagine that you are speaking to a friend about the *experience you just described*. While you are talking, you feel that your friend barely tries to understand your views and experiences in a nonjudgmental way. Moreover, your friend's reactions, questions, and comments show little interest in you and your feelings, in what you have to say about your experience. During the conversation, your friend does not seem empathic, attuned to your feelings, and rarely shows an understanding of the experiences that you have shared. The friend's behavior also does not convey interest and openness, which you notice through their eye contact, posture, and

head nodding as you speak. You also notice that the friend receives several text messages and calls throughout the conversation and responds to all of them.

Afterward, participants answered questionnaires on research variables and demographics and were debriefed and compensated.

Measures

All measures were anchored on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all agree*, 4 = *moderately agree*, 7 = *completely agree*). Each measure included the following preface: "The following statements refer to your perceptions of the imagined conversation you read about. Please rate your level of agreement with each of them."

Listening Quality (Manipulation Check). As a manipulation check, we used seven items from the Constructive Listening subscale of the Facilitating Listening Scale (Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2018). Example items are "During the conversation, I felt that the listener (a) paid close attention to what I said, and (b) created a positive atmosphere for me to talk" (α = .98).

Kama Muta. To assess the different dimensions of Kama Muta, we used the Kama Muta Multiplex Scale (KAMMUS) Two scale. The KAMMUS is composed of five subsections assessing the five dimensions of Kama Muta. As recommended by the authors (Zickfeld et al., 2019), we analyzed each subsection separately. All items began with the following prompt: "Please indicate to what extent you experienced any of the following sensations, feelings, or actions during the imagined conversation you read about," which was then followed by the specific items for each subscale. There were 12 *bodily sensation* (Section 1) items (e.g., moist eyes; a warm feeling in the center of the chest; α = .88). There were three *communal sharing* items (Section 2; e.g., an exceptional sense of closeness; an incredible bond; α = .94). There were four *devotion motivation* (Section 3) items (e.g., I felt like telling the listener how much I care about them; I felt more strongly committed to a relationship with the listener; α = .93). There was one *positive valence* (Section 4) item (I had positive feelings). There were three *labeling* (Section 5) items (e.g., I was moved; I was touched; α = .91).

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics by experimental conditions. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables.

Primary Analyses

Following Zickfeld et al. (2019), we analyzed each KAMMUS Two subscale separately. This approach allows for a more fine-grained understanding of how different Kama Muta dimensions relate to listening by providing a comprehensive picture of the experience.

Listening Quality (Manipulation Check). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) with listening condition as the only independent variable showed a main effect of condition on participants' perception of listening quality, $F(2, 290) = 529.174$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 1.88$. A least significant difference post hoc test indicated that participants in the high-quality condition experienced the highest levels of perceived listening; that is, they rated the listener as showing greater listening quality than participants in the moderate-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.36, 2.91], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [4.34, 4.90]. Participants in the moderate condition perceived greater listening than participants in the low-quality condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.71, 2.26]. These results indicate that the listening manipulation was effective.

Physical Sensation. An ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of the listening manipulation on the physical sensation dimension, $F(2, 290) = 34.989$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.48$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition felt more physical sensations than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.68, 1.25], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.85, 1.43]. However, the difference between participants in the moderate and low conditions was not significant, $p = .24$, 95% CI [−0.11, 0.46].

Communal Sharing. An ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of the listening manipulation on communal sharing, $F(2, 290) = 161.055$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 1.06$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition reported greater communal sharing than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.81, 2.53], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.89, 3.62]. Participants in the moderate condition reported greater communal sharing than participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.73, 1.45].

Devotion Motivation. An ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of the listening manipulation on participants' devotion motivation, $F(2, 290) = 153.421$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 1.02$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition reported more devotion motivation than participants in the moderate condition, $p <$

Table 1
Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations for the Listening Conditions Predicting the Study Variables

Dependent variable	Poor-quality listening		Moderate-quality listening		High-quality listening	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Listening perception (manipulation check)	1.92a	1.12	3.91b	1.18	6.54c	0.53
2. Physical sensation	2.36a	0.97	2.54a	1.10	3.50b	0.99
3. Communal sharing	1.54a	0.92	2.63b	1.48	4.80c	1.38
4. Devotion motivation	1.74a	1.13	2.70b	1.44	4.97c	1.34
5. Positive valence	1.78a	1.15	3.13b	1.70	5.35c	1.44
6. Labeling	1.71a	0.96	2.55b	1.41	4.69c	1.35

Note. Listening quality was measured on a 7-point scale. Columns in the same row that do not share the same subscript letter differ at $p \leq .05$.

Table 2

Study 1: Descriptive and Correlations for the Main Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Experimental condition			—						
2. Listening perception	4.13	2.13	.88**	—					
3. Physical sensation	2.80	1.13	.41**	.51**	—				
4. Communal sharing	2.99	1.86	.71**	.83**	.66**	—			
5. Devotion motivation	3.13	1.88	.70**	.81**	.70**	.93**	—		
6. Positive valence	3.42	2.06	.70**	.80**	.58**	.83**	.84**	—	
7. Labeling	2.99	1.77	.68**	.77**	.76**	.87**	.89**	.83**	—

Note. The listening conditions were coded as -1 = poor-quality, 0 = moderate-quality, and 1 = high-quality.
** $p < .01$.

.001, 95% CI [1.90, 2.63], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.85, 3.60]. Participants in the moderate condition reported greater devotion motivation than participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.59, 1.33].

Positive Valence. An ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of the listening manipulation on positive valence, $F(2, 290) = 148.289$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 1.02$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition felt more positive valence than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.81, 2.63], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.16, 3.98]. Participants in the moderate condition felt greater positive valence than participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.94, 1.76].

Labeling. An ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of the listening manipulation on the labeling dimension, $F(2, 290) = 144.069$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 1.00$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition felt more labeling than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.79, 2.50], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.62, 3.33]. Participants in the moderate condition felt greater labeling than participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.48, 1.19].

Discussion

The results of Study 1 provided initial support for Hypothesis 1. In this experimental study, we found that manipulated high-quality listening led to increased levels of all five dimensions of Kama Muta for speakers in an imagined conversation about a negative experience. Speakers who imagined talking about their experience with a listener who exhibited high-quality listening reported higher levels of all five dimensions of Kama Muta relative to speakers in the moderate- and low-quality listening conditions. Similar results were obtained when comparing moderate- to low-quality listening, except for the physical sensation dimension. Despite these promising initial findings, Study 1 was not without limitations. As noted in the introduction, conversations are potential opportunities to intensify the communal sharing relationship. As such, each member of this type of conversation—the speaker and the listener—may experience Kama Muta when this opportunity is realized, which we posit occurs in high-quality listening. Study 1 focused solely on the speaker's experience. Thus, Study 2 also examined the listener's experience. Furthermore, a communal sharing relationship can intensify not only from sharing negative experiences or aspects of the self (e.g., a regret as in Study 1) but also from sharing positive ones. To examine whether the valence of the shared experience

was a boundary condition for the hypothesized effects, in Study 2, we focused on a positive experience.

