Original Papers

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Spontaneous Trait Inferences of Agentic and Communal Content

Abstract: A large amount of research has shown that there are two types of trait content in social cognition – agency (including competence) and communion (including morality). Because communal traits are more instrumental in locating a person on the approach-avoidance dimension than agentic ones, the former are considered to be relatively more important in person (and group) perception processes. We developed a proposal that this difference in importance extends to spontaneous trait inferences based on the behavior of the perceived person. The hypothesis that trait inferences are stronger in the communal than agentic domain was tested in four experiments (N = 265) using three different methods of studying spontaneous trait inferences (i.e., the cued recall of distractors procedure, the false recognition paradigm, and the lexical decision task). Despite the variation in methods, the studies yielded the same result – spontaneous trait inferences appeared stronger in the communal than agentic domain, but the effect was restricted to the traits of positive rather than negative valence. For the agentic domain the strength of trait inferences remained relatively low, independent of trait valence. Possible reasons for the difference between positive and negative communal traits are discussed.

Keywords: *Spontaneous Trait Inferences, Agentic Content, Communal Content, Resource Management*

Inferring traits from a person's behavior and appearance is part and parcel of person perception. Traits constitute 65% of characteristics provided in free descriptions of others (23% are behavior descriptions – Park, 1986). It is no wonder that studying traits, their inferences and organization is central to the scientific pursuit of impression formation and person perception (Uleman & Saraiby, 2012). However, "not all traits are created equal" – there is a large amount of data evidencing the notion that communal traits are generally more important than agentic ones in the perception of persons (and groups). We summarize this data and then discuss the research on spontaneous trait inferences – unintended, unconscious, and automatic inferences of traits from descriptions of behaviors which do not contain explicit names of the traits. Although automatic trait inferences have been quite a popular research topic, very little is known about how the inferences differ depending on the content of the inferred traits.

Based on these two steams of literature we develop a hypothesis that spontaneous trait inferences are stronger in the communal than agentic domain. We present four experiments testing this hypothesis for positive and negative traits, using three popular methods of ascertaining spontaneous trait inferences – the cued recall of distractors procedure, the false recognition paradigm, and the lexical decision task.

AGENCY AND COMMUNION AS BIG TWO DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL PERCEPTION

There is an emerging consensus that social cognition is underlain by two basic content dimensions of agency/ competence and communion/warmth. This is a common tenet of five theoretical models of social cognition (stereotype content model, dual perspective model, behavioral regulation model, dimensional compensation model and agency-beliefs- communion model) compared and integrated recently by their main proponents (Abele, Ellemers, Fiske, Koch, & Yzerbyt, 2020). According to these models, agency/competence concerns "getting ahead" – qualities involved in achieving goals and solving tasks, related to both ability and motivation (which are frequently considered to be two main facets of this dimension). It is related to status, power, prestige, class, skill, influence and effectiveness. Communion/warmth

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concerns "getting along" – qualities involved in building and maintaining social bonds and relationships related both to friendliness and morality (which are frequently considered to be two main facets of this dimension). It is related to benevolence, trustworthiness, cooperation, intentions, sharing values and resources. Virtually hundreds of empirical studies have shown that qualities involving these two dimensions are independent and underlie perception as well as evaluation of the self, other individuals, and social groups. Moreover, numerous conceptual distinctions have been proposed in personality and social psychology. For example, a study on 300 traits gathered data on how much each trait related to community and agency, collectivism and individualism, femininity and masculinity, morality and competence, and how much each served the interests of the trait possessor versus the interests of the surrounding others (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). It was shown that the traits are arranged in two easily interpretable dimensions, where the first contains community, collectivism, morality, femininity and other-interests, while the other contains agency, individualism, competence, masculinity and self-interest. It is worth noting that there is very little correlation between the dimensions, and their relationship cannot be explained by the influence of valence. Subsequent studies showed that the differentiation appeared in five different countries, indicating that the dimensions of agency and communality are universal psychological variables and cannot be reduced to the linguistic category (Abele, Uchronski, Suitner, & Wojciszke, 2008). Therefore, they are stable across cultures (Abele, Hauke, Peters, Louvet, Szymkow, & Duan, 2016).

Communion involves intentions of the perceived persons and groups which may be beneficial or detrimental to the perceiver's well-being. Because intentions are essential for locating others on the approach-avoidance dimension, communal content dominates the perception and evaluation of others. For example, an early study comparing moral (M) and competence-related (C) traits demonstrated that M traits show a higher chronic accessibility than C traits, that perceivers looking for information to formulate a global impression of others are more interested in their M than C traits. The most often mentioned traits were: sincere, honest, cheerful, tolerant, loyal, intelligent, truthful, unselfish, responsible and friendly – seven of which were strongly connected to community, and only two to agency (Wojciszke, Bazińska, & Jaworski, 1998). The same authors found that morality attributed to a person better predicts the global impression of the person than attributed competence – both for real and fictitious persons and when the M versus C content is balanced for valence. These findings were extended in a large research program showing the primacy of morality in impression development (Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, & Goodwin, 2021). This program convincingly showed that morality drives the whole impression and a change in moral information about others (individuals or groups) induces a much greater change in global impressions than information about any other aspect of a person.

