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The mystery of communion in narcissism:
The success-as-a-flaw effect

Abstract: In the present paper we consider the specific relationship between communal and agentic functioning of narcissistic individuals. The study was aimed to test whether narcissist's aggression is due to not only negative information about their agency but also positive information about their communion. Whereas the first effect is well- documented in empirical studies, the second effect has been revealed in our prior research. The results of the present study confirmed both effects: negative information about one's agency increased aggressive tendencies (operationalized as a display of demeaning behavior) and decreased state self-esteem, while positive information about one's communion resulted only in displaced aggression. The aggressive response to positive communal information is discussed as the success-as-a-flaw effect, which we mean as inverse ofthe failure-as-an asset effect. According to the success-as-a-flaw effect, positive outcomes in the communal domain, considered by narcissists to be an evidence of low-status, are threatening for the grandiose self, based on the domain of agency. The social cognitive and clinical approach is employed to interpret these results.
Key words: narcissism, communion, agency, displaced aggression, state self-esteem

A question about articulating needs may gently expose a narcissistic patient's belief that it is shameful to need someone and may create opportunities to learn something different about human interdependency. Nancy McWilliams, a psychologist - psychoanalyst (2011, p. 191)

The present study examines the role of narcissism in interplay between two fundamental dimensions of self-perception – agency and communion. Consistently, it has been established that narcissists describe themselves relatively high on agency but low on communion (Paulhus & John, 1998; Campbell, Rudich & Sedikides, 2002; Bazińska, Drat-Ruszczak & Pałucha, 2004; Campbell & Foster, 2007). The agency (competence) is the basis of narcissistic unrealistically positive, inflated self-esteem. This is a value highly prized by narcissists and the first object of their aspirations and efforts (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken & Maio, 2012). It is less clear, however, why narcissists do not self-enhance in the communal domain. Are communal values, especially other person's good, considered as not important at all, or treated as less important than agentic qualities? Are they – as suggested by some clinicians – suppressed or denied? And, the most important,

does the communal domain have any effect on intensity and quality of agency-oriented behavior? The aim of this study is to verify our previous statement (Drat-Ruszczak & Bazińska, 2010) that narcissistic persons implicitly use the communal domain to enhance his or her agentic self-view. Paradoxically, defining oneself low on communal traits may increase a grandiose glory, which would have been easily diminished in case of high communal profile. In a nutshell, we propose that a substantial self-enhancement in the communal domain may threaten the grandiosity of narcissistic self, comparably to the agentic failure.

Narcissism: One-sided dedication to tasks

The myth of Narcissus influential for contemporary thinking about the narcissism, basically ignores the issue of Narcissus's agency. Although it is well known that Narcissus devotes himself to hunting, the story does not mention this activity any further and treats it as negligible element of the story. The myth is really focused on the communal domain, specifically, on its distorted understanding due to Narcissus, adoring his own reflection in a pond, becomes himself the object of self-love. Such a love, not possible to be fulfilled,

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leads Narcissus to death and thereby the key message of the tale is that the communal dimension cannot be realized individually. The story warns that no one at all can become beneficiary of self-love.

The dilemma of the mythical Narcissus has been taken up with passion by clinical psychologists (Freud, 1914/1957; Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977), who have observed that narcissists do not create transference in therapeutic relationships which means that they do not view the other person as a separate one. Instead, they treat this person as a "self-object", that is an object on which narcissistic desires and frustrations, hopes and disappointments are being constantly projected. These narcissistic experience is organized around two opposite ego states: grandiose (all-good) *versus* depleted (all-bad) definition of self (Kernberg, 1975). In accordance with such a polarities, other people are either idealized or devalued, but always their role is to serve only as vehicles for internal processes aimed at enhancing, maintaining or restoring self-esteem (McWilliams, 2011). Thus psychoanalysts similarly as the myth, do not focus as much on narcissistic agency but on defensive realization of communal motives (i.e., on the experience of humiliation which is repeatedly accompanied by communal needs). From this standpoint, highly agentic self-view is a mere mask for communal maladjustment of narcissists.

Social and personality psychologists consider narcissism as a personality trait and argue that high agency of modern narcissists is their asset, and although a low communion creates costs, however gives no reason to disconfirm narcissists' psychological health (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro & Rusbult, 2004). On the other hand, empirical studies generated by this paradigm draw the same picture of narcissism as seen by psychoanalysts. The narcissistic persons do not act for sake of someone's good but are ready to act against if their own interest is threatened. As Sedikides et al. (2004) noted, the narcissists are so preoccupied with agency that they devalue communion by endorsing an "other exists for me" illusion.

But even thought a domain of narcissistic behavior is communal, the means and goals remain agentic and for this reason interpersonal relationships of narcissists may be considered as pseudo-communal (Drat-Ruszczak & Bazińska, 2010).[1] Narcissistic pseudo-communion is particularly salient in the context of romantic relationships because they *require* communion (e.g., caring, warmth), while narcissists use them in a way that characterizes the domain of agency (e.g., to achieve status, power, dominance), that is, in the service of the self. Thus narcissistic persons are more likely to choose admiring partners rather than that caring (Campbell, 1999), they prefer short-term relationships (Campbell & Campbell, 2009), which often lack the emotional intimacy (Foster, Shrira & Campbell, 2006). They prefer agame-playing ("ludic") style of love,

which is – as Campbell, Foster & Finkel (2002) note – of agentic nature, as a part of strategy to maintain power and autonomy in the relationship.