Study 2

Study 2 had three goals: to increase generalizability by focusing on a positive experience (whereas Study 1 focused on a negative topic), to test whether high-quality listening would trigger Kama Muta in listeners as well as speakers (Hypothesis 2), and to conceptually replicate the results of Study 1 for speakers.

Method

Participants

We recruited 555 students from two universities in Israel to participate in the study for course credit. This sample size was determined based on the average effect size observed in Study 1 across Kama Muta dimensions, namely, Cohen's $f = 0.92$. To ensure the ability to detect smaller effects, particularly for interaction terms, we aimed for a minimum of 500 participants with an additional 10% for potential exclusions. We excluded 42 participants who failed to answer the attention question correctly (i.e., "Please mark number 5"). The final sample size was $N = 513$ ($M_{age} = 25.94$ years, $SD = 7.17$, 69.8% women). The sensitivity analysis indicated that the weakest effect size that this sample size could detect in a between-participant design with six groups, with a power of 80% and $\alpha = .05$, was Cohen's $f = 0.17$ (Faul et al., 2007). Therefore, the sample size was sufficiently powered to detect the effect sizes on the speakers based on the results of Study 1.

Procedure

After participants completed the consent forms, we randomly assigned them to a role (speaker vs. listener) and listening condition (low-, moderate-, and high-quality listening). Participants in the listener role wrote about a time when they listened either poorly, moderately, or well to someone who disclosed a positive and exciting experience. Participants in the speaker role wrote about a time they disclosed a positive, exciting experience to someone who either listened poorly, moderately, or well. The instructions for each condition are presented in the Supplemental Materials (pp. 2–5).

Measures

All measures were anchored on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all agree*, 5 = *moderately agree*, 9 = *completely agree*).

Listening Quality (Manipulation Check). We used different scales to assess listening quality during the conversation, depending on the role participants were assigned to. For participants assigned to recall an experience as a speaker, we measured listening quality on the Constructive Listening Scale as in Study 1 (10 items; Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2018; α = .93). For participants assigned to recall an experience as a listener, we measured their perception of their own listening on the Active-Empathic Listening Scale (10 items; Bodie, 2011); an example item was "During the conversation, I was sensitive to what the speaker was not saying" (α = .81).

Kama Muta. As in the previous study, we measured the five dimensions of Kama Muta on the full KAMMUS Two scale (Zickfeld et al., 2019; physical sensation, α = .81; communal sharing, α = .93; devotion motivation, α = .92; labeling, α = .94).

Results

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics by experimental conditions.

Manipulation Checks

Listening Quality (Speaker). A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect on listening for the speaker, $F(2, 259) = 271.106$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 1.46$. An least significant difference post hoc test indicated that participants in the high-quality condition rated the listener as showing greater listening quality than participants in the moderate-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.77, 3.71], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [5.10, 6.05]. Participants in the moderate condition perceived greater listening than participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.86, 2.82].

Listening Quality (Listener). A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect on listening for the listener, $F(2, 247) = 75.90$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.78$. An least significant difference post hoc test indicated that participants in the high-quality condition rated themselves as showing greater listening quality than participants in the moderate-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.36, 2.72], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95%

CI [2.34, 3.26]. Participants in the moderate condition rated themselves as showing better listening than participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.51, 1.46].

Primary Analyses

Physical Sensation. A two-way ANOVA (Listening Quality × Role in Conversation) indicated a significant main effect of listening quality on physical sensation, $F(2, 507) = 26.321$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.31$. Specifically, participants in the high-quality listening condition felt more physical sensations than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.46, 1.03], and in the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.73, 1.31]. The difference between the moderate and low conditions was not significant, $p = .06$, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.57]. There was no main effect for role condition (speaker/listener), $F(1, 507) = 0.26$, $p = .61$, Cohen's $f = 0.03$, 95% CI [−0.17, 0.30]. The Listening × Role interaction was not significant, $F(2, 507) = 1.81$, $p = .16$, Cohen's $f = 0.08$.

Communal Sharing. A two-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of listening quality on communal sharing, $F(2, 507) = 117.96$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.69$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition reported greater communal sharing than those in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.64, 2.54], and the low-quality condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.03, 3.94]. Similarly, participants in the moderate condition perceived more communal sharing than those in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.93, 1.86]. We also observed a main effect for the role condition, $F(1, 507) = 6.51$, $p = .01$, Cohen's $f = 0.10$, with listeners generally feeling higher levels of communal sharing than speakers, 95% CI [0.11, 0.85]. While both speakers and listeners reported increased communal sharing as listening quality improved, this effect was more pronounced among speakers than listeners. The Listening × Role interaction was significant, $F(2, 507) = 16.82$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.25$, showing that high-quality listening increased communal sharing for both speakers and listeners, though the effect was stronger for speakers. In the high-quality listening condition, speakers felt significantly more communal sharing compared to those in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.51, 3.77], and in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [4.07, 5.33]. Likewise, speakers in the moderate condition reported greater communal sharing than those in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.93, 2.20]. For listeners, those in the high-quality condition reported more communal sharing than those in the moderate condition,

Table 3
Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Listening perception (speaker)	5.53	2.79	—						
2. Listening perception (listener)	6.49	1.91		—					
3. Physical sensation	2.87	1.43	.44**	.27**	—				
4. Communal sharing	4.10	2.64	.80**	.55**	.50**	—			
5. Devotion motivation	4.52	2.77	.60**	.50**	.44**	.78**	—		
6. Positive valence	4.79	3.01	.83**	.48**	.42**	.72**	.62**	—	
7. Labeling	4.39	2.92	.80**	.55**	.53**	.81**	.75**	.82**	—

Note. Listening quality for the speaker and listener was reported on different scales (Constructive Listening Scale vs. Active-Empathic Listening Scale), so the means are not comparable. Listening quality was measured on a 9-point scale. The listening conditions were coded as -1 = poor-quality, 0 = moderate-quality, and 1 = high-quality. The roles were coded as 0 = listener and 1 = speaker.
** $p < .01$.