There is ample evidence that basic criteria used in the evaluation of others or self are usually based on moral or agentic criteria. There is evidence that person descriptions can be reduced to the Big Two dimensions (Uchronski, 2008). In the case of attitudes towards close people, 82% of the variance is explained with moral and agentic qualities (Wojciszke, Bazińska, & Jaworski, 1998). Other data show that these dimensions are essential threads of autobiographical stories of children aged 4 to 9 years (Ely, Melzi, Hadge, & McCabe, 1998). It is very difficult to find any strong positive or negative traits concerning people that do not apply to one of those dimensions (Wojciszke, Dowhyluk, & Jaworski, 1998). There are also clear differences in the validity and functionality of community and agency in the perception of self and others. The community component is strongly associated with the perception of other people because it indicates whether their intentions can benefit or harm the perceiver. The agentic component, though more related to self as the focus on these characteristics, is a strong determinant of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Abele & Hauke, 2020; Wojciszke, 2005; Cisłak & Wojciszke, 2008; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008; Wojciszke, Baryła, Parzuchowski, Szymków, & Abele, 2011). It is crucial in terms of current studies that communal traits are recognized and categorized more quickly than agentic traits. Also, communal trait words are inferred more quickly from behavior descriptions and moreover they are mentioned prior to agentic ones in situations concerning other people's behavior (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011).

Two models are used to accurately and comprehensively describe the process of social perception: the schematic model of dispositional attribution (Reeder & Brewer, 1997; Reeder, Pryor, & Wojciszke, 1992) and the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Both models assume that people draw conclusions about the traits of others by observing their behavior. Within the communal domain, negative information is more important than positive, whereas in case of perception of agency, positive information plays a greater role than negative.

SPONTANEOUS TRAIT INFERENCES

The perception of self and others is primarily an evaluative process that is strongly associated with emotions and occurs as background cognition. It runs quickly and often unintentionally, acting as a groundwork for self-perception and relationships with others (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001, Zajonc, 2000). Nowadays, in studies on social cognition, more refined paradigms are used (e.g., based on the measurement of reaction time) to determine whether and when attributions are made. It is assumed that people make dispositional attributions, that is, unintentionally make impressions of personality traits based on their behavior (Newman & Uleman, 1989; Uleman & Moskowitz, 1994).

Spontaneous trait inferences (STIs) occur during observation of behavior in the absence of intention and

motivations to make them. For example, when a person is at a wedding party and notices that another man steps on his partner's foot while dancing, you may think of him as a clumsy person. Studies under STI suggest that people make inferences not only without a clear purpose, but they are also not aware of this process. It comes down to the fact that observer inferences require observation of a behavior, which is given a meaning and then an adequate characteristic is assigned to the acting person. In studies on STI, it is assumed that the consequences of the cognitive behavioral observations are similar to situations in which information is read in text form. Most of the paradigms in this field of study are based on text referring to information about the behavior. Only a few studies have used film recordings as materials presented during the procedure (Fiedler & Scheneck, 2001).

Starting from the late sixties and over the subsequent ten years, studies on the perception of others were based on self-report measures of various aspects of social perception. After this period, social cognition researchers began to produce knowledge based on the paradigms involving perception and memory procedures, designed to shed light on information processing about others. The earliest evidence of STI comes from the first half of the eighties, where the participants were presented a set of behavioral traits implying characteristics, along with an instruction to memorize them. In the next section the respondents were asked to recollect sentences that were previously presented. The recollection was more efficient within the group that was given a set of traits that were implied by those sentences than in the group that was given no cues (Winter & Uleman, 1984). To eliminate the suspicion that the features were generated in a conscious strategic manner, a procedure was used in which the sentences appeared as distractors along with another primary type of task. The results showed that even in such cases, the traits are valuable hints for recollection (Winter, Uleman, & Cunniff, 1985). However, these studies were still exposed to alternative explanations associated with the processes occurring in the time between encoding and decoding information. Nowadays a number of different paradigms such as the Lexical Decision Task or Word Stem Completion are used which eliminate the delay of measurement of the dependent variable (Whitney, Waring, & Zingmark, 1992).

A number of studies on STI show that when presentation of trait implying sentences of behavior coincides with the presentation of the face, in the subsequent phases of the experiment, after the face is shown, the implied trait is more accessible than other ones. Evidence for trait inferences and associating them with faces appears even after a very brief presentation of photos and descriptions of behaviors (Todorov & Uleman, 2002; Todorov & Uleman, 2003).

Most cognitive processes within the field of researchers' interest including STI are complex and require consideration regarding automatic and strategic (controlled) processing. Based on research in social cognition there are four central characteristics within automatic

processes: awareness, intention, efficiency and control (Bargh, 1994). When considered in the field of STI, it can be concluded that trait inferences are very efficient and occur without awareness, intention, and control. It should also be noted that the effect of efficiency depends on rather little cognitive resources.

One of the common methods used in the study of cognitive mechanisms for monitoring sources is defined by a memory paradigm, in which the effectiveness of the task depends on the ability to distinguish the original encoded information from similar information, so the source of error is the effect of familiarity caused by STI. The Forced Choice paradigm coupled with the applied Process Dissociation Procedure is a method of estimating the probability of occurrence of automatic and controlled processes (Jacoby, 1991) (described in detail later in this work). The use of these methods demonstrated that when participants were asked to exactly memorize sentences describing behavior, the controlled component was diminished in comparison with participants whose task was to develop a general opinion about the presented behaviors. It was also shown that an additional cognitive load diminishes the use of controlled processes compared to the no-load condition (Ferreira, Garcia-Marques, Hamilton, Ramos, Uleman, & Jeronimo, 2012).