However, the well documented narcissistic pseudo-communion, described also as "interpersonal deficit", encourages social-personality researchers to investigate the adaptive value of narcissism rather than to look for mechanisms of the narcissistic disorder. As Sedikides et al. (2004, p. 412) argue: "high narcissists may be socially callous, but that is no reason for them not to be psychologically healthy". In a series of studies, these authors have found that narcissism is associated with multiple indicators of positive mental health and that these links are mediated by high self-esteem. The results are not surprising, given that narcissistic individuals are masters at deflecting of attacks by either inability or unwillingness to process negative information (Campbell & Foster, 2007). In psychodynamic terms, such tendencies would be labeled "ego-syntonic", which means, that a person believes that his or her reactions are the only right and proper response in a given situational context (McWilliams, 2011). The inability to perceive negative aspects of one's own behavior results in persistent denial of the necessity of change, what is commonly noted in a therapeutic context. It is, therefore, not very likely for narcissists – who always define themselves positively – to report suffering from depression or poor quality of life.

The qualities of narcissistic positive self-views such as persistence, exaggeration, rigidity and – among other – inconsistency with reality, suggest its defensive role regarding functions of self-esteem, which may be actually low, or at least fragile. Yet, a careful search for evidence of narcissistic negative feelings hidden "deep down inside" (Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996), do not provide however systematically confirming results (see review in Bosson et al., 2008). Considering the domain of agency, in most of studies the implicit self-esteem is found to be as high as the explicit one. The communal self-esteem appears to be certainly lower, however still increasing number of studies also fails to demonstrate a significant discrepancy between its overt and hidden levels (Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey & Kernis, 2007; Campbell & Foster, 2007).

Summing up, the high agency and motivation to enhancement of highly positive self-esteem persuade social psychologists to assume that narcissism is rather an approach-oriented and offensive than avoidant trait.

The narcissistic refusal of communal success

A strong body of evidence seems consistently to suggest that the exploration of narcissistic deep-seated negative feelings will be rather doomed to failure, excepting that narcissism would be defined as covert or "hypersensitive" that is characterized explicitly by a lowered self-esteem (Bosson et al., 2008; Hendin & Check, 1997; Miller & Campbell, 2010). However, considering

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[1] *Communal narcissism*, appointed recently for life by Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken & Maio (2012) still remains pseudo-communal, because of narcissistic, agentic goals. The fact, that these goals are realized through communal means does not imply yet that we have to do with communion per se, as the term *communal* determinedly premises.

a defensive personality structure of the grandiose type of narcissism as much wider studied and much more puzzling, it is worth to investigate a narcissistic aggression, which is, after all, not difficult to evoke. For its violence and rapidity this aggression is called narcissistic rage and from a clinical perspective gives a reasonable ground for claims that narcissism is a mask of emotions which are just opposite to those overtly displayed. As mentioned, narcissistic aggression commonly evokes attacks on the source of negative information about the self. Usually, it appears as a reaction to criticism that is perceived to be detrimental to a core narcissistic motivation to maintain a sense of superiority over other (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). This aggression much more than low communal orientation remains in apparent discord with unrealistically positive self-view, reported optimism and presumed narcissists' mental health.

Both clinical and social personality psychologists agree with the thesis that narcissistic aggression is aimed to guard a grandiose view of the self. However, clinicians have inferred the masking role of grandiosity from its inordinate, excessive and rigid display. Regarding hidden emotions such as an anxiety and inferiority feelings, these states revolve however, around a fear of humiliation and refer not only to the agentic but also to the communal domain (although treated by narcissists in agentic way). More specifically, narcissists' fear that communal qualities (warmth) may deprive them of the agency (control, power) constitutes a situation much worse than a solitary looking at their own reflection in a mirror pond. In other words, independence and self-sufficiency are key components of narcissistic agency, for which every communal activity can be threatening and weakening.

For that reason, the inordinate, "addicted-like" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001) narcissistic agency was metaphorically conceptualized by Modell (1975; Almond, 2004) as a "bubble" serving to fight off dependent yearnings and to avoid interpersonal emotions such as longing or sadness. Psychoanalysts seem to have no doubts that narcissistic superiority is threatened not only by evidently agentic failure, but also by an intimacy, which means for narcissists a dependency and weakness (Kernberg, 1975; McWilliams, 2011). Thus, a key part of the clinical view of narcissism does not hold that the grandiosity masks feelings of inferiority and that the negative self-image hides behind positive self-views, but it states the fundamental importance of the imbalance between high agency and low communion. The question that clinical psychologists are supposed to ask, concerns the function of high agency for the communion and function of low communion for the agency.

Previous research on narcissistic aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Twenge & Campbell,

2003) have identified this phenomenon as a response to the questioning of one's competence (agency). In Bushman and Baumeister's (1998) study, the participants were given a bogus feedback about the agentic failure, whereas in Twenge and Campbell (2003) research the participants were induced with communal failure, i.e., social exclusion. It is noteworthy however, that in both lines of research the authors activated crucial narcissistic superiority-inferiority dimension. In the first case (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) both domains and means of negative feedback were overtly agentic. In the second research (Twenge & Campbell, 2003) a manipulation of social exclusion was related to the communal domain, however the negative feedback had also agentic qualities. The message: "nobody chose you" meant a loss of respect, thus deprived of narcissist's sense of power and domination (Wojciszke, Abele & Baryła, 2009). Hence, Twenge and Campbell's (2003) research portrayed – typically narcissistic – agentic interpretation of the communal domain (pseudo-communality).

However, if the clinical assumptions as described above are true and communion is highly threatening for narcissists then aggressive response should be not only an effect of deprivation of agentic success but also should result in exposing narcissists for essentially communal self-view. Thus, prescribed them the genuinely communal relationships should be rejected as precisely threatening for the agentic self.