Table 4

Study 2: Descriptive Statistics by Experimental Condition

Role/dependent variable	Poor-quality listening		Moderate-quality listening		High-quality listening	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Speaker						
Listening quality	2.83_a	1.75	5.17_b	1.94	8.41_c	0.92
Physical sensation	2.28_a	1.20	2.78_b	1.38	3.57_c	1.42
Communal sharing	1.72_a	1.35	3.29_b	2.29	6.42_c	2.27
Devotion motivation	2.41_a	2.07	3.77_b	2.52	5.89_c	2.61
Positive valence	1.92_a	1.87	4.23_b	2.73	7.37_c	1.80
Labeling	1.88_a	1.68	3.71_b	2.66	6.79_c	2.10
Listener						
Listening quality	5.13_a	1.78	6.12_b	1.76	7.94_c	0.93
Physical sensation	2.54_a	1.20	2.60_a	1.38	3.30_b	1.52
Communal sharing	3.13_a	2.42	4.35_b	1.97	5.40_c	2.30
Devotion motivation	4.08_a	2.63	4.58_a	2.37	6.15_b	2.52
Positive valence	3.61_a	2.63	4.90_b	2.69	6.38_c	2.64
Labeling	3.33_a	2.58	4.17_b	2.40	6.10_c	2.73

Note. Listening quality for the speaker and listener was reported on different scales (Constructive Listening Scale vs. Active-Empathic Listening Scale), so the means are not comparable. Listening quality was measured on a 9-point scale. Columns in the same row that do not share the same subscript letter differ at $p \leq .05$.

$p = .001$, 95% CI [0.41, 1.68], and the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.63, 2.92]. Similarly, listeners in the moderate condition felt more communal sharing than those in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.56, 1.89].

Devotion Motivation. A two-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of listening quality on devotion motivation, $F(2, 500) = 56.52$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.47$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition felt more devotion motivation than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.33, 2.37], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.25, 3.31]. Participants in the moderate condition felt greater devotion motivation than participants in the low condition, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.40, 1.47]. There was a main effect for the role condition, $F(1, 500) = 17.29$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.18$. Specifically, participants in the listener role felt greater devotion motivation than speakers, 95% CI [4.63, 5.25]. The Listening × Role interaction was significant, $F(2, 500) = 3.50$, $p = .03$, Cohen's $f = 0.10$. Speakers in the high-quality listening condition felt greater devotion motivation than speakers in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.40, 2.86], and the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.75, 4.22], and speakers in the moderate condition perceived more devotion motivation than speakers in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.62, 2.10]. Listeners in the high-quality listening condition felt more devotion motivation than listeners in the moderate condition, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.82, 2.31], and the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.32, 2.83]; however, listeners in the moderate condition did not differ in devotion motivation than listeners in the low condition, $p = .20$, 95% CI [−0.27, 1.29].

Positive Valence. A two-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of listening quality on positive valence, $F(2, 504) = 125.42$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.71$. Participants in the high-quality listening condition felt more positive valence than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.79, 2.82], and the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.59, 4.62]. Participants in the moderate condition perceived greater positive valence than

participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.27, 2.33]. There was a main effect for role condition, $F(1, 504) = 4.50$, $p = .03$, Cohen's $f = 0.09$. Participants in the listener role perceived more positive valence than speakers, 95% CI [0.03, 0.88]. The Listening × Role interaction was significant, $F(2, 504) = 13.60$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.22$. Speakers in the high-quality listening condition felt greater positive valence than speakers in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.42, 3.85], and the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [4.73, 6.16], and speakers in the moderate condition perceived more positive valence than speakers in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.59, 3.04]. We observed similar results for listeners in the high-quality listening condition who felt more positive valence than listeners in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.75, 2.21], and the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.03, 3.50], as well as listeners in the moderate condition who felt greater positive valence than listeners in the low condition, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.52, 2.05].

Labeling. A two-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of listening quality on labeling, $F(2, 504) = 115.80$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.67$. In the high-quality listening condition, participants felt more labeling than participants in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.00, 3.00], and in the low-quality listening condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.33, 4.34]. Participants in the moderate condition perceived greater labeling than participants in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.82, 1.86]. There was no main effect for the role condition, $F(1, 504) = 3.70$, $p = .05$, Cohen's $f = 0.08$. The Listening × Role interaction was significant, $F(2, 504) = 8.76$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $f = 0.18$. Speakers in the high-quality listening condition felt greater labeling than speakers in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.37, 3.78], and the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [4.20, 5.62], and speakers in the moderate condition perceived more labeling than speakers in the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.12, 2.55]. We observed similar results for listeners in the high-quality listening condition who felt more labeling than listeners in the moderate condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.20, 2.65], and the low condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI

[2.04, 3.49], as well as listeners in the moderate condition who felt greater labeling than listeners in the low condition, $p = .03$, 95% CI [0.08, 1.59].

Discussion

In Study 2, participants who recalled a conversation about a positive topic reported higher levels of Kama Muta across all five dimensions in situations of high versus lower quality listening. These effects were observed for both speakers and listeners, thus lending support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively. The effect among speakers replicates Study 1, while the effect among listeners constitutes the first examination of this effect. Study 2 thus made several contributions. It replicated the results of Study 1 for speakers (Hypothesis 1) using a different conversation topic, namely, a positive story, thus increasing the model's generalizability. It also provided supporting evidence for the hypothesis about listeners (Hypothesis 2) since in this experimental design, manipulated high-quality listening led to increased Kama Muta for listeners as well as speakers. Interestingly, when the main effect of the role was significant, listeners reported higher Kama Muta than speakers (i.e., main effects on communal sharing, devotion motivation, and positive valence).

However, the significant Listening × Role interactions revealed that the effect of listening quality on Kama Muta was more pronounced for speakers, particularly in the dimensions of communal sharing and positive valence. This pattern appears to be driven by speakers' especially low Kama Muta scores in the low-quality listening condition, which lowered their overall average. In other words, speakers were more sensitive to changes in listening quality, showing particularly low levels of Kama Muta when listening was poor, compared to listeners.

Although Studies 1 and 2 had high internal validity, they had limited ecological validity. Specifically, imagining a listener (Study 1) is not the same as engaging with someone in an actual conversation, and people's imagined social interactions often do not align with their actual experience (e.g., Atir et al., 2023). Furthermore, recalling a conversation (Study 2) might be prone to memory biases or confounds if the type of interaction recalled varies by condition (e.g., if the conversation they recall with high- compared with low-quality listening is with a closer friend). Therefore, we conducted a third study using a live conversation.

Study 3

In Studies 1 and 2, participants were asked to imagine or recall conversations that varied in listening quality. These methods may have led participants to think of conversation partners who were likely closer to them in high-quality listening scenarios than in low-quality ones. As a result, these baseline relationship characteristics may have acted as an additional causal factor influencing feelings of Kama Muta. To address this limitation, in Study 3, we invited participants into the lab and paired them with strangers, thereby eliminating the variance associated with preexisting relationship quality. Study 3 also aimed to address the limitations on ecological validity in Studies 1 and 2 by examining the relationship between listening and Kama Muta in a live conversation for both speakers and listeners. Unlike the previous studies, we measured rather than manipulated listening quality. This approach was chosen to capture the closest interaction to the real world in lab settings, thereby

increasing ecological validity. This study also included an objective assessment of listening quality, where a research assistant (RA) rated listening quality during the conversation. Recent research indicates that perceptions of listening quality can diverge between individuals (Collins et al., 2024; Kriz et al., 2021). Therefore, we employed a multifaceted approach: Speakers and listeners each rated their listening quality perceptions, and an RA provided an external assessment. This method allowed us to examine how both speakers' and listeners' Kama Muta aligned with different perceptions of listening quality (their own, their partners', and the RA's) and determine which best predicted Kama Muta experience for both roles, thus providing a more fine-grained understanding of the listening–Kama Muta relationship.