In a study on STI, materials are always used based on the descriptive aspects of human personality. This is often a set of about a dozen traits involved in the test procedure. Sometimes they are expressed directly or are to be inferred on the basis of behavior description. They often appear in the process responsible for the measurement of the dependent variable. To date, there are no reliable studies with regard to the internal nature of the traits that are used for the description of people, and it might be useful to take into account the existence of common classifications.

HYPOTHESES

In conclusion, on the basis of the reviewed literature we expected that people make spontaneous trait inferences based on observing other people's behavior (Winter & Uleman, 1984; Winter et al., 1985; Carlston & Skowronski, 1994; Uleman et al., 1996). When a target face associated with these inferred traits is presented, the traits are reactivated and become cognitively available (Todorov & Uleman, 2002; Todorov & Uleman, 2003). Moreover, the traits can be defined in two main domains: agency and communion, which play different roles in the perception of others. We expect that spontaneous processes of trait inference may be stronger in the communal than agentic domain. This would be yet another facet of the primacy of communion over agency in person perception.

EXPERIMENT 1

This experiment aimed to test the hypothesis that inferences of communal traits are stronger than inferences of agentic ones. A Cued Recall of Distractors procedure

(Winter, Uleman, & Cunniff, 1985) was used. We expected that communal trait names would serve as better cues of retrieval than agentic ones.

Method

Participants

Sixty university students took part in this experiment – half female and half male (M_{age} = 21.97; SD = 2.18).

Materials

A computer program was written in Inquisit 4. Four different versions of the materials were prepared according to a trait type 2 (content domain: agency vs. communion) and 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) design. The sets of traits were prepared with care for counterbalancing their names for length and frequency. The communal traits (e.g., kind-hearted, honest) were selected on the basis of their highly communal and low agentic meaning, whereas the agentic traits (e.g., ambitious, persistent) were pre-rated as high in agentic and low in communal meaning. All the traits were selected from a pool of 300 traits judged for saturation with the two meanings and valence (compiled originally by Abele & Wojciszke, 2007 in the Polish language). The selected traits and ratings of their attributes are listed in Appendix 1.

For each trait there was a sentence assigned describing behavior expressing that particular trait, e.g., "He gave back the change in a market as he got too much" (for honesty) or "He's finished the race though it was raining and the wind blew" (for persistence). The full set of sentences used in the study is presented in Appendix 2.

Procedure

The procedure was run individually for each participant. They were asked to take a seat at a desk with a laptop on it. First they read the instructions and then the experimenter explained what the task was about to make sure it was clear. *„This experiment is about cognitive processes. Your task is to remember strings of digits. There will be five digits shown on the screen, e.g. 5 8 3 1 2. You are to read them aloud and remember. Whenever you're ready click the SPACE button. There will be distractor sentences presented in order to make the task more difficult. When it appears you should read it aloud and then silently repeat it "in your head". Soon after the sentence will disappear and a string of question marks will appear „?????" Then you are supposed to recall and state aloud the string of digits shown before. You can continue to the next trial by clicking the space button."*

Importantly, participants were told to remember strings of digits only and they did not anticipate recalling the sentences (presented as distracters). The first part of the procedure had the following sequence: string of digits → sentence → question marks. Sixteen random strings of letters were used and each appeared only once without returning, set out in 4 blocks. There were four blocks that consisted of one of each sentence condition 2 × 2: domain, valence. Each sentence was presented for 10 seconds, then

a string of question marks appeared and after digit recall, the next session started after the space bar was clicked. The digits were written down on a sheet of paper by the experimenter. The first phase consisted of 16 sentences. After the first phase a distractor task was performed for 2 minutes. The laptop computer was taken off the table and subjects were given a sheet of paper with a "LOCOMO-TIVE" word written on it and the instruction to form as many words using the letters of this word as possible, e.g., "love". Phase 3 comprised the measure of dependent variables with participants being asked to recall as many sentences as possible. Half of the participants wrote their answers on a sheet of paper with the appropriate trait-names written in a column (the cued recall condition) and the others received a blank page (the non-cued condition). They were given 10 minutes to recall although a few resigned after about 7 minutes as they could not remember more. The timing sequence is presented in Figure 1. At the end the participants were thanked for their participation. The procedure took about 20 minutes per person.
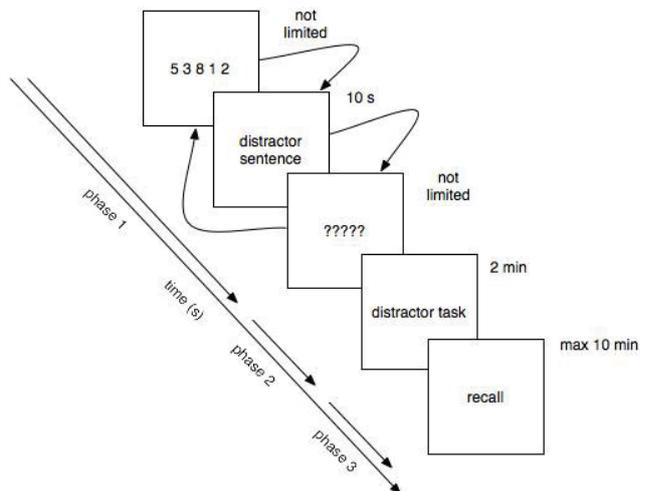

Figure 1. Graphic representation of the procedure used in Experiment 1.

