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## Gender and agency versus communion at the threshold of adulthood

**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to verify the importance of reinforcing a sex stereotype on participants' identification with this role. The results were analysed as a function of both biological sex (63 women and 65 men) and psychological gender (58 sex-typed individuals and 70 androgynous individuals). In the study the Psychological Gender Inventory was used, as well as a scale measuring Agency and Communion, a scale measuring Unmitigated Agency and Unmitigated Communion, lists of sentences containing stereotypes of the male sex and the female sex, and sentences that were neutral with regard to sex. The results showed that feminine women ascribed more female characteristics to themselves regardless of whether the role that was associated with their biological sex was reinforced or not. Men showing characteristics of both sexes ascribed a similar level of unmitigated communion and agency to themselves irrespective of whether the sex stereotype was reinforced or not.

**Key words:** psychological gender, agency, communion, early adulthood

### Psychological gender vs agency and communion at the threshold of adulthood

Entering adulthood is an extremely important period in the life of every human being. In late adolescence and in early young adulthood one's mental life becomes consolidated. Young people have already been through the turbulent developmental period which entailed the need to simultaneously fulfil many developmental tasks which were often difficult to reconcile. Among such tasks is, for example, the development of one's identity (Erikson, 2004), including psychosexual identity, which is inextricably linked to the topic of psychological gender.

Human psychological gender is connected with the spontaneous readiness to use gender dimensions in relation to oneself and the world. Sandra Lipsitz Bem's (1974, 1981) gender schema theory is one of the most extensively verified conceptions of psychological gender which have been developed as part of social constructivism. According to this author, people may have different proportions of male and female characteristics regardless of their biological sex, and masculinity and femininity constitute two independent dimensions. Psychological gender, which develops as a result of acquiring cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, functions as a schema on the basis of which we select information and which influences our expectations

about acquired characteristics, i.e. roles, attitudes and behaviours that are typical of men and women as well as typical of ourselves as men or women (Bem, 2000). Depending on whether a gender schema is a part of one's self-schema, different configurations of psychological gender can be identified. Bem (1988) points to four such categories, of which two can be described as schematic, and two as aschematic (Dakowicz, 2000). The first category comprises sex-typed individuals (feminine women and masculine men) and cross-sex-typed individuals (masculine women and feminine men). The second category is made up of undifferentiated individuals (who have not developed characteristics that are considered to be typically male or typically female in a given culture) and androgynous individuals (who have both typically male and typically female characteristics). The results of many studies indicate that psychological gender has a significant influence on a human being's functioning, behaviour and opportunities for development (Kuczyńska, 1992). It is worth emphasizing that, in Bem's opinion, the androgynous type can function the most effectively because of a broader range of possible behaviours that allow one to easily adapt to changing conditions and because such an individual is not limited by stereotypes of gender roles (Bem, Martyna & Watson, 1976; Andersen & Bem, 1981).

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The concepts of agency and communion are related to masculinity and femininity. These terms were introduced by Bakan (1966) in 1966 and the conception of these two orientations as broadly defined personality traits was developed by Helgeson (1994, 2003). The two orientations refer to a relatively stable differentiation between the ways in which people see themselves and these are also key components of their identity. Agency is understood as “a focus on self and on oneself as achieving goals” (Wojciszke, 2010, p. 173), whereas communion means “a focus on others and on one’s relationships with others” (Wojciszke, 2010, p. 173). Apart from agency and communion there are also extreme forms of these modalities, i.e. unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion. These are so strong that they suppress the other dimension, which has negative consequences for one’s mental health. Unmitigated agency (through communion requirements) leads to negating relationships with people and ignoring their goals, which results, among other things, in negative attitude towards people, conflicting behaviour, destructive behaviour with dominance or revenge traits, resistance to seeking social support as well as lacking the ability to give such support or express emotions. Unmitigated communion (through agency requirements) on the other hand, involves a strong focus on other people and relationships with them, leads to negating own agency and abandoning own goals, which as a result implies lack of the need for support from the others, as well as destructive behaviours in relationships, such as overprotectiveness, invasive behaviours, excessive control over a partner (Helgeson, 2003). Out of these two attitudes, the extreme form of communion may appear as socially more acceptable. According to Wojciszke (2010) the concepts of agency and communion roughly correspond to the concepts of masculinity and femininity, and as the two last terms are unclear, they should even be replaced by ‘agency’ and ‘communion’.