Method

Participants

We recruited 348 individual undergraduate students enrolled in Introduction to Psychology courses at a university in the northeastern United States to participate in this study for course credit. Participants signed up for the study knowing they would converse with another person, but did not know who. Participants were generally unacquainted with each other. We did not specifically recruit based on gender or other criteria, so dyads varied in their gender composition. Of these participants, 14 were excluded because at least one dyad member failed to answer the attention check correctly. An additional dyad was excluded because both members selected "speaker", and we could not determine each person's role. The final sample size was $N = 159$ dyads. Specifically 318 participants; $M_{age} = 18.91$, $SD = 1.32$, 51.6% female.

Procedure

Study 3 was conducted via Zoom and involved two participants and an RA. After receiving an email with a Zoom link for the chosen conversation date, both participants entered the Zoom room. The RA randomly assigned one participant to the speaker role and the other to the listener. The speaker was asked to share a personally meaningful experience (67.9% chose to share a positive experience, 5.7% shared a negative experience, and 26.4% shared a mixed experience with both positive and negative elements). The participants in the listener role were asked to listen as they normally would during a conversation. The RA indicated that the participants could interact with each other as they normally would, but they should stick to their roles and the topic (i.e., the speaker's experience). Then, the RAs shut down their camera and mic, let the participants converse, and told the participants they would be informed when the time was up. The conversation lasted 10 min. After the conversation, the participants completed questionnaires containing the dependent measures. Afterward, the RA debriefed participants and answered any questions they had.

Before beginning the conversation, the RA ensured that both participants were in a quiet and well-lit space and could see and hear each other well. In compliance with the institutional review board of this study, the conversations were not recorded. While the participants completed their questionnaires, the RA rated the listening quality of the listener, thus providing an objective perspective of the listening quality, which, along with the self-report rating of

the participants, was expected to yield a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of listening quality and the experience of Kama Muta in the dyad.

Measures

All measures were anchored on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*).

We used the same measures as in the previous studies: the Constructive Listening Scale for speakers' listening perception (seven items; Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2018; α = .90), the Active-Empathic Listening Scale for listeners' listening perception (11 items; Bodie et al., 2013; α = .84), and the full KAMMUS Two scale for each Kama Muta dimension (Zickfeld et al., 2019; physical sensation, α = .84; communal sharing, α = .92; devotion motivation, α = .90; labeling, α = .93).

We measured the RAs' perceptions of listening quality on a 7-point scale that ranked the quality of listening by the listener from *very poor listening* (1) to *average listening* (4) to *very high-quality listening* (7).

Results

Main Effects: Speakers and Listeners

As indicated by the correlations presented in Table 5, perceptions of the listener's listening quality had small ($r = .20$) to moderate (rs = .34, .37) correlations between the RA, the speakers, and the listeners, whereas the listeners' and speakers' KAMMUS subscales correlated more strongly with individuals' own listening quality perceptions than with their partners'. For example, speakers' communal sharing strongly correlated with their own devotion motivation ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) and labeling ($r = .63$, $p < .01$), but weakly with listeners' measures. This pattern held across all subscales and for both roles, suggesting that subjective Kama Muta experiences during conversations are more closely linked to one's own perceptions than to those of one's conversational partners.

Interestingly, the pattern of correlations between the RA's coding of listening quality and the speaker and listener Kama Muta subscales appeared to more closely align with the speaker's

perception of listening than with the listener's self-reported listening quality. Although this is a single piece of evidence and should be interpreted with caution, it may suggest that externally observable behaviors—such as verbal and nonverbal attentiveness or responsiveness—play a greater role in shaping how speakers experience being listened to than in how listeners evaluate their own behavior. One likely explanation is that speakers base their perceptions on visible cues, whereas listeners' self-assessments may also draw on internal states such as effort or intention, which are not as readily observable (Pronin, 2008). Future research is needed to examine this possibility more systematically and to better understand the alignment (or misalignment) between external ratings, self-perceptions, and partner perceptions of listening.

Given that the Kama Muta dimensions were nested within dyads, we calculated the intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) to assess the proportion of variance attributable to between-dyad versus within-dyad differences. As presented in Table 5, the ICCs ranged from .07 to .33 across the Kama Muta dimensions, suggesting that the Kama Muta experiences varied more within dyads than between them, with most of the variance stemming from within-dyad differences.

Which Source of Listening Perception Predicts Kama Muta?

From a constructivist perspective on social perception (e.g., Griffin & Ross, 1991), individuals' emotional experiences are shaped more by their own subjective interpretations than by external evaluations. In the context of listening, speakers and listeners construct meaning based on their personal construals of being heard or of having listened well. Therefore, we expected that individuals' own perceptions of listening would be stronger predictors of their emotional outcomes than partner or observer perceptions. However, we also explored whether partner or RA perceptions would explain additional variance, particularly for a shared interpersonal emotion like Kama Muta. Therefore, we examined how different sources of listening perception predicted the dimensions of each person's Kama Muta experiences. To do this, we conducted regression analyses predicting speakers' and listeners' Kama Muta experiences from the

Table 5
Study 3: Descriptive and Correlations for the Main Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	ICC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Listening perception RA	5.09	1.72		—												
2. Listening perception speaker[1]	8.05	1.27		.34**	—											
3. Listening perception listener[2]	6.95	1.21		.37**	.20*	—										
4. Physical sensation[1]	3.15	1.31	.08	.07	.10	.02	—									
5. Physical sensation[2]	2.64	1.18		.05	−.01	.27**	.12	—								
6. Communal sharing[1]	4.39	2.09	.33	.30**	.35**	.19*	.43**	.14	—							
7. Communal sharing[2]	4.12	2.13		.14	.17*	.40**	.21**	.48**	.34**	—						
8. Devotion motivation[1]	3.63	2.37	.23	.10	.10	.07	.51**	.09	.61**	.23**	—					
9. Devotion motivation[2]	3.20	2.02		.09	.03	.31**	.12	.42**	.30**	.57**	.24**	—				
10. Positive valence[1]	7.15	1.89	.19	.24**	.42**	.09	.29**	.02	.57**	.19*	.47**	.10	—			
11. Positive valence[2]	7.01	1.86		.02	.15	.35**	.04	.30**	.14	.45**	.10	.27**	.19*	—		
12. Labeling[1]	4.64	2.50	.26	.21**	.25**	.03	.51**	.10	.63**	.21**	.65**	.26**	.55**	.06	—	
13. Labeling[2]	4.87	2.35		.05	.14	.29**	.06	.41**	.18*	.48**	.21**	.59**	.18*	.48**	.26**	—

Note. The roles were coded as follows: 1 = speaker and 2 = listener. Listening quality was measured on a 9-point scale for speakers and listeners and a 7-point scale for RAs. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; RA = research assistant.
* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

listening perceptions of the self, partner, and RA. We expected that participants' own perceptions should predict their emotional experiences, and we did not have specific predictions about whether the other perceptions would predict Kama Muta. The results are summarized in Table 6. Regression results for two-predictor models, namely, the focal person's and observers' listening perceptions predicting Kama Muta, led to the same conclusions and are reported in the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/z6ekh/ (pp. 6–7).