Variables

All recalled sentences were written down on separate sheets. Each consisted of a header with the original sentence and all recalled sentences below. Four competent judges evaluated each sentence for its similarity to the original sentence on a scale ranging from 0 – not alike at all to 4 – excellent match. These ratings appeared highly reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.96). The missing values were replaced with 0 automatically. The average ratings were then calculated, e.g., kind-hearted, friendly, honest, and caring for the communal positive traits.

Results

The ratings of recall similarity were subjected to a 2 (group: cued vs non-cued recall) × 2 (domain: agency vs communion) × 2 (valence: positive vs negative) ANOVA with repeated measurements on the latter two factors. This analysis revealed a main effect of the domain,

$F(1,58) = 12.63$; $p = 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$, showing better recall of sentences related to communion, $M = 1.90$ ($SD = 2.15$), than agency, $M = 0.86$ ($SD = 1.37$). No other main effect or interaction was significant, however the simple effects reached a significant level, although some simple effects appeared significant.

The distributions were not normal (K-S; $p < 0.05$), therefore nonparametric tests were used for further analyses. Simple effects analyses using Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon tests showed a significant difference in recall within the cued recall condition between communion, $M_{rang} = 13.75$, and agency, $M_{rang} = 8.75$, $Z = -2.79$; $p = 0.005$. Mann-Whitney comparisons showed a significant difference in recall between cued, $M_{rang} = 34.47$, and non-cued, $M_{rang} = 26.53$, conditions within positive communal sentences, $U = 331$; $p = 0.03$. Wilcoxon tests showed differences within positive, $Z = -2.99$; $p = 0.002$, as well as negative, $Z = -2.11$; $p = 0.035$, recall in the non-cued condition. A significant difference was also found between communal positive and agentic negative recall in the cued condition, $Z = -2.18$; $p = 0.03$. The means are presented in Figure 2.
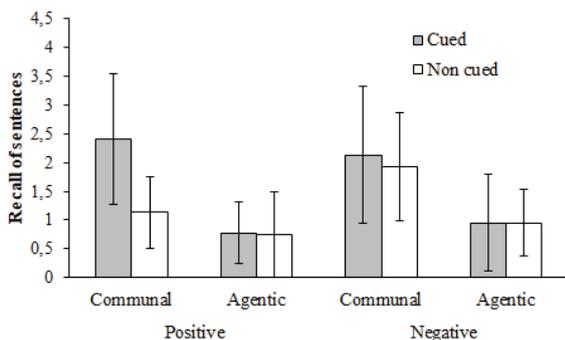

Figure 2. Recall means of communal and agentic sentences of positive and negative valence in the cued and non-cued condition (Experiment 1).

Discussion

As expected, the analyses showed that sentences describing communal behaviors were better recalled than sentences describing agentic behaviors in the cued recall condition, and this held for both positive and negative sentences. Because communal trait-names served as better recall cues of corresponding behaviors than the agentic ones, this suggests that communal traits were inferred to a higher degree than agentic traits. Unexpectedly, sentences implying negative communal traits were remembered equally well in the cued and non-cued condition.

EXPERIMENT 2

This experiment aimed to replicate the previous one with modified instructions. This time participants were asked to remember both the strings of digits (distracters) and the sentences expressing relevant traits. In other words, participants expected to recall sentences.

Method

Participants

60 students from University of Gdansk took part in this experiment: 30 female $M = 22.53$ ($SD = 1.89$) and 30 male $M = 22.13$ ($SD = 1.68$).

Procedure

The same materials were used as in Experiment 1. The procedure was also the same with modified instructions, which included an additional sentence, *"Important!! Try to remember sentences as well as it's important for a further part of the experiment"*, passed verbally to the participants. The same measures were used as in Experiment 1. The reliability of competent judge evaluations of recall was high, $\alpha = 0.94$.

Results

A mixed ANOVA was conducted on the recall measure in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design, with the condition as a between-subject variable (cued vs. non-cued), while domain (agency-communion) and valence (positive-negative) served as within-subject variables. This analysis revealed a significant domain × valence interaction $F(1,58) = 4.99$; $p = 0.029$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$.

The distribution again deviated from normality (K-S; $p < 0.05$), so nonparametric tests were used. The interaction was analyzed with Wilcoxon tests, which revealed a significant difference between positive over negative sentences in the communal domain, $Z = -1.67$; $p = 0.047$ (one-tailed), as well as an inverted negative-positive difference within the agentic domain, $Z = -1.96$; $p = 0.05$. Additionally, an analysis of the group × domain was conducted. The U Mann-Whitney comparisons showed a significant difference in the recall of communal sentences between the cued, $M_{rang} = 35.53$, and non-cued condition, $M_{rang} = 25.47$, $U = 299$; $p = 0.025$. The difference between the conditions within the agentic content was not significant.

Finally, Figure 3 presents recall means for all combinations of the three-factorial design. Additional Wilcoxon tests showed a significant difference in recall between communal positive, $M_{rang} = 6.44$, and agentic positive, $M_{rang} = 13.21$, sentences, $Z = -2$; $p = 0.046$. A U Mann-Whitney test showed a significant difference in the
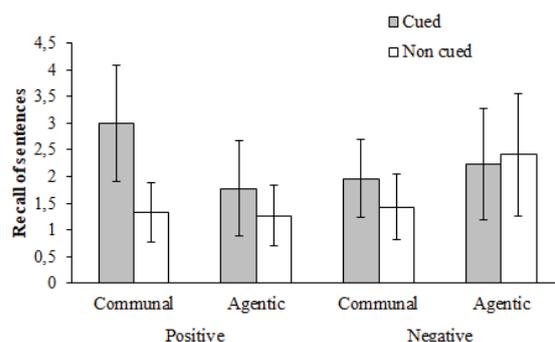

Figure 3. Recall means of communal and agentic sentences of positive and negative valence in the cued and non-cued condition (Experiment 2).

recall of communal positive sentences between the cued, M_{rang} = 34.55, and non-cued, M_{rang} = 26.45, condition U = 328.5; p = 0.032.