Additionally, this rejection is not likely to be explicitly manifested, because narcissistic individuals do not deny having communal qualities, instead, they report low or "neutral" levels of communal traits. Thus, the identification of highly communal characteristics of the self may result in indirectly aggressive responses.

This hypothesis was tested by our earlier study (Drat-Ruszczak & Bazińska, 2010) in which the false feedback was given to the participants regarding their positive vs. negative agency and positive vs. negative communion.[2] Indicators of the explicit response consisted of a satisfaction with "personality diagnosis" and an assessment of its validity, whereas indirect response was operationalized as a displaced aggression[3] directed toward a third person.

The results revealed that while narcissistic individuals were explicitly dissatisfied with negative agentic feedback, which they considered as invalid, they were satisfied with positive agentic feedback that was evaluated to be valid. It is noteworthy that these effects were not affected by a feedback on communion (neither high nor low). The indirect aggression was, however, triggered not only by giving participants negative feedback on their agentic qualities, but also by a positive feedback on their communion. In other words, assigning to narcissistic

individuals interpersonal warmth resulted in their aggressive tendencies displaced on a third person. In sum, the study demonstrated that while narcissists both explicitly and implicitly refused to fail in the agentic domain, they reacted with an implicit displaced aggression to positive communal feedback, however they did not question such assessment explicitly.

The explicit and implicit rejection of agentic failure jibed with common and well-documented view on narcissism as being hallmarked by a preoccupation with enhancing, maintaining and restoring agentic self-esteem. Whereas, the implicit aggression due to positive communal feedback accounted for the clinical interest in the negative relationship between chronically inflated agentic self-esteem and communion. Since positive communal qualities are believed by narcissists to decrease their agency, those attributes are constantly rejected. This effect, in fact, seems quite evident in the light of previous studies showing that narcissists prefer agency and reject communion. For example, Campbell (1999) demonstrates that narcissists prefer an agentic partners (i.e., perfect and admiring) and reject communal ones (i.e., needy and caring), which may result both from a use of partner's agentic qualities to enhance one's own (agentic) self-view and from a threat that partner's communion would depreciate them.

In terms of Melanie Klein's theory (1975), that has been referred to by Kernberg (1975) and Modell (1975), communal partner as a "bad object", contaminates narcissists' agency and therefore narcissist must keep the splitting of both agentic and communion objects idealizing the first and devaluing the latter one. Therefore, it is psychologically impossible for narcissist to integrate the positive (high-agentic) and the negative (high-communal) qualities of self into cohesive image.

The narcissistic aggression as a response to positive feedback about one's communion may also be explained by reference to studies on stereotypes (Drat-Ruszczak & Bazińska, 2010). More specifically, a sense of threat related to positive communal feedback seems to be a mirror reflection of the *failure-as-an asset* effect, as observed by Reinhard, Stahlberg and Messner (2008, 2009). This phenomenon refers to positive effects of failure in a low-status domain. The underperformance in such domain may be viewed as an asset because indicates a strong prototypicality for the high-status group and affiliation to this group. In Reinhard et al.'s studies (2008), male failure was viewed as an asset if only male participants were provided with information that females usually excel in a given task.

In our study, high communal success attributed to narcissists might have been unconsciously (automatically) considered to be a flaw, because it made them feel less competent. According to many authors (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002; Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008; Wojciszke, 2002) agency and warmth constitute the content of many stereotypes as two complementary dimensions of social perception. The out-groups are often stereotyped as either "competent but cold" (i.e., high-status groups eliciting envious prejudice, see Fiske et al., 2002) or "incompetent but warm" (i.e., low-status groups eliciting pity and sympathy). Considering narcissistic individuals, they seem to acknowledge the incompetent-but-warm stereotype, since from their standpoint – indeed as psychoanalysts have observed – interpersonal warmth is not worth to be praised because it stands for low agency, that is, a weakness. These cognitions may occur automatically (i.e. implicitly) thus narcissists do not explicitly reject communal positive feedback, although they obviously do not appreciate it.

The Present Study

The aim of the present study was to replicate conceptually the effect of narcissistic perception of positive communal feedback as a flaw. We proposed that the indirect narcissistic aggression might be triggered by attributing positive communal qualities to a narcissistic person, because he or she interpreted it as a threat to the agentic self-view (the psychoanalytical approach) or a flaw as a substantial impairment of its social importance (the social cognition approach to stereotypes).

Precisely, we verified the hypothesis that for individuals scoring high on narcissism positive information about one's communion would be as threatening as negative information about one's agency. Thus, we expected that in both these cases narcissism would be related to aggression. We also hypothesized that negative feedback concerning one's agency would cause a decrease in explicit self-esteem, whereas, positive feedback about one's communion would have no effect on this measure, because it was not experienced as explicitly threatening. The feedback manipulation was identical to that used in our earlier study (Drat-Ruszczak & Bazińska, 2010), in which participants were presented with the information about both agentic (negative vs. positive) and communal (negative vs. positive) characteristics. Next, the implicit and the explicit responses were observed in individuals scoring high and low on narcissism. The explicit response was operationalized as state self-esteem scores before the manipulation subtracted from state self-esteem after the manipulation. The implicit response (i.e., aggression) was operationalized as a tendency to humiliate others, measured by items adopted from Fast, Halevy & Galinsky (2011).

Method

Participants and Design. A total of 104 Polish university students (59 women) participated voluntarily. Participant's age ranged from 19 to 28 years ($M = 22.20$; $SD = 1.96$). Participants were randomly assigned to consecutive cells of a 2 (Valence of Communal Feedback: negative vs. positive) x 2 (Valence of Agentic Feedback: negative vs. positive) between participant design with 26 participants per cell.