Three-Predictor Regression Models

Physical Sensation. There were no significant effects in the model predicting the speakers' physical sensation, specifically, speaker: $\beta = .07$, $p = .416$; listener: $\beta = -.01$, $p = .895$; observer: $\beta = .04$, $p = .658$. For the listeners' physical sensations, the listeners' own listening perception was a significant predictor, $\beta = .30$, $p < .001$, while the speakers' and observers' listening perceptions were not significant, $\beta = -.06$, $p = .470$, and $\beta = -.04$, $p = .667$, respectively.

Communal Sharing. For speakers' communal sharing, their own perceptions of listening were a significant predictor, $\beta = .26$, $p = .001$, as were experimenter perceptions, $\beta = .18$, $p = .031$. Listener perceptions were not a significant predictor, $\beta = .07$, $p = .404$. In the model predicting listeners' communal sharing, only their own perceptions of listening were significant, $\beta = .40$, $p < .001$.

Table 6

Study 3: Standardized Regression Coefficients Predicting Kama Muta Dimensions From Listening Perceptions in Simultaneous Regression Models

Kama Muta dimension	Listening source	β	t	p
Physical sensation speaker	Speaker	.07	0.82	.416
	RA	.04	0.44	.658
	Listener	−.01	−0.13	.895
Physical sensation listener	Speaker	−.06	−0.73	.211
	RA	−.04	−0.43	.667
	Listener	.30	3.56	<.001
Communal sharing speaker	Speaker	.26	3.32	.001
	RA	.18	2.18	.031
	Listener	.07	0.84	.404
Communal sharing listener	Speaker	.10	1.30	.196
	RA	−.04	−0.45	.652
	Listener	.40	4.97	<.001
Devotion motivation speaker	Speaker	.06	0.73	.468
	RA	.05	0.60	.548
	Listener	.04	0.42	.679
Devotion motivation listener	Speaker	−.03	−0.33	.743
	RA	−.02	−0.28	.780
	Listener	.33	3.92	<.001
Positive valence speaker	Speaker	.39	5.12	<.001
	RA	.12	1.53	.128
	Listener	−.04	−0.47	.636
Positive valence listener	Speaker	.12	1.55	.123
	RA	−.16	−1.94	.055
	Listener	.39	4.81	<.001
Labeling speaker	Speaker	.20	2.46	.015
	RA	.17	1.95	.053
	Listener	−.07	−0.82	.411
Labeling listener	Speaker	.11	1.39	.167
	RA	−.10	−1.15	.251
	Listener	.30	3.63	<.001

Note. RA = research assistant.

Speaker perceptions, $\beta = .10$, $p = .196$, and experimenter perceptions, $\beta = -.04$, $p = .652$, were not statistically significant.

Devotion Motivation. For speakers, none of the three predictors was statistically significant. Speaker perceptions of listening had a standardized coefficient of $\beta = .06$, $p = .468$; listener perceptions, $\beta = .04$, $p = .679$; and experimenter perceptions, $\beta = .05$, $p = .548$. For listeners, only their own perceptions of listening significantly predicted motivation, $\beta = .33$, $p < .001$. Speaker and experimenter perceptions were not significant, $\beta = -.03$, $p = .743$, and $\beta = -.02$, $p = .780$, respectively.

Positive Valence. For speakers, only speaker perceptions of listening significantly predicted positive feelings, $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$. Listener perceptions and experimenter perceptions were not significant, $\beta = -.04$, $p = .636$, and $\beta = .12$, $p = .128$, respectively. For listeners, listener perceptions were a significant predictor, $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$, while speaker perceptions and experimenter perceptions were not significant, $\beta = .12$, $p = .123$, and $\beta = -.16$, $p = .055$, respectively.

Labeling. For speakers, speaker perceptions significantly predicted feeling moved, $\beta = .20$, $p = .015$. Listener perceptions and experimenter perceptions were not statistically significant, $\beta = -.07$, $p = .411$, and $\beta = .17$, $p = .053$, respectively. For listeners, listener perceptions were a significant predictor, $\beta = .30$, $p < .001$. Speaker perceptions and experimenter perceptions were not significant, $\beta = .11$, $p = .167$, and $\beta = -.10$, $p = .251$, respectively.

In these models, listeners' own perceptions consistently predicted all Kama Muta dimensions, while the speaker and RA perceptions showed no significant effects on listener outcomes. For speakers, their own perceptions of their partner's listening predicted communal sharing, positive valence, and labeling. RA perceptions predicted communal sharing but did not significantly contribute elsewhere. Overall, self-perception was the most robust predictor, especially for listeners, with limited contributions from RA and partner ratings. Although there was some convergence of prediction in the zero-order relationships (notably convergence among the observer and speaker perceptions), the simultaneous models suggest that each person's own perceptions of listening were most strongly related to their Kama Muta experience. This is consistent with the broader notion that a person's own construal of a situation is the primary determinant of their responses to it (Griffin & Ross, 1991).

Discussion

Study 3 examined the relationship between perceived listening quality and Kama Muta experiences in live dyadic conversations, thus extending the findings reported in Studies 1 and 2. We found positive, significant correlations in listening quality perceptions across RAs, speakers, and listeners, indicating a degree of consensus in perceived listening quality, though these relationships were relatively modest in magnitude (i.e., rs = .20–.37). These modest correlations highlight an important distinction between objective listening behaviors and subjective perceptions of listening quality, suggesting that listening is perceived differently across conversation roles, influenced by both observable behaviors and interpretive processes.

The ICCs indicated that most variance in Kama Muta experiences occurred within dyads rather than between dyads (ICCs ranging from .07 to .33). This suggests that Kama Muta was primarily experienced at the individual level rather than as a shared, dyadic

emotional state. In other words, even though the speaker and listener participated in the same conversation, their emotional responses often differed, reflecting the influence of personal, subjective factors over shared interactional dynamics.

The regression analyses revealed that participants' own perceptions of listening quality predicted their experiences of Kama Muta. Specifically, listeners' perceptions of their own listening quality significantly predicted their reports of Kama Muta across all dimensions, whereas speakers' perceptions showed a more selective pattern—speakers' perceived listening quality did not predict their physical sensations or devotion motivation. These findings were consistent with the zero-order relationships. Observer (RA) ratings uniquely predicted only the speakers' communal sharing dimension. These results suggest that Kama Muta is primarily evoked by subjective experiences of listening rather than observable listening behaviors. This finding aligns with previous listening research demonstrating that speakers' perceptions of received listening quality predict their psychological outcomes (e.g., Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2018, 2020; Weinstein & Itzchakov, 2025), while listeners' perceptions of the quality of listening they provided predict their own psychological outcomes (Itzchakov, 2020).

