ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Agentic and communal narcissism and subjective well-being: Are narcissistic individuals unhappy? A research report

Magdalena Żemojtel-Piotrowska[1·A,B,C,D,E,F], Amanda Clinton[2·D,E,F], Jarosław Piotrowski[3·B,C,E,F]

1: University of Gdansk, Gdansk, Poland
2: Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico
3: University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Poznan Faculty, Poznan, Poland

BACKGROUND

The communal/agentic model of narcissism is well accepted in the current research literature (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken & Maio, 2012). This model could be particularly useful in examining the relation between narcissism and hedonistic and eudaimonic subjective well-being (SWB; Deci & Ryan, 2008).

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

In an effort to examine the relationship between narcissism and SWB, correlational analyses of survey responses obtained from students ($n = 138$) were conducted. Agentic narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) and communal narcissism by the Communal Narcissism Inventory (CNI; Gebauer et al., 2012). Subjective well-being measures included the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985), Positive And Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tegellen, 1988), and the Social Well-being Scale (SWBS; Keyes, 1998). Self-esteem was included in the study in order to examine the potential mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between narcissism and subjective well-being.

RESULTS

Agentic narcissism was positively related to the affective component of SWB whereas communal narcissism was positively related to the cognitive component of SWB. Both forms of narcissism were positively related to social well-being. All relationships were mediated by the participant's self-esteem level.

CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that both agentic narcissism and communal narcissism are positively related to SWB. The results are discussed in the context of the agentic/communal model of narcissism (Gebauer et al., 2012) and hedonistic/eudaimonic well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

KEY WORDS

agentic/communal narcissism; subjective well-being; self-esteem

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR — Magdalena Żemojtel-Piotrowska, University of Gdansk, 4 Bażyńskiego Str., 80-952 Gdansk, Poland, tel. +48 58 523 43 24, e-mail: psymzp@ug.edu.pl

BACKGROUND

Narcissism is generally believed to be negatively related to subjective well-being. As portrayed in Greek mythology, Narcissus, a hunter, is a profoundly miserable individual who is absorbed by self-admiration. The ancient myth of Narcissus serves as the basis for describing clinical patients who present with characteristics including a belief that one is better than others, exaggeration of individual talents, the expectation of praise and admiration and taking advantage of others, to name a few (e.g. Freud, 1914/1957; Kernberg, 1975). Currently, the study of narcissism is popular in psychological specializations ranging from clinical psychology to general personality psychology and even social psychology. In one of the most comprehensive reviews of existing approaches to the study of narcissism to date, Miller & Campbell (2008) compared clinical and socio-psychological approaches to narcissism. Other researchers have pointed to the necessity of describing narcissism as either partially adaptive or present in healthy (or at least non-clinical) populations in addition to unhealthy, pathological narcissism, defined in terms of personality disorder. Miller *et al.* (2011) distinguished between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism and provided strong evidence for this distinction. Further research introduced new concepts strictly related to classical narcissism, such as communal narcissism (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken & Maio, 2012). Gebauer *et al.* (2012) proposed an agentic/communal model of narcissism based on the distinction between agency and communal aspects of human action and self-perception (see Bakan, 1966; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). This more recent research addresses the question of the nature of narcissism – specifically, what it is, the ways in which it manifests, and how it is linked to basic aspects of human functioning. The present paper aims to elucidate the relationship between classical (agentic) and communal narcissism and cognitive and affective components of well-being. The importance of self-esteem in this relation is also examined.

NARCISSISM AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING: CURRENT RESEARCH

To better understand the nature of the relationship between narcissism and well-being, both phenomena should be precisely defined. First, the concept of narcissism must be analyzed. As clinically defined, narcissism is believed to be maladaptive (Bishop & Lane, 2002; Miller, Campbell & Pilkonis, 2007) and at least partially profitable for the individual (Campbell, Bush, Brunell & Shelton, 2005; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro & Rusbult, 2004). Due to contradictory results on measures of social functioning in narcissistic individuals, Miller *et al.* (2011; see also

Miller & Campbell, 2008) proposed distinguishing between two forms of narcissism: vulnerable and grandiose. Vulnerable narcissism is related to unstable self-esteem, including negative self-view and negative affect. Grandiose narcissism is related to inflated self-esteem (grandiosity), aggression, and a tendency toward dominating others. Vulnerable narcissism seems to be commonly observed in the clinical context, while in normal populations grandiose narcissism is frequently seen. Some observations of American culture confirm widespread narcissism, mainly in grandiose form, in youth in the United States (see Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