Manipulation check: type of feedback. For the information feedback, instead of using highly obtrusive, ostensible feedback procedure (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Twenge & Campbell, 2003; Drat-Ruszczak & Bazinska, 2010), we used the imaginary

feedback scenario.[4] A fictitious situation of an internship application was chosen, which included the element of a teacher's recommendation. We assumed, that this situation, being a common applying-for-a-job procedure, is both well-known to students and it is relatively unobtrusive. The study was presented to prospective participants as a study of social imagery. Participants were asked to imagine a hypothetical situation where they apply for an important internship. Their task was to think of a particular teacher they would ask for a recommendation. In order to increase participants' involvement in the task, they were asked to specify the course/s they have had with this teacher. Next, participants were provided with an ostensible recommendation letter and instructed to imagine that this opinion was written by the teacher they had chosen. Each opinion was graphically presented as 8 bipolar dimensions anchored from a negative characteristic, such as "passive" (-4) to its positive equivalent, i.e., "active" (+ 4). Half of these characteristics concerned the domain of agency (passive – active, unintelligent – intelligent, incapable – capable, ineffective – effective) and half the communion domain (selfish – selfless, dishonest – honest, cold – warm, hostile – friendly). Participants were ostensibly rated on each dimension so that every person received information about his or her four agentic characteristics (A) and four communal characteristics (C) that were either positive (+) or negative (-). Experimental conditions were randomly assigned from among four possible versions of a recommendation letter that, depending on the condition, included information about one's: (1) positive agentic and positive communal characteristics ($A^{POZ}C^{POZ}$ (2) positive agentic and negative communal characteristics ($A^{POZ}C^{NEG}$); (3) negative agentic and positive communal characteristics ($A^{NEG}C^{POZ}$); and (4) negative agentic and negative communal characteristics ($A^{NEG}C^{NEG}$). After receiving the opinion, participants evaluated (1) to what extent receiving such opinion was possible and (2) to what extent they were satisfied with it. Answers were provided on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*definitely not*) to 7 (*definitely yes*). The effectiveness of the type of feedback manipulation was tested in a preliminary study ($N = 60$). The results confirmed that, depending on the content, the ostensible opinion significantly influenced participants' reactions.[5]

Dependent measures

Demeaning behavior. To adopt Fast, Halevy and Galinsky's (2011) measure of demeaning behavior we formulated 18 activities varying in severity of the described behavior. Fifty-three psychology students rated how much these items would be demeaning for them. The answers

were marked on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*weakly*) to 7 (*strongly*). Next, we chose five items rated as the most demeaning (e.g.,"Enter a lecture on all four limbs"; *Ms* ranging from 5.00 to 5.76) and five rated as the least demeaning (e.g., "Tell a joke an unknown person standing in a line to the bar at your university"; *Ms* ranging from 1.94 to 2.89). The number of strongly demeaning activities (from 0 to 5) served as our measure of demeaning behavior (see Appendix).

State self-esteem. In order to appraise the extent to which our manipulation influenced the self-esteem, a state self-esteem was measured twice, before and after the feedback. As a dependent variable, we used the difference score between the means for post- and pre-feedback state self-esteem level. The dependent variable was z standardized. The results above zero indicated an increase in state self-esteem. This measure is valuable in the context of dynamic changes in self-esteem, because it enables to estimate the relative change in state self-esteem as a result of provided opinion about one's characteristics. Due to positive correlation between narcissism and explicit measures of self-esteem, the mere indicator of state self-esteem affected by the manipulation might have not been sufficient enough to reveal the effect of manipulation.

Procedure. The participants completed the Polish version of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Bazińska & Drat-Ruszczak, 2000; Raskin & Hall, 1979). To assess pre- feedback level of state self-esteem we employed 5 items from the Polish version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek & Łaguna 2008; Rosenberg, 1965). Participants were asked to consider to what extent each item (No: 1, 3, 6, 8, 10) was true of them at the moment. The ratings were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The relevant responses were reverse-scored so higher scores indicated higher state self-esteem. An overall state self-esteem index was computed by averaging all items ($\alpha = .71$). Next, the manipulation of the type of feedback was conducted and participants evaluated the ostensible information about their characteristics (i.e., whether receiving such opinion is possible and whether they are satisfied with the information). Finally, to assess post-manipulation level of state self-esteem, participants responded to remaining five items from RSES (No: 2, 4, 5, 7, 9; $\alpha = .77$). After completion, participants were thanked and invited to participate in another, brief study ostensibly aimed at preparing materials for the research on "willingness to undertake uncomfortable behavior to receive financial gratification. In this part of the study, we actually measured implicit aggression. All participants were provided with a list of ten activities; five of them

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[4] The procedure based on imaginary situations has been effectively employed by social psychologists. In recent studies on narcissism it has been used by, for example, by Hepper, Hart, Gregg and Sedikides (2011), and Besser and Priel (2010).