One of the possible interpretations of the opposites: masculinity vs femininity is related to subjective differences, i.e. characteristics that men and women attribute to themselves (Wojciszke, 2010). Currently it can be observed that self-perceptions are becoming less consistent with gender stereotypes (Abele, 2003; Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Contemporary society wants to be regarded as neutral with regard to sex which, according to rules prohibiting any stereotyping that are being adopted increasingly more often, should not determine one’s rights and obligations or the position one occupies, and which should not be a reason for domination or mutual dependence. In addition, today’s world is equally accessible to the representatives of both sexes, which is exemplified by the fact that people take on many social roles that are traditionally associated with and meant for one of the sexes only (Melosik, 2002). Increasingly more men and women are reporting to have characteristics that are stereotypically associated with the opposite sex apart from characteristics that are specific to their own biological sex. As it has already been mentioned, these individuals can be called androgynous. Bem (1978) emphasizes that androgyny should be treated as an attitude taken by people who do not pay attention to cultural definitions of gender,

and not as an integration of masculinity and femininity. The above-mentioned tendency mainly concerns the generation of young people who are entering adulthood and were born after the period of intense political transformation (Melosik, 2002). As research shows (Wojciszke & Szlendak, 2010), both men and women begin to perceive themselves more in accordance with the stereotype of their own biological sex after their sex-related self-stereotypes have been subtly activated. The research concerning this subject matter has not so far verified the role of psychological gender. As for people having different psychological genders (sex-typed and androgynous), it is interesting whether their self-ascribed level of agency and communion changes after they are reminded about characteristics that are typical of their biological sex (for example, through reinforcing the stereotypical role associated with a given sex). The research presented in this article focuses on sex-typed individuals (feminine women, masculine men) as well as androgynous individuals (androgynous women and androgynous men). It can be assumed, that sex-typed individuals, who shaped their self-concept on social definitions of masculinity and femininity, and who can be characterised by greater readiness to behave in line with these definitions and a tendency to avoid behaviours, which are in contradiction to such definitions (Bem, 1984), will be strongly influenced by the sex-related stereotype activation, which will then result in a considerable increase of their assessment in the area related to the gender role and a substantial decrease in the area not related to the gender role (both in unmitigated and extreme forms). Androgynous individuals on the other hand, who unlike sex-typed individuals, are not that easily influenced by social pressure (Bem, 1975), and are better at managing information related to gender dimension (Bem, 1984), will be prone to the stereotype activation to a considerably smaller extent.

### Present Hypotheses

The aim of the research study was to find the answer to the following question: Will reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with the biological sex of people entering early adulthood cause them to identify with this role to a greater extent? Two hypotheses were put forward: It was assumed that young men would ascribe more (mitigated and unmitigated) agency than communion to themselves after the stereotypical male role had been reinforced, whereas young women would attribute more (mitigated and unmitigated) communion than agency to themselves after the stereotypical female role had been reinforced.

It was also assumed that young masculine and androgynous men would ascribe more (mitigated and unmitigated) agency than communion to themselves after the stereotypical male role had been reinforced, whereas young feminine and androgynous women would attribute more (mitigated and unmitigated) communion than agency to themselves after the stereotypical female role had been reinforced.

## Method

### Participants

A group of 160 persons aged 18-21 (80 women) were studied at the first stage of the research and 137 persons (68 women) participated in the second stage. The hypothesis was tested by conducting a study among a group of 128 people (63 women); cross-sex-typed individuals and undifferentiated individuals were excluded from the statistical analyses. The women's mean age was 19.5 ( $SD = 0.77$ ), and the men's mean age was 19.4 ( $SD = 0.72$ ). All participants were recruited from among first-year university students. They were informed that they were taking part in a study of sex-related characteristics and that the research would be carried out in two stages.

### Procedure and measures

The participants first provided their personal particulars, i.e. their sex, year of birth and the year of graduation from secondary school. Then they filled in a short questionnaire about the major they had chosen and the reasons behind this decision<sup>1</sup>. Next, they filled in the Psychological Gender Inventory which had been developed by Kuczyńska (1992). This inventory consists of two scales: of femininity and of masculinity. Participants are to rate how each of the 35 characteristics relates to their own behaviour on a five-point scale (1 – “I don't relate to this at all”; 5 – “this is exactly me”). The inventory measures the compatibility of one's behaviours with cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity. Following this stage of the study, the participants' psychological gender was established.

Three days later, the participants were asked to read 17 sentences and count how many words there were in each sentence in order that the stereotypical roles associated with the biological sexes could be reinforced. The study was carried out under two conditions of reinforcement of the roles, i.e. of the male and of the female role, as well as under control conditions that were neutral with respect to sex. In each of the subgroups that had been identified depending on the psychological gender, one half of the respondents were subjected to experimental manipulation (reinforcement), and the other half were studied under control conditions. Under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex, men were given a list of sentences containing stereotypes of the male sex (e.g. “The possibility of competing motivates one to act”) and women received a list of sentences containing stereotypes of the female sex (e.g. “People should talk about their feelings”); participants under control conditions were shown sentences that were neutral with regard to sex (e.g. “Books broaden one's horizons”). The lists of sentences that were used during experimental manipulation had been pretested by competent judges with regard to their adjustment to experimental conditions (reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex) vs

control conditions (neutrality in the context of biological sex).