Despite the methodological advancement of pairing participants with strangers and using independent observer ratings, Study 3 cannot fully eliminate the influence of relational dynamics on the experience of Kama Muta. Although assigning dyads of unacquainted individuals reduces the confound of preexisting relationship closeness found in Studies 1 and 2, it does not entirely remove variability in emergent interpersonal liking that can form quickly during first impressions. Participants may have naturally varied in how much they liked or felt interested in their partner, which could have influenced their listening behavior or perception of being listened to and, in turn, their experience of Kama Muta. Moreover, qualities such as the depth and clarity of the speaker's self-disclosure, narrative ability, or sensitivity to the listener's communication style could shape both actual and perceived listening quality. These factors highlight the complex, bidirectional nature of in-the-moment interpersonal interactions, where listening quality is both shaped by and shapes other relational cues (Reis & Itzchakov, 2023, 2025). Episodic listening theory underscores this point by framing listening as a dynamic, cocreated process that emerges from the evolving relational context of a conversation, rather than a static, one-sided behavior. Although random assignment of roles and use of strangers aimed to isolate the effect of listening quality, these nuances underscore that listening, especially as a trigger of Kama Muta, could unfold within a rich interpersonal dance that cannot be fully disentangled from momentary liking or conversational chemistry. That said, Kama Muta has been theorized to arise from a sudden intensification of communal sharing, which can occur in both long-standing and newly formed relationships, even between strangers (Fiske, 2020; Fiske et al., 2017).

General Discussion

Kama Muta, a distinctive positive social–relational emotion characterized as being "moved by love," plays a pivotal role in fostering communal bonds and enriching emotional experiences across diverse cultural contexts (Fiske et al., 2016). It encompasses elements including communal sharing, positive valence, bodily sensations, devotion motivation, and labeling. This profound

emotional state typically manifests in scenarios such as reunions with loved ones and acts of kindness. The three studies reported here suggest that Kama Muta may be elicited through high-quality listening, which is characterized by attention, comprehension, and positive intention (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). This type of attentive listening benefits speakers by fostering feelings of validation and acceptance, thus strengthening the bond between speaker and listener, and promoting a positive emotional climate and mutual understanding (Kluger & Mizrahi, 2023).

The findings provide evidence supporting the correlation between high-quality listening in enhancing the experience of Kama Muta in conversations for both speakers and listeners. In Study 1, speakers reflecting on negative experiences reported heightened levels of all five dimensions of Kama Muta when imagining a listener demonstrating high-quality listening behavior. Building on these findings, Study 2 expanded the scope to positive experiences and included both speakers and listeners recalling actual conversations, finding that high-quality listening was associated with Kama Muta, where the listeners often reported higher levels than the speakers themselves. Study 3 further replicated these results in real-time conversations among strangers, while also having an independent observer assess listening quality objectively. Positive, significant correlations between speakers' and listeners' perceptions of listening quality and most of the dimensions of Kama Muta were found, thus reinforcing the suggested relationship of high-quality listening with this profound social–emotional state.

These effects were found across variations in participants' role in the conversation (i.e., speaker or listener), the valence of the conversation topic, and the specific study method used (i.e., imagined, recalled, or live conversation). This is consistent with the literature on Kama Muta, which, while typically seen as a positive emotional experience, does not necessarily require a positive setting for it to manifest (Fiske, 2020; Zickfeld et al., 2019).

In Studies 1 and 2, listening quality predicted all dimensions of Kama Muta for both speakers and listeners. However, in Study 3, while listeners' perceptions of their own listening quality continued to predict all Kama Muta dimensions, speakers' perceptions did not predict the dimensions of physical sensations or devotion motivation. This discrepancy could be due to differences in the intensity of listening quality between Studies 1 and 2 and Study 3. Specifically, Studies 1 and 2 involved scenarios explicitly designed to induce or recall experiences of high-quality listening, resulting in consistently higher perceived listening quality. In contrast, Study 3 featured naturalistic conversations where listening quality was likely less consistently high, potentially insufficient to trigger stronger Kama Muta dimensions like physical sensations and devotion motivation. Interestingly, listeners were unaffected by this reduction in listening quality, possibly because their self-perceptions incorporated internal states or intentions, which could independently enhance their Kama Muta responses. Additionally, the dimensions affected, namely, physical sensations and devotion motivation, may specifically require particularly high intensities of Kama Muta to manifest, suggesting that the relatively moderate listening quality observed in naturalistic conditions in Study 3 was adequate for eliciting milder dimensions but insufficient for these more intense subscales.

Findings from Study 3 suggest that Kama Muta was primarily experienced at the individual level. Although both members of a dyad participated in the same interaction, they often reported different levels of Kama Muta, as indicated by relatively low ICCs.

This suggests that Kama Muta was shaped more by individual subjective experiences, namely, the feeling of being listened to by speakers and the perception of providing high-quality listening for listeners, than by a shared emotional experience. However, this does not preclude the possibility that Kama Muta also contains dyadic elements, and it is possible that our context—a 10-min conversation between strangers—made it unlikely for dyadic processes to emerge. Future research should apply the social relations model (Kenny & La Voie, 1984) to disentangle actor, partner, and relationship effects. Indeed, high-quality listening is not only dyadic in nature (Malloy et al., 2023) but also reciprocated within the dyad, as demonstrated in the link between listening and intimacy (Kluger et al., 2021). A similar reciprocal pattern may exist between listening and Kama Muta—one that social relations model-based designs are well-suited to uncover.

The findings of Study 3 also reinforce the view that listening is a subjective, top-down construct shaped by individual expectations and interpretive frameworks (Itzchakov et al., 2025). Specifically, we found low convergence in listening quality perceptions across roles: Only 10% of the variance in speakers' ratings was explained by RA assessments, and just 4% was shared with listener self-ratings. This divergence challenges the assumption of an objective standard for evaluating listening and suggests that interpretations rely heavily on personal schemas and contextual cues. These findings align with prior work showing that perceptions of listening quality often diverge across speaker, listener, and observer roles (Bodie et al., 2014) and from objective indicators (Collins et al., 2024). The discrepancy may stem from the fact that speakers and observers focus on observable behaviors, while listeners incorporate internal states, such as intentions (Pronin, 2008). These results also inform our understanding of Kama Muta, which, though relational, emerges from individuals' subjective perceptions of relationship intensification.