[5] The results of one factor ANOVA analysis revealed that both the rating of possibility of receiving the opinion and satisfaction with its content differed with the type of feedback condition: $F(3,57) = 5.26$; $\eta^2 = .22$ and $F(3,57) = 13.07$; $\eta^2 = .41$, respectively. The *post hoc* Bonferroni tests indicated that the opinion $A^{POZ}C^{POZ}$ was rated as more possible ($M = 4.67$) than the opinion $A^{NEG}C^{NEG}$ ($M = 1.93$; $p<.001$), the opinion $A^{POZ}C^{NEG}$ ($M = 2.87$; $p = .015$) and the opinion $A^{NEG}C^{POZ}$ ($M = 3.80$; $p = .12$, the effect marginally significant). Similar pattern of results was found for the ratings of satisfaction with the ostensible opinion; participants were more satisfied with the opinion $A^{POZ}C^{POZ}$ ($M = 4.60$) than the opinion $A^{NEG}C^{NEG}$ ($M = 1.50$; $p < .001$), $A^{POZ}C^{NEG}$ ($M = 2.67$; $p = .001$) and $A^{NEG}C^{POZ}$ ($M = 1.80$; $p<. 001$).

described highly demeaning behaviors, whereas another five were – in our preliminary study – considered to be the least demeaning (see Appendix). From this set of items, participants were instructed to choose five activities that would to be performed by students participating in the next research. The number of items chosen from the five most demeaning activities served as the measure of demeaning behavior. After completing the task, participants were thanked and debriefed. None of the participants were aware of the purpose of the study.

Results

Preliminary Analyses. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of all measured variables are displayed in Table 1. To ensure that there would be no initial differences between the participants assigned to the different condition, we compared the groups in variables assessed prior to the manipulation. Two-way ANOVAs revealed no significant differences in narcissism score ($F < 1$) and pre- feedback state self-esteem ($F < 1$). This confirmed the randomized design. Furthermore, in the preliminary analyses we found no gender effects, so we dropped this variable from the analyses.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and zero order correlations between study variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Narcissism	108.30	21.58	(.93)			
2. Pre- State self-esteem	5.21	.91	.32**	(.77)		
3. Post- State self-esteem	5.30	.92	.28**	.75**	(.71)	
4. Demeaning behaviour	2.83	1.40	.12	.14	.04	-

Note. Cronbach's alpha coefficients displayed in parentheses *$p < .01$, **$p <. 001$

Main Analyses. To test how a feedback type and narcissism predicted demeaning behaviour and the state self-esteem, we performed hierarchical regression analyses separately for demeaning behaviour and the state self-esteem. The feedback type was coded into two orthogonal vectors: dimension of the agency ($A^{NEG-POZ}$, effect coded: *negative* = -1, *positive* = 1) and dimension of the communion ($C^{NEG-POZ}$, effect coded: *negative* = -1, *positive* = 1). One vector ($A^{NEG-POZ}$) compared the negative to the positive of the agency, the other ($C^{NEG-POZ}$) compared the negative to the positive of the communal domain. We entered main effects in step 1, two-way interactions in step 2, and the three-way interaction onto the third step. Significant interactions were plotted using the method of Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken (2003) and the simple slopes were tested as described in Aiken & West (1991).To probe the specific predictions, we examined the demeaning behavior effects and change in state self-esteem for high narcissism (1 *SD* above the mean) and low narcissism (1 *SD* below the mean).

Demeaning behavior. The first step of the regression equation was not significant: $F(3, 100) = .56$, $p = .64$. Consistent with predictions, the regression equation in Step 2 was significant, $F(6, 97) = 5.31$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .25$ and revealed main effect of $C^{NEG-POZ}$ vector: b = - 2.30, SE = .53, t (97) = - 4.33, $p < .001$ and marginal main effect of the NPI score: b = .01, SE = .006, $t(97) = 1.76$, $p = .08$. More important, the main effects were qualified by the predicted two-way interaction: $C^{NEG-POZ}$x NPI: b = .03, SE = .006, $t(97) = 4.50$, $p < .001$ and $A^{NEG-POZ}$x NPI, b = - .01, SE =.006, $t(97) = - 2.22$, $p < .03$. The three-way interaction added in the regression equation in third step did not change the amount of variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = .004$, $F(1, 96) = .53$, $p = .47$).

Figure 1. Demeaning behaviour as a function of communal (negative vs. positive) feedback and narcissism. High and low levels of narcissism were designated using values at 1 *SD* below and 1 *SD* above the mean NPI.
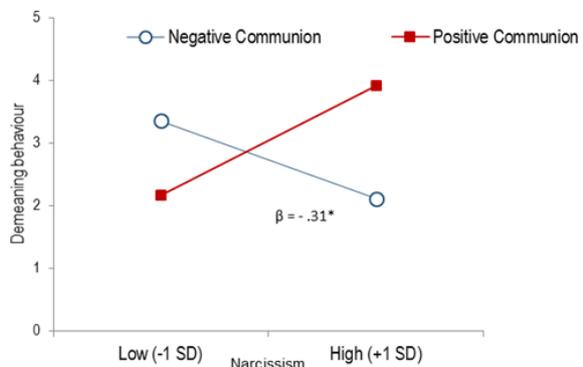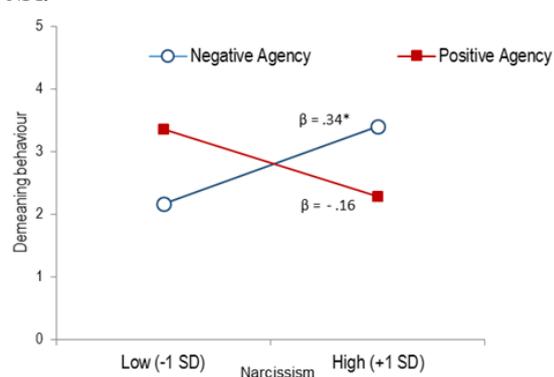

Figure 2. Demeaning behaviour as a function of agency (negative vs. positive) feedback and narcissism. High and low levels of narcissism were designated using values at 1 *SD* below and 1 *SD* above the mean NPI.