Due to the distinction between vulnerable and relatively "healthy" narcissism, one could expect that only vulnerable narcissism should be negatively related to subjective well-being. However, the concept of well-being is a complex one. Subjective well-being is a psychological aspect of broadly defined well-being (see Deci & Ryan, 2008). It is typically measured using questionnaires or other self-report measures. Some of these measures are designed to assess the cognitive aspects of subjective well-being, such as overall satisfaction with life as a whole. Examples include the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985), or particular life domains, such as the Personal Well-being Index (PWI; see International Well-Being Group, 2013). Some others focus more on the affective component of well-being, such as the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; see Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). The affective component is often positively related to its cognitive counterparts. However, subjective well-being may refer to positive affectivity, including pleasure and lack of negative emotions (hedonistic well-being) and to searching for meaning in life, self-actualization, and positive relations (eudaimonic well-being), as well. This last distinction was proposed by Ryan and Deci (2001, see also Deci & Ryan, 2008).

One of the most controversial aspects of the study of narcissism and its plausible profitability is that of the social functioning of narcissistic individuals. There is no consensus regarding the degree of seriousness of social functioning problems in narcissistic individuals (Bishop & Lane, 2002; Priffitera & Ryan, 1984) or whether narcissism may be partially adaptive in social interactions (Campbell *et al.*, 2005; Sedikides *et al.*, 2004). This controversy could potentially be resolved by regarding different forms of narcissism while including concepts of social well-being (Keyes, 1998) in addition to classical well-being measures. Social well-being is particularly interesting when it is examined in terms of its link to narcissism. According to Keyes' (1998) definition, social well-being is based on the perception of self in social environments. It comprises several aspects, such as social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherency, and social actualization. Social integration is related

to individual self-assessment in terms of one's perception of self as an important part of society. Social acceptance is based on a positive assessment of society, including interpersonal trust. Social contribution may be understood as the belief that the individual is an important member of society and is able to offer something valuable to others. Social coherence is reflected in the belief that the social world is meaningful and logical; it is also related to caring about society in a broad context. Finally, social actualization is based on a general assessment of society moving in a positive direction in terms of growth and progress. Thus, social well-being is a rather complex concept. At least two aspects are related to the positive assessment of others – social coherence and social actualization – whereas some aspects reflect a positive self-view of oneself as a member of society.

As mentioned above, Gebauer *et al.* (2012) proposed an agentic/communal model of narcissism. Classical (or rather agentic, in the terms of Gebauers *et al.*) narcissism, which is measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), is based on an agentic self-view and fulfilling one's own motives in the agentic domain (e.g. dominance over others). Communal narcissism is related to a self-view of extraordinary communal traits and fulfilling one's own motives in the communal domain (see Gebauer *et al.*, 2012). As communal narcissism seems to be built on inflated communal self-esteem, it is possible that individuals high in communal narcissism could manifest higher social well-being in comparison to individuals low in communal narcissism. On the other hand, agentic narcissism could be unrelated to social well-being, at least in regards to those specific aspects which are related to the quality of social interactions. Moreover, as communal narcissism, similar to its agentic counterpart, is in fact egocentric, it should be positively related only to the aspects of SWB that refer to the self and its role in the social world. It should be unrelated to positive perception of the social world as a whole, however. Furthermore, agentic narcissism could be strongly related to hedonistic well-being, since it is related to activity and pleasure-seeking. Communal well-being, however, is associated with eudaimonistic well-being, as it is based on satisfying one's own motives in the social domain. In both cases, all positive relations between narcissism and subjective well-being should be mediated by self-esteem, as self-valorization motives are substantial for grandiose narcissism, independent of its domain (see e.g. Gebauer *et al.*, 2012).

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

PARTICIPANTS

One hundred and thirty-eight students from Gdansk University's Computer Science and Political Science Programs and the Psychology Program at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Poznan participated in the current study. In terms of gender and age, participants included 66 men and 72 women ranging in age from 18 to 47 years (M = 21.57, SD = = 3.54). Students participated voluntarily in the study.

PROCEDURE AND MEASURES

Participants completed the questionnaires in two separate sessions in order to effectively mask the purpose of the study. In the first session, participants responded to a set of items related to personality. These included the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), the Communal Narcissism Inventory (CNI), and the Self-Esteem Scale (SES). In the second session, which was conducted two weeks after the initial session, items related to well-being were completed. These included the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and the Social Well-being Scale (SWBS). In order to identify participants, each was asked to sign a form indicating the number of their indices. These data were ultimately destroyed in order to ensure anonymity for participants. Since the NPI and CNI measure personality traits and, as such, have high stability over time, this relatively long delay did not affect the results.