Discussion

The most reliable simple effect found in Experiments 1 and 2 is the higher recall of communal positive sentences in the cued versus non-cued condition. This supports our prediction that communal traits are inferred to a high degree during comprehension of sentences implying the traits. However, none of the experiments found a similar simple effect for the recall of the negative communal sentences. Both studies found no effect of cuing agentic traits on the recall of the relevant sentences – either of positive or negative valence.

EXPERIMENT 3

This experiment aimed to verify the main hypothesis of the advantage of communal over agentic traits in spontaneous trait inferences with another method of studying these inferences – the false recognition paradigm (Todorov & Uleman, 2002). In the first phase of this paradigm, participants are asked to memorize faces paired with sentences describing behaviors which exemplify personality traits. In the second (test) phase, participants are presented with a recognition test. Each trial consists of a face and four words including the name of a relevant trait and three fillers (an irrelevant trait and two irrelevant nouns). The participants decide which of the four words accompanied the face during its initial appearance. False recognition of the trait implied by a behavioral description is treated as an indication of a spontaneous inference of this trait (which is actually absent in the behavior descriptions). The advantage of this index is that it evidences spontaneous trait inferences bound to persons depicted on the photos as opposed to traits merely bound to behaviors exemplifying the traits.

Method

Participants

Fifty female university students participated in the experiment. Their mean age was M = 23.86 (SD = 2.66).

Materials

The materials consisted of 24 photographs of faces presenting a neutral expression downloaded from the Blazej Mrozinski photo base (@pokaztwarz / Twitter) (sample faces are presented in Figure 4). A set of traits and descriptions of behavior implying those traits was prepared as in previous experiments. In the present study we extended the number of traits to six per each condition of

Figure 4. Sample faces used in Experiment 3.

a domain (agency – communion) by valence (positive – negative) design. The 24 selected traits were balanced for ratings of agency, communion, and valence like in previous experiments. Each trait was implied by two different descriptions of behavior – all traits and behaviors are listed in Appendix 4. The materials also included fillers – 24 neutral traits relating to neither communion nor agency (e.g., mature, serious, suspicious) and 48 neutral nouns (e.g., wall, kitchen, bicycle).

A PowerPoint presentation was prepared in eight different versions. The behaviors matched for feminine faces were formed in the third person feminine form, and male matched faces were presented in the third person masculine form. Behaviors were presented in small blocks consisting of four behaviors in each condition. As there were two sentences implying each actor's behavior the presentation was run in two blocks. The positioning of target items and fillers was also randomized.

Procedure

The procedure was run in groups of 1-5 participants in a single session consisting of two phases. In the first phase, the participants were presented with 24 faces, each accompanied for six seconds by a behavior implying a trait. Then the faces were presented for a second time and once more each face was accompanied by another behavior implying the same trait as previously. So, there were six faces for each of the four trait combinations (agency-communion by positive-negative) and twice as many behaviors. All 24 traits and 48 behaviors are listed in Appendix 4. In the second phase, several stimuli were presented for a very short time in the following sequence: fixation → face → fixation → mask → *non-word* → mask → choice slide. The non-words were senseless strings of letters. The fixations presented before and after face photos depicted × signs and were presented for 80 ms. The face remained onscreen for 80 ms, which was enough for correct recognition. The masks before non-words were presented for 1000 ms, and the non-word for 30 ms. The non-words were additionally framed in a gradient field so it was not possible to recognize any letter of the string (interviews with participants indicated they were not able to recognize any word or even single letters). The decision slide ending each trial consisted of four words randomly dispersed within the slide. One was a target trait assigned to a face presented twice in the first phase of the procedure (with accompanying behaviors implying the trait), another was an irrelevant trait, and two other fillers were two irrelevant nouns. The participants were asked to choose a word they thought had been presented in the non-word position. Choosing a relevant trait was an index of spontaneous trait inference. Other trials were presented after the decision was made and the space bar was clicked. Two training trials were performed which included example traits instead of non-words. One was run in slow-motion so participants could understand the idea and the other at a normal speed so they were not aware of the presented content. The matches in the training session showed that everyone understood the instructions.

Variables

The variables were computed as sums of correct matching choices for each of the four trait types. As there were six traits of each type, the range was 0 to 6.

Results

An ANOVA was conducted in a within-subject 2 (domain: agency-communion) and 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) design with the average of matching decisions as the dependent variable. The analysis showed a significant main effect of valence, $F(1,49) = 4.90$; $p = 0.03$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$, with the mean for positive traits, $M = 3.71$ ($SD = 1.18$), being higher than the mean for negative ones, $M = 3.33$ ($SD = 1.47$). No other main effect or interaction was significant, however the simple effects reached a significant level. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

The distribution of the dependent variable deviated from normality (K-S; $p < 0.05$), so simple effects were analyzed with Wilcoxon tests. One-tailed Wilcoxon tests showed a significant difference in matchings between communal positive and communal negative recognitions, $Z = -1.91$; $p = 0.028$. The same test also showed a difference between communal positive and agentic positive recognitions, $Z = -1.67$; $p = 0.048$.