Simple slope analysis revealed that when communal feedback was C^{POZ}, an increase in demeaning behavior was positively predicted by the NPI score ($\beta = .50$, $t(97) = 4.18$, $p < .001$). In contrast, when the feedback was CNEG, the demeaning behavior was negatively predicted by the NPI score ($\beta = - .36$, $t(97) = - 2.33$, $p < .03$. The plots of the simple slopes for this two-way interaction are presented in Figure 1. These results mean that individuals who were high in NPI demonstrated more demeaning behaviour when received C^{POZ} feedback and less demeaning behavior

when received C^{NEG} feedback than individuals who were low in the NPI score. These results indicate that demeaning behavior is moderated by the NPI score but the direction of this depends on the valence of communal feedback.

Furthermore, analysis of the next interaction $A^{NEG-POZ}$x NPI revealed a significant slope effect in feedback ANEG. In that case the NPI score was positively related to the demeaning behavior ($\beta = .34$, t(97) = 2.52, p < .03). When agency dimension of feedback was negative, the NPI score was positively related to demeaning behavior (see Figure 2). However, when agency dimension of feedback was positive, narcissism and demeaning behavior were unrelated ($\beta = -.16$, $t(97) = -1.14$, $p = .26$). This pattern indicates that the demeaning behavior was positively predicted by the NPI score only among those who received the negative feedback in agency domain.

State self-esteem. The first step of the regression analysis on changes of state self-esteem was significant: $F(3, 100) = 4.66$, $p < .01$. $R^2 = .12$. This step revealed a significant main effect of the $A^{NEG-POZ}$vector: b = .32, SE = .09, $t(100) = 3.40$, $p < .001$, indicating that participants who received A^{POZ} feedback demonstrated higher state self-esteem than participants who received ANEG feedback. Of importance, Step 2 was significant, $F(6, 97) = 5.84$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .27$ and explained an additional 14% of the variance. Consistent with prediction, two –way interaction was revealed: $A^{NEG-POZ}$x NPI: b = .02, SE =.004, $t(97) = 3.53$, $p < .001$. The slopes comprising this interaction are displayed in Figure 3. Other effects in Step 2 were not significant. Entering the three-way interaction into a regression equation in Step 3 did not affect the results and produced the same amount of variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = .001$, $F(1, 96) = .18$, $p = .67$).

Figure 3. Z - State self-esteem (post– pre feedback state self-esteem) as a function of agency (negative vs. positive) feedback and narcissism. High and low levels of narcissism were designated using values at 1 *SD* below and 1 *SD* above the mean NPI.
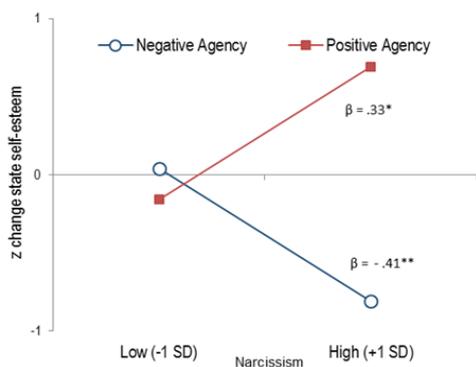
Most importantly, the analysis of interaction $A^{NEG-POZ}$x NPI revealed two significant simple slope effects. Consistent with our expectations, when the agency dimension of feedback was A^{POZ}, an increase in state self-esteem was positively predicted by the NPI score ($\beta = .33$, $t = 2.51$, $p < .02$). In contrast, when the feedback was ANEG, the increase of state self-esteem was negatively predicted by the NPI score ($\beta = -.41$, $t = -3.22$, $p < .002$). As illustrated in Figure 3, among individuals who were high (vs. low), in the NPI, the valence of feedback in agency dimension was significantly associated with the state of self-esteem. This suggests that $A^{NEG–POZ}$ feedback is related to change of state self-esteem and that narcissism acts as a moderator of the relationship.

Discussion

The results indicate that individuals high in narcissism, as compared to individuals low in narcissism, demonstrated more demeaning behavior when received positive information about their community and less demeaning behavior when received negative information on this domain. Furthermore, when received negative information about one's agency, narcissism was positively related to demeaning behavior, however, when agency dimension of feedback was positive, narcissism and demeaning behavior were unrelated. Additionally, among individuals who were high (vs. low) in narcissism, the valence of feedback in agency dimension was significantly associated with state self-esteem. More specifically, when the agency dimension of feedback was positive, the increase in state self-esteem was positively predicted by narcissism. In contrast, when the feedback about one's agency was negative, the increase of state self-esteem was negatively predicted by narcissism. Both positive and negative feedback on the communion domain were not related to the state of self-esteem and narcissism.

The results clearly confirmed our hypotheses showing that narcissism was related to the increased tendency to demean others not only in the condition in which participants received a negative feedback on their agentic qualities, but also in the condition of positive communal information. What is more, explicit self-esteem decreased relatively only as a result of the negative information about one's agency but not as a result of positive information about one's communion. This pattern of results conceptually replicated our previous findings (Drat-Ruszczak & Bazińska, 2010) with a different measure of displaced aggression.

The results indicate that the negative information about one's agency is a threat for narcissists on both explicit and implicit levels, whereas the positive information about one's warmth threat them only implicitly, that means it operates out of conscious awareness. In other words, on an explicit level narcissists are not frustrated by the highly positive assessment of their interpersonal warmth. Their response to such information is rather "neutral", which is in line with most studies on explicit communal self-esteem in narcissism (Campbell et al., 2007; Bosson et al., 2008). When diagnosing personality disorders, such a "neutral" outcome falls into a range of diagnostic "silence", indicating that a given trait (here: communion) is irrelevant to narcissism. The effect of positive communal information on aggression, moderated by narcissism, was observed clearly on an implicit (automatic) or – in clinical terms – unconscious level.