Communal Narcissism Inventory (CNI; Gebauer *et al.*, 2012). This 16-item inventory serves as a measure of communal narcissism. Communal narcissism is defined as a type of grandiose narcissism that is based on satisfying narcissistic motives by communal means, such as by holding a grandiose communal self-view. Participants answered questions on a 7-point scale (from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 7 – *strongly agree*). The scale was translated into Polish and then independently back-translated by two independent scientists (authors of the current article), experts in social and personality psychology, for the purpose of the current research.

Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Polish adaptation Bazińska & Drat-Ruszczak, 2000). The NPI serves as a measure for agentic, grandiose narcissism. The scale consists of 54 items and participants answered questions on a 5-point scale (from 1 – *it's not me* to 5 – *it's about me*). The scale has demonstrated reliability and validity (e.g. Emmons, 1984, 1987).

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson *et al.*, 1988; Polish adaptation Brzozowski, Watson & Clark, 2010). In the present project, the 20-item version of the PANAS was implemented. The PANAS Scale consists of 20 adverbs describing emotions. Ten of these are related to positive affectivity, and ten to negative affectivity. In order to measure general affect, participants were asked to indicate how they usually tend to feel. They answered on a 5-point scale (from 1 – *never* to 5 – *very often*).

Self-Esteem Scale (SES; Rosenberg, 1965, Polish adaptation by Łaguna, Lachowicz-Tabaczek & Dzwonkowska, 2007). This 10-item scale is one of the best-known measures of global self-esteem in the field. Five items are reversed. Participants answer questions on a 5-point scale (from 1 – *definitely no*, to 5 – *definitely yes*). The Polish version of the scale shows high reliability.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener *et al.*, 1985; Polish adaptation Juczynski, 2001). This scale consists of 5 items, each measuring general satisfaction with one's life. Participants answer the questions on a 5-point scale (from 1 – *I disagree* to 5 – *I agree*). The scale has demonstrated validity and reliability (e.g. Diener *et al.*, 1985).

Social Well-Being Scale (SWBS; Keyes, 1998; Polish adaptation Karaś, Najderska & Cieciuch, 2013). This 33-item scale serves as a measure of social well-being, which is defined as self-assessment of an individual's social functioning. The SWBS consists of 5 subscales: social integrity, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherency, and social self-actualization. Participants answer questions on a 5-point scale (from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 5 – *strongly agree*). The Polish version has been shown to have high reliability and proven external validity (Karaś *et al.*, 2013).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents correlations and reliabilities between measures (mean scores) of classical narcissism, communal narcissism and well-being measures.

In an effort to determine whether communal and agentic narcissism could predict subjective well-being levels, regression analyses were conducted. In the first step, data for age and sex were introduced. In the second step, mean scores for both the NPI and the CNI were introduced. In the third step, self-esteem level was added to the model. In the fourth and final step, interactions between self-esteem level and narcissism were introduced.

Cognitive aspects of well-being and social well-being were both positively predicted by communal narcissism independent of agentic narcissism level (see Table 2). Although interactions between narcissism and self-esteem did not allow for predicting levels of well-being, when self-esteem levels were added to the model, communal narcissism did not predict the dependent variable.

Agentic narcissism levels were positively related to the affective component of well-being and remained significant even after including self-esteem in the equation. Similar to satisfaction with life and social well-being, interactions between self-esteem and both forms of narcissism did not allow for predicting levels of well-being. Thus, self-esteem influences well-being independently of narcissism level.

Social well-being is a complex phenomenon and, as previously mentioned, it contains both positive self-evaluation in communal domains and a positive evaluation of society. In order to determine whether a positive relationship between social well-being and narcissism is limited only to self-view, separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. The logic of the particular steps in the analyses was analogical to that previously described. Table 3 presents results for particular components of social well-being as dependent variables. Congruent with predictions, both forms of narcissism allowed for predicting levels of social contribution, although after adding self-esteem these relationships became insignificant. Communal narcissism was positively related to virtually all aspects of social well-being with the only exception being social coherence, but only when self-esteem was not included in the equation.