Discussion

Our main hypothesis predicted stronger spontaneous trait inferences in the communion than agency domain. Our results showed this effect to be restricted to positive communal traits. The spontaneous trait inferences effect was also weaker for agentic content – both positive and negative. Despite the change of the method ascertaining spontaneous trait inferences, this pattern of results corresponds closely to the results obtained in our first two experiments.

EXPERIMENT 4

In this experiment we followed Na and Kitayama (2011) using a lexical decision task to ascertain spontaneous trait inferences in an indirect way, that is, without asking our participants for explicit trait inferences. Participants first memorized facial photos with trait-implying behaviors. Then they were presented with a series of stimuli and were asked to decide whether each was a meaningful word or a non-word. These stimuli included traits implied in the first phase and these words were identified more quickly when primed with associated faces. The present experiment used a similar procedure with the expectation that spontaneous trait inferences would be stronger for communal than agentic traits.

Method

Participants

Ninety-five female students of University of Gdansk took part in this experiment.

Materials

The procedure was devised with the E-prime 2.0 program, where 48 actor faces were selected from the same source as in Experiment 3. Also the same set of 24 traits was used covering a 2 (domain) x 2 (valence) x 6 (replication) design. Each trait was implied by two different sentences describing behaviors. Additionally 96 non-words were created.

Procedure

The procedure was run in groups of 1-5 participants in a single session consisting of two phases. The first was a memorization phase where participants were presented with faces and behavior descriptions with the instruction to memorize them. In this phase 24 faces appeared consecutively on a computer screen. After 2 seconds a behavioral sentence (implying but not mentioning a trait) was added that remained on the screen along with the face for another 5 seconds. After 24 trials, the same faces were presented once more, accompanied this time by different behaviors but implying the same traits. In the second phase a lexical decision task was given. On each trial of the task a trait name or a pseudoword was flashed on the screen as long as the participant answered the question as to whether it was a regular Polish word or a non-word (by pressing one of two designated computer keys). Before each word or non-word a face flashed for 1500 ms. In this part each face appeared twice, once with the matching trait and once with a non-word. Dispersed over the trials were 24 new (unrelated) faces. They were presented twice, once followed by one of the 24 critical traits and once followed by a non-word.

Variables

Reaction Times (RTs) were measured for words and non-words. Only the correct answers were analyzed. All RTs below 300 ms were deleted as well as those longer than 2000 ms (cf. Ferguson & Bargh, 2004). 1.5% of incorrect reactions and 4% of too slow and too fast reactions were eliminated. The mean RT for non-words was $M = 863.14$ ($SD = 315.59$).

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of hits as a function of the domain and valence (Experiment 3)

Valence	Communal	Agentic
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Positive	3.90 (1.50)	3.52 (1.30)
Negative	3.42 (1.63)	3.24 (1.70)

Results

A within-participant ANOVA was conducted in a 2 (relatedness of the face: related – unrelated) × 2 (domain: communion – agency) × 2 (valence: positive vs negative) design with RT as a dependent variable. Before analyses, RTs were subjected to logarithmic transformation. The analysis showed a main effect of the domain, $F(1,87) = 22.49$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.21$, with the mean RT significantly shorter for communal ($M = 710.06$; $SE = 13.24$), than agentic ($M = 734.15$; $SE = 14.68$) traits. Also a main effect of valence emerged, $F(1,87) = 54.31$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.38$, with mean RT shorter for positive ($M = 699.26$; $SE = 13.07$) than negative ($M = 744.95$; $SE = 14.98$) traits. There was also a significant interaction of all three factors, $F(1,87) = 4.76$; $p = 0.032$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$.

An analysis of simple effect was performed with t-tests for dependent measures. There was one one-tailed significant difference between related and unrelated traits RTs within communal positive traits, $t(90) = 1.64$; $p = 0.05$. Differences within this factor failed to reach significance in all other comparisons. Moreover, there was a simple effect within related RTs, $F(3,267) = 19.67$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$. The t tests showed that all the means differ ($p < 0.05$) except one pair, communal negative and agentic positive ($p > 0.05$). An analogous analysis revealed a significant difference for unrelated traits that showed a significant simple effect, $F(3,264) = 16.21$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$. The t tests showed significant differences among RTs ($p < 0.05$), except the pairs communal negative and agentic positive ($p > 0.05$) and communal negative and agentic positive ($p > 0.05$). Figure 5 shows the means with confidence intervals.
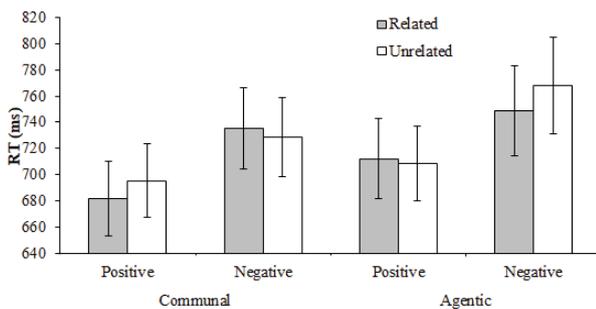

Figure 5. Mean RTs as a function of trait-relatedness (Experiment 4).