From the clinical standpoint the relation of positive information about one's communion to aggression demonstrates that such an interpersonal trait like "warmth" is avoided as self-definitions and unwanted by narcissists because leaving them exposed to a sense of weakness. It should be supposed, that communion, placed by narcissists on the only important to them dimension of social importance, that ranges from grandiosity (i.e., being better-then-others) to smallness or meanness (i.e., feelings of inferiority and humiliation turns into lesser or greater agency. Such an agentic interpretation precludes warm, intimate relationships as foreshadowing of "humiliating" emotions such as dependence, and the agentically negative weakness (McWilliams, 2011). This argument is strengthened by our data showing that the aggressive response is due to both, negative agency and positive communion.

From the social cognitive point of view, however, building upon the work of Reinhardt et al.'s (2009), we suggest complementary, that such as men's failure in women's task is perceived by them as an asset, such narcissists succeeding in the communal domain are used to perceive this success to be "worthy of pity" (Fiske et al., 2002), and therefore may view themselves as having failed. According to the *failure-as-an-asset* effect (Reinhardt et al., 2009), failures may become assets when they facilitate viewing oneself as more prototypical of a given high-status group (which legitimizes one's belonging to the group).

Similarly, narcissists who strive to maintain the status of prototypical representative of a high-status group of "competent but cold" are to perceive their communal "success" as a flaw, a weakness, a failure. Cuddy et al.'s (2008) argue that the "competent but cold" are not liked but are respected. Results of our study show that both being competent and socially cold is viewed by narcissists as favorable, what is more, implicitly those characteristics seem to be equally important. Despite the fact that in social perception the "competent but cold" elicit envy, such description is highly valued by narcissists, because it denotes for them being worthwhile and unique, which animates the grandiose self.

It seems that there is yet another possible explanation of the success-as-a-flaw-effect, which is also offered by social-cognition approach. Kervyn, Bergsieker & Fiske (2011) recently have shown so called *innuendo effect*, which describe a tendency for individuals to draw negative inferences from positive description referring to one of the two dimensions (warmth or competence) but omit the other. More precisely, omitting information is the basis for making negative inferences on the omitted dimension about the person described. The *innuendo effect* depends mostly on the context of communication: negative information is inferred from omitted but contextually salient dimension despite positive information on irrelevant dimension. Specifically, in an agentic context, positive information about one's communal features gives a reason to draw negative inferences about the omitted, agentic features. The same is true for omitted communal features in a communal context.

As all the research on narcissism has shown, for narcissistic individuals the only important context is the agentic one. Hence, the feedback about their warmth is unimportant for them as long as it is *not* exclusively positive. If so, the narcissistic person is the first one who feels threatened by possibility to draw negative inferences about her or his own competence. Positive descriptors on communal dimension seems to be perceived by narcissists as even offending them, because they do not concern their agency. In the narcissus mind the agency and communion seems to be related – as Kervyn, Bergsieker and Fiske specify (2011, p.8) – "hydraulically".

Both presented social-cognitive explanations, reversal effect of *failure-as-an-asset* (i.e. *success-as-a-flaw effect*) and *innuendo effect* are much the same in the sense that they are related to social perception. Social perceivers – as authors of innuendo effect noted – variously use these and other effects "to construct, maintain and convey impressions consistent with social norms and stereotypic perceptions of social groups" (Kervyn, Bergsieker & Fiske, 2011, p.8). It should be inevitably stressed at this point, that narcissistic individuals are the best exponents (promoters) of "conveing impressions" as well as the most susceptible to its effects. If someone ask whether narcissists are the victim of a stereotype which contrasts competence and warmth, it would be reasonable to assume that narcissists create rather or at least strengthen than passively realize this stereotype, deeply rooted in Western culture. The link between narcissism and modern culture, that has been noted quite long ago by sociologist (Lasch, 1991; Giddens, 1991), in psychology is currently within the scope of Twenge and Campbell's (2001) comparative studies or Kraus et al.'s (2012) models, in which so-called solipsism of rich people, that is conceptually close to narcissism, is being contrasted with contextualism of the poor.

Stereotypes of the "competent and cold" and the "incompetent but warm" without a doubt are vividly present in a current social perception. The results of our study suggest that narcissists may process such stereotypical information automatically, out of conscious awareness. From the clinical point of view, however, unconscious aggression is motivated and defensive. A wide range of primitive (i.e., more difficult to change than neurotic or mature ones) defense mechanism seem possible in this context: splitting the object into good (highly competent) and bad (incompetent and interpersonally warm) objects, denial of unfavorable feedback (i.e., about one's incompetence and interpersonal warmth), primitive self-idealization (i.e., validation of one's agentic attractiveness) and primitive devaluation of other people by prescribing them demeaning behavior. The last one shares characteristics with introjective aggression (Vaillant, 1992; McWilliams, 2009), in which someone need to humiliate other people in order to avoid his or her humiliation. These mechanisms would be symptomatic for a model proposing that inflated and overvalued agency constitutes a defense against communal emotions such as depression or sadness. Notably, the pattern of implicit, easily triggered aggression is a marker of just this mechanism. Although our study does not provide information on all

specific mechanisms that psychoanalysts have proposed, we think that it illustrates the fundamental Kleinian thesis of the good object becoming contaminated by the bad one (for a narcissists "bad" communion contaminates "good" agency).