Following experimental manipulation, the participants completed a scale measuring Agency ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and Communion ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) as well as a scale measuring Unmitigated Agency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ) and Unmitigated Communion ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ) which had been developed by Wojciszke and Szlendak (2010). The first scale contains a list of 30 characteristics, of which 15 refers to agency (e.g. “enterprising”), and 15 to communion (e.g. “compromise-seeking”). Each participant is to indicate the extent to which a given characteristic describes him or her. Answers are given by using a seven-point scale, where 1 means “definitely no” and 7 “definitely yes”. The scale measures mitigated forms of agency and communion. The second scale consists of 22 sentences, of which 11 refer to unmitigated communion (e.g. “Good relations with others are more important to me than success”), and 11 to unmitigated agency (e.g. “I achieve my goals regardless of what others think”). Each participant indicates the extent to which he or she relates to a given opinion (1 – “definitely no”, 7 – “definitely yes”). The scale measures extreme (unmitigated) types of agency and communion.

## Results

### Biological sex versus psychological gender

The analysis of the results concerning psychological gender that had been obtained at the first stage of the study ( $N = 137$ ) showed that nearly half of the participants (46,9%) belonged to a group of androgynous individuals showing both female and male characteristics, irrespective of their biological sex. 40% of the participants were sex-typed (feminine women and masculine men). 9.4% were individuals with dominant characteristics that were typical of the opposite sex (cross-sex-typed individuals), i.e. masculine women (10%) in the group of women and feminine men (8.8%) in the group of men. There were registered 3.7% of undifferentiated individuals in the studied group (5% in the group of women and 2.5% in the group of men). The exact distribution of the results is presented in the below table.

**Table 1. Psychological gender vs biological sex - results distribution**

Psychological gender	Women	Men	Total
Sex-typed	40,0 %	40,0 %	40,0 %
Androgynous	45,0 %	48,8 %	46,9 %
Cross-sex-typed (masculine women, feminine men)	10,0 %	8,8 %	9,4 %
Undifferentiated individuals	5 %	2,4 %	3,7 %

Further analysis, in accordance with the hypotheses, focused on the group of sex-typed and androgynous individuals ( $N=128$ ).

<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from the questionnaire about selecting one's major are not discussed in this article.

### Biological sex and psychological gender versus reinforcement of the stereotypical role

In order to test the proposed hypotheses, four analyses of variance were conducted. The first analysis of them used a 2 (condition: reinforcement vs no reinforcement of the sex role) x 2 (biological sex) x 2 (content: agency vs communion) experimental design with repeated measures on the last factor. This analysis showed a main effect of biological sex,  $F(1, 124) = 12.91, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.09$ , which means that regardless of the remaining factors, women evaluated themselves higher ( $M = 5.22; SD = 0.48$ ) than men ( $M = 4.98; SD = 0.59$ ). This effect appeared moderated by an interaction of biological sex with the content of ascribed characteristics,  $F(1, 124) = 84.32, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.41$ . This means that women ascribed more communion ( $M = 5.45; SD = 0.42$ ) than agency ( $M = 4.98; SD = 0.59; t(62) = 5.37, p < 0.001, d = 0.93$ ) to themselves, whereas men did the opposite, that is ascribed more agency ( $M = 5.23; SD = 0.48$ ) than communion ( $M = 4.74; SD = 0.49; t(64) = 5.91, p < 0.001, d = 1.02$ ) to themselves.