Discussion

Analysis of reaction times in the Lexical Decision Task revealed the main effect of domain with faster recognitions of communal than agentic traits as well as the main effect of valence with faster reactions to negative than positive traits. However, the domain by valence interaction revealed that the domain effect was restricted to positive traits only. It should be concluded that the present study observed the same effect as that observed in all previous experiments. We predicted faster reactions for related communal traits though we observed this effect for positive traits only. Another important finding was that RTs for related communal positive traits were shorter than for any other related trait condition.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Based on the primacy of communion over agency in social cognition, we developed the hypothesis that spontaneous trait inferences are stronger in the communal than agentic domain. We tested this hypothesis in four experiments which used three different methods of studying spontaneous trait inferences – the cued recall of distractors procedure, the false recognition paradigm, and the lexical decision task. Despite the variation in methods, all studies yielded the same result – spontaneous trait inferences appeared stronger in the communal than agentic domain, but only for traits of positive valence.

This difference between communal traits of different valence may be related to differences between reflective and impulsive systems of information processing (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). The two systems differ in (1) how information is represented, (2) what kind of psychological processes govern their operation, and (3) the degree of automaticity of processing. According to our results the behavior representing a social positive interaction might promote trait inference because the impulsive system is based on automatic processes that promote latent trait inferences. Many theories and results explain how important it is for the cognitive system to detect dangerous factors in the environment (Czapinski, 1988; Peeters, 2007). Social behavior however is much more complex and requires the cognitive system to allocate more resources to context understanding (Fiske, 1980) and also plan an appropriate reaction.

The reflective system is based on deliberate processing that leads to an appropriate response in a situation that might be harmful. These situations require allocation of more cognitive resources which can lead to a more complex representation of the event (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). Through deliberate processing, not only do people have more insight into the situation but it also prompts "Why" questioning (Abele, 1985; Czapinski, 1988; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985; Weiner, 1985). According to this understanding, in a dangerous situation it is of primary importance to avoid harm (losing money) rather than generating a trait reflecting dishonesty. Knowing how and why someone is stealing from others can be more useful than knowing that someone is a thief or that they are dishonest. The action that is to be taken is complex and requires deliberate processing (Czapinski, 1988). Those processes allocate resources and do not lead to spontaneous trait inference.

Behavioral research suggests that learning about other people in the domains of morality and ability is characterized by an asymmetry in diagnosticity. Both immoral (negative communion) and competent (positive agency) behaviors are seen as more diagnostic for a person's overall morality and competence than moral (positive communion) and incompetent (negative agency)

behaviors (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987; Wojciszke, 2005). Research also shows findings that cold-but-competent traits are clustered more densely than traits falling into the warm-but-incompetent category (Bruckmüller & Abele, 2013). To the extent that a category is more densely clustered in memory, activating one element falling into this category will jointly activate more associated elements in this category, for example, in terms of categorizing an element (such as an observed behavior) as "immoral" or "competent." In this case, the ability of the trait cue feature in the STI process may be limited.

Methods allowing us to distinguish which processes are involved in information processing should be used in order to better understand the mechanisms responsible for inferences about community and agency. One of the common methods used in the study of cognitive mechanisms for monitoring sources is defined by a memory paradigm, in which the effectiveness of the task depends on the ability to distinguish the original encoded information from similar information, so the source of error is the effect of familiarity caused by STI. The Forced Choice paradigm coupled with the applied Process Dissociation Procedure is a method of estimating the probability of occurrence of automatic and controlled processes (Jacoby, 1991). The use of these methods demonstrated that when participants were asked to exactly memorize sentences describing behavior, the controlled component was diminished in comparison with participants whose task was to develop a general opinion about the presented behaviors. It was also shown that the additional cognitive load diminishes the use of controlled processes compared to the no-load condition (Ferreira, Garcia-Marques, Hamilton, Ramos, Uleman, & Jeronimo, 2012).

It seems to us that knowing to what extent automatic and controlled processes are involved in the processing of social information will allow for a better understanding of our research results. According to our thinking, automatic processes are responsible for the inference of positive community features. We assume that the participation of controlled processes inhibits the process of spontaneous inferences of features in terms of negative community features. Therefore, the The Forced Choice paradigm and Process Dissociation Procedure method should be used in future research when considering community and agency.

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APPENDIX 1

Traits used in Experiment 1 and their attributes: length (l) (number of letters in Polish), frequency (fr), communal content (com) and agentic content (age) (Experiment 1).

Communion								
Positive					**Negative**			
	l.	**fr.**	**com**	**age**		**l.**	**fr.**	**com**	**age**
Kind-hearted	8	27	4.43	1.35	Cruel	7	35	-4.05	0.25
Honest	7	33	3.81	1.30	Malicious	8	26	-3.86	-0.25
Friendly	10	30	4.10	1.30	Envious	8	20	-3.81	-0.45
Caring	10	34	3.90	0.45	Arrogant	9	29	-3.43	-0.15
Mean	8.75	31	4.06	1.11	Mean	8	27.50	-3.79	-0.15

Agency								
	l.	**fr.**	**com**	**age**		**l.**	**fr.**	**com**	**age**
Ambitious	7	40	1.19	4.75	Lazy	6	14	-1.57	-3.60
Persistent	8	30	1.90	4.40	Timid	7	24	-1.24	-3.30
Diligent	9	29	2.05	4.25	Mindless	9	35	-1.76	-3.10
Talented	6	35	1.19	3.85	Resigned	12	33	-1.24	-3.10
Mean	7.50	33.50	1.58	4.31	Mean	8.5	26.5	-1.45	-3.28

APPENDIX 2

Traits and behavior descriptions implying the traits used in Experiments 1 and 2.