These studies make several theoretical contributions. We suggest high-quality listening during conversation as a possible antecedent of Kama Muta. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to compare high versus lower levels of listening quality and their association with the experience of Kama Muta for both speakers and listeners. This study expands the theoretical framework of Kama Muta and integrates it with broader listening literature traditionally centered on the speaker's perspective (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). By measuring the listener as well (Studies 2 and 3), the results showed that listeners not only enjoy high-quality listening outcomes correlated to higher Kama Muta, but they might also experience it more than the speakers. That is, listening to someone is no less important than being listened to.

The practical implications of this research are relevant to interpersonal communication and relationship management in various contexts. Understanding the relationship of high-quality listening with Kama Muta can inform interventions and practices aimed at improving communication skills and enhancing relational dynamics. By recognizing and cultivating the role of high-quality listening in the experience of Kama Muta, practitioners across disciplines can contribute to creating environments that nurture meaningful connections, emotional resilience, and positive social interactions (Alessandrini, 2024).

We observed a divergence in results between Study 3 and Studies 1 and 2 regarding the strength with which listening perceptions predicted the different facets of Kama Muta. Although listening quality consistently predicted all five dimensions of Kama Muta in Studies 1 and 2 for both speakers and listeners, this pattern did not fully replicate in Study 3. In particular, listening perceptions continued to predict Kama Muta responses for listeners, but these effects were less consistent and more limited for speakers. We believe this divergence reflects important methodological differences. In the first two studies, listening was manipulated through controlled recall or imagination tasks, which likely produced clear and uniform impressions of listening quality. In contrast, Study 3 involved live, unscripted conversations between unacquainted dyads, where listening was not experimentally manipulated but emerged organically and was measured through self and observer reports. This more naturalistic design may have introduced greater variability in interpersonal dynamics, such as spontaneous rapport, differences in emotional storytelling, or momentary engagement, that could dilute the influence of listening perceptions alone. We acknowledge that even with random pairing, variation in interpersonal connection likely shaped participants' experiences, particularly for speakers. These contextual nuances seem especially relevant for more internal and embodied responses like physical sensation and devotion motivation. Thus, the divergence in findings highlights the boundary conditions of the listening–Kama Muta link and suggests that the impact of listening may be shaped by the relational context in which it occurs.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of the research should be interpreted in light of a few limitations. First, although the results consistently suggest that listening increases Kama Muta for speakers and listeners, we did not explicitly examine the hypothesized mechanism—a sudden increase in the communal sharing relationship. Instead, our hypothesis was based on the idea, derived from episodic listening theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), that high-quality listening can foster a sense of togetherness and interpersonal comfort and lead to more self-reflection and interpersonal disclosure. Thus, the theory of listening supports the notion that listening can foster the intensification of the communal sharing relationship, but this intensification was not directly assessed in our studies. We should be clear that we do not believe that listening is the only factor that can increase the intensification of the communal sharing relationship, nor that high-quality listening will always lead to such intensification. Of particular note, it is likely that high-quality listening will only produce the hypothesized intensification of the communal sharing relationship when the topic of conversation is one on which closeness is likely to follow. Indeed, this is why we chose personally meaningful topics in our studies. However, we did not explicitly test this hypothesis (e.g., by manipulating the topic of conversation).

Most of the items that participants responded to might be perceived as socially desirable (e.g., "I would feel an exceptional sense of closeness"; "I would feel an incredible bond"). Although this issue is similar to many other studies of Kama Muta (Lizarazo Pereira et al., 2022), it suggests that individual differences in social desirability might have affected scores on both the listening and the Kama Muta items and that the relationship that emerged would be the product of common method variance. We aimed to address this methodological artifact through the experimental designs in Studies 1 and 2, which manipulated listening quality, thereby attempting to disentangle it from such normative pressures. However, this is more

of a concern in Study 3, which used correlational methods. One piece of evidence inconsistent with common method variance is that the observer's ratings of listening quality showed the same zero-order pattern of relationships with the speaker's Kama Muta as the speaker's own ratings of listening quality. Further, we believe that the consistent results across the three studies provide evidence that it is the quality of listening that evokes Kama Muta rather than these relationships merely being the product of a pattern of socially desirable responding. That is, if social desirability was the active ingredient, we would not have observed differences in the Kama Muta dimensions between the different experimental conditions in Studies 1 and 2.

In Study 3, our goal was to enhance ecological validity through a live, naturalistic conversation via Zoom. However, many nonverbal listening behaviors, such as eye contact, are suboptimal in this setting (Doherty-Sneddon et al., 1997; Itzchakov & Grau, 2022). For instance, when the listener looks at the speaker's image on their screen, the speaker cannot tell whether the listener's gaze is directed at them. To simulate eye contact, the listener must look directly at the camera, which is often unnatural. Although listening has been effectively manipulated via Zoom or Microsoft Teams in previous studies (e.g., Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; T. Moin et al., 2024; Weinstein & Itzchakov, 2025), those studies involved trained listeners. In contrast, Study 3 involved two untrained participants, which may have further reduced the effectiveness of nonverbal listening cues and introduced less meaningful variability in perceived listening quality. Nevertheless, Zoom remains a valid tool for studying interpersonal processes in conversations; for example, research on shared reality—a construct closely related to listening—has successfully employed Zoom to examine dyadic psychological alignment (Rossignac-Milon et al., 2021).

One important limitation of the present research is its focus on the listener as the primary agent responsible for creating emotionally positive conversational experiences. Although our findings emphasize the impact of high-quality listening on eliciting positive emotional outcomes, this perspective may underplay the inherently relational nature of conversational dynamics. Listening quality is often confounded with the underlying relational model, as it emerges not only from individual intent but also from shared history, mutual trust, and contextually appropriate cues (Clark et al., 2020; Sandstrom & Boothby, 2021). Conversations marked by high-quality listening are co-constructed by both partners, with a central element being the interplay between the speaker's willingness and ability to self-disclose and become vulnerable and the listener's interest, attentiveness, motivation, and intention toward the speaker (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Kluger & Mizrahi, 2023). As such, conversations are shaped by who is speaking with whom, in what context, and at what moment.

Although our findings point to a consistent association between high-quality listening and increased Kama Muta across multiple roles and settings, it is important to recognize that listening does not operate in a vacuum. Rather than positioning listening as the sole causal antecedent, we acknowledge that Kama Muta, during conversations, likely emerges from a dynamic interplay of multiple relational processes. These include the speaker's willingness to disclose, the emotional depth of the narrative, the listener's perceived responsiveness, and the mutual experience of connection. The literature on self-disclosure and intimacy formation highlights that when speakers share personal, emotionally laden experiences

and feel understood and validated, intimacy and closeness often follow (Reis et al., 2017; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Responsiveness, defined as expressing understanding, validation, and care (Reis et al., 2004; Reis & Itzchakov, 2025), has been shown to be a key predictor of intimacy and emotional bonding (Balzarini et al., 2023; Forest & Wood, 2011; Lemay et al., 2007; Reis, 2012). Listening has been argued to promote perceived responsiveness (Itzchakov & Reis, 2023; Reis & Itzchakov, 2023), and this relational feedback loop may help explain how Kama Muta is co-constructed during conversations. In turn, listeners may also be influenced by the characteristics of the speaker, such as narrative skill (Itzchakov et al., 2016), authenticity (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), and attunement to the listener's communicative needs (Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023). Moreover, individuals often project communal responsiveness onto others to sustain a sense of closeness, especially in early-stage relationships (Lemay & Clark, 2008), and may interpret ambiguous conversational cues through the lens of their relational goals (Clark et al., 2019). These dynamics align with episodic listening theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), which conceptualizes listening as an unfolding, coregulated experience embedded in transient moments of togetherness. Thus, although listening quality plays a critical role, it is likely one pathway among several that together create the conditions for Kama Muta to arise.