The results of regression analyses indicated that narcissism is positively related to well-being. How-

Table 1

Correlations between narcissism, communal narcissism, and subjective well-being measures (n = 138)

	NPI	CNI	SWLS	PANAS_N	PANAS_P	SWBS	SES
NPI	(0.95)	0.50***	0.20*	−0.09	0.51***	0.16*	0.41***
CNI		(0.90)	0.29***	−0.12	0.28***	0.27***	0.40***
SWLS			(0.84)	−0.15*	0.35***	0.36***	0.42***
PANAS_N				(0.74)	−0.13	−0.26***	−0.43***
PANAS_P					(0.73)	0.36***	0.40***
SWBS						(0.91)	0.38***
SES							(0.87)

Note. NPI – Narcissistic Personality Inventory; CNI – Communal Narcissism Inventory; PANAS_N – Positive and Negative Affective Schedule – negative affect (general); PANAS_P – Positive and Negative Affective Schedule – positive affect (general); SWBS – Social Well-Being Scale; SES – Self-Esteem Scale.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Table 2

Results for hierarchical regression analyses with narcissism, communal narcissism, and self-esteem as predictors of subjective well-being (cognitive, affective, and social)

	SWLS		PANAS_P		SWBS	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	0.09***		0.03		0.07**	
Sex		0.25*** (0.14)		−0.16 (0.10)		0.26** (0.08)
Age		−0.16 (0.07)		−0.09 (0.05)		−0.02 (0.04)
Step 2	0.10***		23***		0.09***	
Sex		0.30*** (0.13)		−0.05 (0.09)		0.30*** (0.07)
Age		−0.13 (0.07)		−0.05 (0.05)		0.02 (0.04)
NPI		0.13 (0.11)		0.48*** (0.08)		0.11 (0.06)
CNI		23* (0.08)		−0.03 (0.06)		0.23*** (0.04)
Step 3	0.12***		0.05**		0.09***	
Sex		0.30*** (0.12)		−0.05 (0.09)		0.29*** (0.07)
Age		−0.17* (0.06)		−0.07 (0.04)		−0.02 (0.04)
NPI		0.02 (0.11)		0.40*** (0.08)		0.01 (0.06)
CNI		0.14 (0.08)		−0.03 (0.06)		0.15 (0.04)
SES		0.40*** (0.10)		0.25*** (0.07)		0.34*** (0.06)
Step 4	0.01		0.00		0.01	
NPI x SES		0.18 (0.16)		−0.01 (0.11)		0.06 (0.09)
CNI x SES		−0.13 (0.11)		−0.01 (0.08)		0.17 (0.06)

Note. NPI – Narcissistic Personality Inventory; CNI – Communal Narcissism Inventory; SES – Self-Esteem Scale.
Table presents standardized coefficients for single predictors and unstandardized for interactions, standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

ever, this relationship is hypothesized to be mediated by self-esteem. To directly examine the interrelation between narcissism, well-being, and self-esteem, analyses were performed using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) SPSS macro for indirect effects. Mediation analyses indicated that the relationship between social well-being and communal narcissism is fully mediated by self-esteem level ($Z = 2.98$, $p = 0.0028$, CI [0.02-0.12]) (Fig. 1).

Similarly, the relationship between agentic narcissism and social well-being was fully mediated by self-esteem level ($Z = 3.34$, $p = 0.0008$, CI [0.05-0.20]) (Fig. 2).
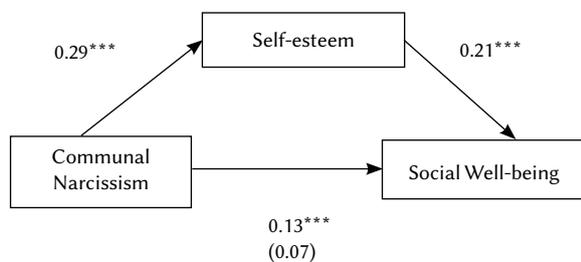

Figure 1. Self-esteem as Mediator of Relationship between Communal Narcissism and Social Well-being [$F(2,135) = 12.88$, $p < 0.001$, adj. $R^2 = 0.15$].
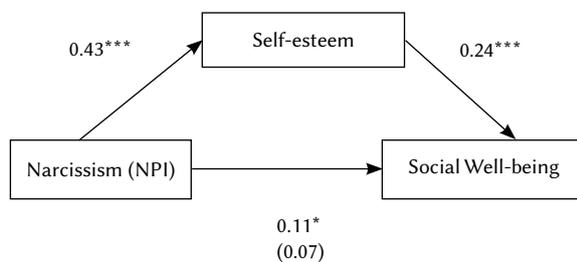
Figure 2. Self-esteem as Mediator of Relationship between Narcissism and Social Well-being [$F(2,135) = 11.14$, $p < 0.001$, adj. $R^2 = 0.13$].