Traits	Behaviors
Communal positive	
Kind-hearted	Warmly welcomed everyone at a party
Honest	Gave back the change in a market as he got too much
Friendly	Loaned notes to a colleague approaching the same exam
Caring	Changed compresses of her mother a few times a day
Communal negative	
Cruel	Didn't feed the dog because it had destroyed his slippers
Malicious	Cut off hot water while his sister was taking a shower
Envious	Scratched his neighbor's brand new car with a nail
Arrogant	Started speaking while the other person had not yet finished
Agentic positive	
Ambitious	Started his first skiing practice on difficult hillsides
Persistent	He's finished the race though it was raining and the wind blew
Diligent	He did not take a day off for three weeks
Talented	Learnt a foreign language by himself within two years
Agentic negative	
Lazy	Watched television and played computer games all day long
Timid	Was afraid of going to the cellar to pick a jar of compote
Mindless	Left the candles lit at home and went to visit a friend
Resigned	Discontinued training as he noticed that it didn't make any progress

APPENDIX 3

Set of target items used in Experiment 3 and their attributes: length (l) – of the original Polish words, frequency (fr), community (com) and agency (ag).

Communal								
Positive					**Negative**			
	l.	fr.	com	ag		l.	fr.	com	ag
Kind-hearted	8	27	4.43	1.35	Cruel	7	35	-4.05	0.25
Honest	7	33	3.81	1.30	Malicious	8	26	-3.86	-0.25
Friendly	10	30	4.10	1.30	Envious	8	20	-3.81	-0.45
Caring	10	34	3.90	0.45	Arogant	9	29	-3.43	-0.15
Chummy	9	29	4.24	1.55	Egoistic	11	26	-3.76	2.45
Loyal	7	20	4.24	1.10	Insincere	8	40	-3.43	0.20
Mean	8.5	28.83	4.12	1.18	Mean	8.5	29.33	-3.72	0.34

Agentic								
	l.	fr.	mor	ag		l.	fr.	mor	ag
Ambitious	7	40	1.19	4.75	Helpless	8	32	0.14	-3.50
Persistent	8	30	1.90	4.40	Timid	7	24	-1.24	-3.30
Diligent	9	29	2.05	4.25	Mindless	9	35	-1.76	-3.10
Talented	6	35	1.19	3.85	Resigned	12	33	-1.24	-3.10
Energetic	10	28	1.86	4.25	Resourceless	10	35	-0.33	-3.80
Inteligent	12	34	1.33	4.35	Lazy	6	14	-1.57	-3.60
Mean	8.67	32.67	1.59	4.31	Mean	8.67	28.83	-1.00	-3.40

APPENDIX 4

Traits and behavior descriptions implying the traits used in Experiment 3.

Trait	Communal positive
Kind-hearted	Warmly welcomed everyone at a party
	Sent Christmas cards to coworkers
Friendly	Changed shirts with an opponent after the game
	Smiled at every client entering the shop
Loyal	Has not left the team even though this team seemed to lose every time
	Wore a t-shirt with his university logo even though he was thrown out
Honest	Returned a lost wallet to a police station
	Gave back the change in a market as he got too much
Chummy	Loaned notes to a colleague approaching the same exam
	Loaned his laptop to a colleague who was robbed on a train
Caring	Changed compresses of her mother a few times a day
	Took a child to work as he didn't want to leave it home alone
	Communal negative
Cruel	Didn't feed the dog because it had destroyed his slippers
	Let a homeless person freeze to death in a park
Insincere	Offered his help at work even though he knew he is not going to move a finger
	Complimented his mother-in-law who he hated
Malicious	Let out the air of his colleague's bicycle wheels in front of school
	Cut off hot water while his sister was taking a shower
Envious	Scratched his neighbor's brand new car with a nail
	Took someone else's mail and threw it away
Egoistic	Didn't share sandwiches with someone who was hungry as well
	Again forgot about his children's birthday
Arrogant	Started speaking while the other person had not finished yet
	Didn't shake a disliked colleague's hand
	Agentic positive
Ambitious	Started to learn programming with an advanced group
	Started his first skiing practice on difficult hillsides
Persistent	Has finished the race though it was raining and the wind blew
	Studied until 4 AM every day to pass his exams

Agentic positive	
Inteligent	Correctly solved all the difficult tasks and got maximum points
	Got his PhD in math last week
Energetic	Got up early in the morning and went running
	Made breakfast, took a shower and cleaned room within 20 minutes
Diligent	Did not take a day off for three weeks
	Doesn't have a backlog and is advanced with his responsibilities
Talented	Learnt a foreign language by himself within two years
	Learned to play the guitar much faster than any other person
Agentic negative	
Shiftless	Couldn't find an address in town and didn't ask anyone about it
	Can't deal with his things in the offices letting himself be pushed around
Lazy	Didn't do anything for a week to catch up with his backlog at work
	Watched television and played computer games all day long
Helpless	Couldn't defend himself against sarcastic comments from his colleagues
	Got a flat tire and waited at the roadside for a few hours for help
Timid	Was afraid of going to the cellar to pick a jar of compote
	Did not cross a bridge as the floor was made of glass
Mindless	Drove through the city on a motorbike at 200 km/h
	Left the candles lit at home and went to visit a friend
Resigned	Didn't even take a second attempt to try to pass an exam
	Discontinued training when he noticed a lack of progress