Studies 1 and 2, which involved imagining and recalling conversations, have different sets of validity limitations compared with Study 3. Although scenario and recall methodologies are extensively employed in listening research (e.g., Castro et al., 2013; Itzchakov et al., 2018, 2023, 2024; for an overview, see Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), as well as in Kama Muta research (Zickfeld et al., 2019), they remain susceptible to validity concerns. Specifically, Study 1's use of imagined scenarios raises questions about participants' ability to accurately predict or simulate emotional responses such as Kama Muta. Furthermore, Study 2's reliance on participant recall presents potential biases and inaccuracies, especially regarding details of the events participants described. Although providing additional data on the recency of these recalled events might offer partial clarity, it does not fully resolve concerns related to the accuracy and validity of participants' memory.

The low ICCs observed in Study 3 for most Kama Muta dimensions indicate that the majority of variance in Kama Muta experiences occurred at the individual level rather than the dyadic level. This suggests that Kama Muta was shaped more by individual factors (e.g., perceptions, personal dispositions, expectations, or interpretive frameworks) than by shared intra-dyadic dynamics, at least in the context studied. Namely, even though both partners participated in the same conversation, their perceptions and emotional responses often diverged. An exception to this pattern was the communal sharing subscale, which showed relatively higher ICCs and significant cross-dyad correlations. This suggests that participants may have had some shared understanding or mutual perception of a deepening connection within the interaction, suggesting that communal sharing may be an aspect of Kama Muta that is more dyad-sensitive than the others.

Our studies measured the variables only once, following a single interaction. As such, they cannot determine whether high-quality listening evokes Kama Muta through sudden intensifications. It is therefore plausible that high-quality listening also strengthens communal bonds cumulatively, even without eliciting intense emotional peaks. For example, listening training studies have been

shown to foster companionate love—marked by care, tenderness, and affection—without directly measuring or necessarily evoking Kama Muta (Itzchakov et al., 2025). Relatedly, Lemay et al. (2023) outlined how high-quality listening can serve as a strategy for pursuing communal relationship goals, emphasizing prosocial motivation and relational signaling. Their review suggests that listening may foster communal closeness through intentional, goal-directed processes that do not necessarily elicit emotional intensification.

A useful methodological direction for future research can be found in a study showing that momentary self-reported experiences of positivity resonance, such as shared positive emotions, mutual care, and a sense of connection, predicted long-term marital satisfaction more strongly than general positive affect (Otero et al., 2020). Such moment-level analyses may help identify the specific instances when listening evokes Kama Muta in both listeners and speakers.

Finally, we anticipate that the effects of high-quality listening on Kama Muta would generalize across relationship contexts, but the pathways and magnitude of these effects may differ depending on relational expectations. In conversations with strangers, unexpected high-quality listening might function as a powerful signal of relational intent, thereby creating a sudden intensification of perceived communal sharing—the central mechanism of Kama Muta. This aligns with findings that listening can signal communal motivation and a desire for connection, particularly when it violates expectations. Perceived responsiveness has similarly been shown to foster communal motivation, and affirming, attentive listening can heighten relational depth, especially when the listener is unfamiliar (Weger et al., 2014). In contrast, in close and established relationships, the sudden intensification needed for Kama Muta to emerge may be less likely, so it may be that high-quality listening during times of vulnerability would be more likely to foster Kama Muta than listening during day-to-day conversation (Khalifian & Barry, 2020). Thus, while the emotional impact of listening may occur across relationship types, the threshold and nature of Kama Muta may vary. Coding relationship closeness and conversation content in future studies could also provide empirical insight into how the experience of being moved unfolds in different social contexts.

Constraints on Generality

Our findings about high-quality listening evoking Kama Muta are likely subject to several constraints on generality. Regarding participants, this study was conducted in Western cultures (Israel and the United States), which limits our understanding of how these findings might apply in non-Western contexts. Kama Muta, as a complex social–relational emotion, may be experienced and expressed differently across cultural contexts. Cultural norms, values, and communication styles can influence how emotions are perceived, expressed, and regulated.

Regarding methods and materials, our findings are based on both imagined/recalled conversations (Studies 1 and 2) and computer-mediated video conversations (Study 3). These results might not generalize equally to all forms of communication, particularly face-to-face interactions, which involve additional nonverbal cues. The listening behaviors we studied might also function differently across various contexts.

For the procedures, though we found effects across both positive and negative conversation topics in dyadic settings, we cannot assume these would generalize to group settings or naturally occurring conversations outside research contexts. The concept of high-quality listening and its relationship to emotional experiences may vary with different interpersonal communication norms and settings (e.g., professional, therapeutic).

We believe these results would replicate with similar Western samples in comparable dyadic conversation settings. However, researchers should exercise caution in extending these findings to significantly different cultural contexts or interaction settings without further validation.

Finally, the present research focused on emotionally meaningful conversations that often elicit intimacy and understanding. Yet, it remains an open question whether Kama Muta can also emerge in conversations marked by disagreement. This is particularly relevant given that Kama Muta arises from a sudden intensification of communal sharing, which could, in principle, occur even in challenging interactions. Recent work suggests that high-quality listening during disagreements promotes speaker well-being (Itzchakov et al., 2024; Saluk et al., 2023) and intimacy (F. K. T. Moin et al., 2025), but whether such listening produces the relational shift necessary to evoke Kama Muta remains to be tested. For speakers, experiencing profound listening from someone with opposing views could represent a surprising act of connection, which violates expectations and potentially triggers Kama Muta. However, achieving this may require an exceptionally high level of listening quality (Kluger & Mizrahi, 2023). For listeners, the dynamics may be more complex. While listening increases listeners' humility (Lehmann et al., 2023) and has been theorized to foster a sense of togetherness (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), it is not yet clear whether these outcomes reach the emotional intensity required for Kama Muta.

Conclusion

Across three studies employing various methodologies, including recalled scenarios and live conversations, we found that both being listened to and providing attentive listening, regardless of whether personal events were positive or negative, evoked Kama Muta, a profound social–relational emotion characterized as being "moved by love." These findings extend the theoretical framework of Kama Muta by highlighting high-quality listening as an antecedent of this multifaceted construct, providing valuable insights into how listening can foster significant social–emotional connections.

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