Table 3

Results for Hierarchical Regression Analyses with Narcissism, Communal Narcissism, and Self-esteem as Predictors of Social Well-being Aspects (n = 138)

	Social integration	Social acceptance	Social contribution	Social realization	Social coherence
Step 1; ΔR^2	0.06*	0.08**	0.03	0.03	0.01
Sex	0.21* (0.11)	0.25** (0.11)	0.16 (0.10)	0.17* (0.09)	0.11 (0.10)
Age	−0.11 (0.06)	0.11 (0.06)	−0.08 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	−0.04 (0.05)
Step 2; ΔR^2	0.07**	0.04*	0.17***	0.03	0.04
Sex	0.26** (0.11)	0.25** (0.12)	0.23** (0.09)	0.16 (0.10)	0.15 (0.05)
Age	−0.08 (0.06)	0.12 (0.06)	−0.04 (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)
NPI	0.16 (0.10)	−0.08 (0.10)	0.27** (0.08)	−0.09 (0.08)	0.20 (0.09)
CNI	0.15 (0.07)	0.24** (0.07)	0.22** (0.06)	0.20* (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)
Step 3; ΔR^2	0.04**	0.05**	0.07***	0.01	0.11***
Sex	0.26*** (0.11)	0.25*** (0.11)	0.23** (0.09)	0.16 (0.10)	0.15 (0.10)
Age	−0.11 (0.06)	0.10 (0.06)	−0.07 (0.04)	0.06 (0.05)	−0.06 (0.05)
NPI	0.09 (0.10)	−0.15 (0.10)	0.18 (0.08)	−0.12 (0.09)	0.08 (0.08)
CNI	0.10 (0.07)	0.17 (0.07)	0.15 (0.05)	0.17 (0.06)	−0.06 (0.06)
SES	0.24** (0.09)	0.25** (0.09)	0.29*** (0.07)	0.11 (0.08)	0.37*** (0.08)
Step 4; ΔR^2	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
NPI x SES	0.06 (0.14)	−0.09 (0.14)	0.13 (0.11)	0.08 (0.12)	0.15 (0.12)
CNI x SES	−0.10 (0.10)	−0.13 (0.10)	−0.02 (0.08)	0.06 (0.08)	−0.01 (0.08)

Note. NPI – Narcissistic Personality Inventory; CNI – Communal Narcissism Inventory; SES – Self-Esteem Scale. Table presents standardized coefficients for single predictors and unstandardized for interactions, standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION

Results reported in the current paper indicate that grandiose narcissism, both in agentic form, as measured by the NPI, and the communal form, as measured by the CNI, is positively related to well-being. This positive relationship was observed not only for hedonistic well-being, as related to pleasure and experiencing positive emotions, but also for eudaimonic well-being, namely its social aspect. According to the agentic/communal model of narcissism (Gebauer *et al.*, 2012), both forms of narcissism are related to the same motives. However, the difference between them could be observed in the way in which narcissistic individuals satisfy their needs. That is, agentic narcissism was observed to be related to the affective component of hedonistic well-being, whereas communal narcissism was related to hedonistic well-being in terms of its cognitive and social aspects. All of these relationships became insignificant after including self-esteem as a predictor however. Mediational analyses further indicated that the relationship between narcissism and social well-being was mediated by self-esteem level. This could suggest at least two alternative explanations. The first explanation may be that narcissistic individuals – both in communal and agentic ways – tend to evaluate themselves in a more positive light, as more satisfied with their own life and social environment, and their own emotionality. Thus, they could overestimate their level of well-being. The second possibility is that narcissism could actually be profitable for social functioning, as Sedikides *et al.* (2004) and Campbell *et al.* (2005) pointed out.

Because the current research is correlational in character, it is impossible to state how the actual social functioning of narcissistic individuals looks. As all of the positive relations that were detected between narcissism and well-being were mediated by self-esteem level, it is highly possible that this positive relation is only illusory. However, current research confirms the distinction between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism made by Miller *et al.* (2011) and the agentic/communal model of narcissism (Gebauer *et al.*, 2012). In the present study, both forms of narcissism were positively related to self-esteem and to different aspects of subjective well-being. As

our study employed non-clinical populations, the results cannot be generalized to clinical groups, such as those suffering from personality disorders. However, the results reported here suggest that in therapy of narcissistic individuals, the distinction between agentic and communal narcissism should be made, at least with respect to subjective well-being level.

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