In line with the results of our study, Anna Czarna (2013) has recently showed that positive communality (altruism) increased competitive strategies, which was moderated by narcissism. In this study, high on narcissism participants, in the positive communion condition, maximized payouts for themselves over payouts for other participants and this effect was not significant neither in the agency condition nor in the control condition. This result jibes with our finding that positive feedback about one's communion may threaten core narcissistic self-views (i.e., their highly agentic self-definition). Czarna's study clearly indicates that the positive communal context activates and/ or strengthens narcissistic tendencies to emphasize one's agentic supremacy, as if altruism and warmth were to diminish this highly agentic position. Narcissism was linked to exaggerated tendencies to make a difference between one's own and other's profit, as though narcissists wanted to give a decided evidence that they are definitely not altruistic. Despite the fact that the competitive strategy is viewed as "positive" and enhancing self-development, choosing this particular strategy, which does not work for the good of the others, may be considered to indicate implicit aggression. While in our study the aggression might have manifested implicit anger due to the communal label, in Czarna's study the aggression was almost counter-communal and it might have demonstrated the degree to which the communal self-image was not to be accepted by narcissist.

Limitations and future directions

There are at least two limitations of our study. First, although the social cognitive approach considers agency and communion rather as orthogonal then dependent dimensions (Wojciszke & Sobiczewska, 2013), it is worth to note that in our study these two domains were activated in conjunction (with one another) in all experimental conditions. Accordingly, participants might have related both the communal and the agentic information because they were presented together (and not because these domains are mixed in the content of social schemata; see e.g., Fiske et al., 2002). However, the results of Czarna's (2013) study were in line with our findings, even though she activated the agency and the communion separately (i.e., as either a study on leadership competencies or a study on altruism). Nevertheless future research should be conducted to replicate our findings using an experimental design where the ostensible feedback about one's agency and warmth is provided separately.

Secondly, it remains an open question for future research to investigate whether narcissistic aggression as a response to positive information about one's warmth was due to self-verification or self-valorization motives. The ostensible feedback information that is clearly contradictory to narcissist's core self-views concerning high agency and disinterest in communion, may be aversive as deeply incoherent with the self. Consequently, it may activate self-verification processes (Swann, 1983; Wojciszke, 2002). On the other hand, perceiving communal success as a flaw may increase self-esteem, because it facilitates identification with respected, high-status group. Therefore it suggests self-valorization processes being involved. Also, the authors of the *failure-as-an-asset* effect (Reinhardt et al., 2009) consider self-valorization to be important, since this effect is related to feelings of pride. Respectively in our study, the effect of *success-as-a-flaw* is related to feeling of disgrace or shame. What is more, self-valorization motives (i.e., strivings to maintain and to enhance the grandiose self) are central to the narcissistic self-regulation (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001, Bosson et al., 2008).

Finally, it should be highlighted that both social explanations, particularly the possibility to interpret the results in terms of an *innuendo effect*, require further studies. In particular, the *success-as-a-flow* effect could be mediated by narcissistic believe that high communion could lower social status. Moreover, narcissism could moderate an *innuendo effect*, conveying cold-and-competent impressions and precluding from formation of a warm-and-competent impression.

Conclusion

Summing up, we suggest that two lines of reasoning can be advanced to account for narcissistic aggression, namely the social cognitive view and the clinical view, both focused on the dynamic of a link between agentic and communal aspects of the self. From the clinical perspective, narcissists experience the communal self as a "bad" object that may contaminate "good" object (i.e., the agentic self). In terms of the social-cognitive approach, positive communion is perceived by narcissists as indicative of their belonging to "bad", i.e., low-status, group. The two lines of reasoning, however, lead to the conclusion that narcissistic aggression is aimed to restore self-esteem, that is, to approximate a domain of agentic success, which is viewed as a "good one". "The fundamental imbalance between agency and communion" (Campbell & Foster, 2007, p. 129) does not only mean that narcissism is related to high agency and low communion, but it also means that these two "twin" dimensions have specific dynamics: the one of them founds the interpretation of the other. The perception dominated by agentic categories results not only in agentic interpretations of the communal domain and using the community to strengthen one's agentic self-views, but also in attempts to protect agentic self-views from being decreased by the communal ones.

If we accept the social-cognitive view, addressing the content of stereotypes, we may consider our results to reflect values of modern times, and probably think of a narcissism as an offensive trait. Narcissism may be recognized as "healthy" to the extent to which strivings to belong to high-status groups of "the competent but cold" are not "unhealthy". If, on the other hand, we are to accept the clinical standpoint, narcissism would be defined

as a defensive trait or personality disorder, depending on intensity of defense processes. If the second is the case, a therapy might be needed, one that works not only on the development of communal concepts (schemata) and behaviors (Campbell & Foster, 2007), but also on decreasing the absolute importance and value of the agency. This therapy should involve teaching how to appreciate balanced functioning on these two dimensions, without overvaluing any of them.

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Appendix

Measure	No.	Content
		ITEMS SELECTED TO MEASURE THE DEMEANING BEHAVIOR
FI	1	Tell a joke an unknown person standing in a line to the bar at your university.
DM	2	In the canteen at your university demand a sandwich to be sold to you on a credit.
FI	3	Tell the experimenter about somebody who definitely does not like you.
DM	4	Applaud loudly for one minute during a lecture.
FI	5	In the presence of the experimenter count backward from 300 to 0 using every seventh number.
DM	6	In the presence of two unknown people say three times loudly and clearly: "I am nobody and nobody likes me" .
FI	7	Tell the experimenter about a situation in which you intentionally lied to somebody.
DM	8	Enter a lecture on all four limbs.
FI	9	Tell the experimenter about true and the greatest weakness of your character.
DM	10	Take a half an hour walk in the university hallway with a large sheet of paper on your belly with "I am a fool" written on it .

Note. FI = filler item; DM = dependent measure item.

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