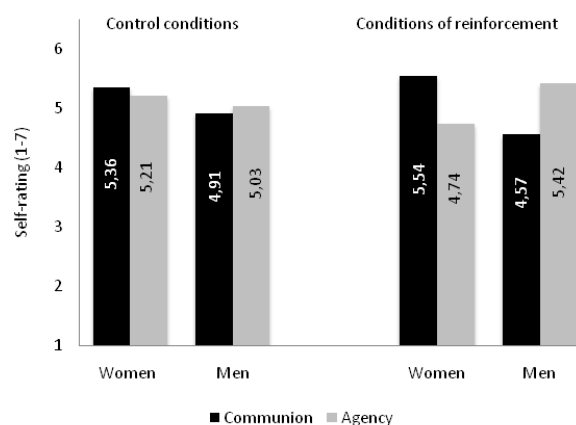
However, this interaction appeared further moderated by a second-degree interaction between biological sex, the content of ascribed characteristics, and reinforcement of the stereotypical sex role,  $F(1, 124) = 43.38, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.26$ . As shown in the right-hand panel of Figure 1, the differences related to the way in which the participants ascribed agency and communion to themselves were only visible under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given sex: women ascribed more communion ( $M = 5.54; SD = 0.37$ ) than agency ( $M = 4.74; SD = 0.69; t(31) = 5.91, p < 0.001, d = 1.45$ ) to themselves, whereas men did the opposite, that is ascribed more agency ( $M = 5.42; SD = 0.47$ ) than communion ( $M = 4.57; SD = 0.47; t(31) = 8.41, p < 0.001, d = 1.9$ ) to themselves. It is worth noting that under conditions of reinforcement women were characterised by greater communion ( $M = 5.54; SD = 0.37$ ) than men ( $M = 4.57; SD = 0.47; t(56.394) = 9.28, p < 0.001, d = 2.29$ ). In the group of men the level of agency was higher ( $M = 5.42; SD = 0.47$ ) than in the group of women ( $M = 4.74; SD = 0.69; t(51.848) = 4.66, p < 0.001, d = 1.15$ ).

Under no-reinforcement conditions the only significant effect showed that women ascribed more communion ( $M = 5.36; SD = 0.46$ ) to themselves than men ( $M = 4.91; SD = 0.44; t(62) = 3.97, p < 0.001, d = 0.99$ ). All of the other simple effects were insignificant ( $ps > 0.07$ ).

As for mitigated forms of agency and communion, an influence of the sex stereotype activation on self-reporting the area related to the gender role and the area not related to the role is similar in the group of women and the group of men. The sex stereotype activation has an influence on the evaluation increase in the area related to the role and the decrease in the area not related to the role. Women ascribe more communion to themselves ( $M_{w0} = 5.36; SD = 0.46; M_{w1} = 5.54; SD = 0.37; t(61) = 2.76, p < 0.01, d = 0.69$ )<sup>2</sup>, whereas

their self-ascribed agency level is lower ( $M_{s0} = 5.21; SD = 0.33; M_{s1} = 4.74; SD = 0.69; t(44.244) = 3.41, p < 0.001, d = 0.89$ )<sup>3</sup>. Men ascribe more agency to themselves ( $M_{s0} = 5.03; SD = 0.46; M_{s1} = 5.42; SD = 0.47; t(63) = 3.5, p < 0.001, d = 0.84$ ), while their self-evaluation of communion level is lower ( $M_{w0} = 4.91; SD = 0.44; M_{w1} = 4.57; SD = 0.47; t(63) = 2.94, p < 0.01, d = 0.76$ ).

**Figure 1. The level of agency and communion in the group of women and men under control conditions and under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex.**



The second analysis of variance was carried out in a 2 (conditions: reinforcement of a given role vs no reinforcement) x 2 (biological sex) x 2 (content: unmitigated agency vs unmitigated communion) design with repeated measures on the last factor. The analysis showed two main effects, i.e. of a characteristic and of biological sex. The main effect of content,  $F(1, 124) = 23.57, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.16$ , shows that regardless of the remaining factors, the participants reported a higher level of unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.55; SD = 0.67$ ) than of unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.33; SD = 0.57$ ). The main effect of a sex,  $F(1, 124) = 5.47, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.04$ , shows that women reported a higher level of both contents ( $M = 4.54; SD = 0.49$ ) than men ( $M = 4.34; SD = 0.56$ ).

The analysis revealed also two first-degree interactions: between biological sex and content,  $F(1, 124) = 85.99, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.40$ , as well as between a condition (reinforcement vs no reinforcement) with content,  $F(1, 124) = 6.87, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.05$ . The first interaction reveals, that women ascribed to themselves higher unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.87; SD = 0.53$ ) than unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.21; SD = 0.42; t(62) = 7.72, p < 0.001, d = 1.38$ ), which was the opposite among men, whose self-ascribed unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.42; SD = 0.60$ ) was higher than unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.21; SD = 0.65; t(64) = 3.47, p < 0.001, d = 0.34$ ). The second interaction reveals, that under the stereotype activation the difference between the level of unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.28; SD = 0.6$ ) and unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.63; SD = 0.78; t(63) = 2.88, p < 0.01, d = 0.5$ ) was higher than the difference between

<sup>2</sup> Mw0 – mean communion, no activation, Mw1 – mean communion, under activation conditions

<sup>3</sup> Ms0 – mean agency, no activation, Ms1 – mean agency, under activation conditions

unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.36$ ;  $SD = 0.45$ ) and unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.45$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ;  $t(63) = 2.47$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.18$ ) under neutral conditions.

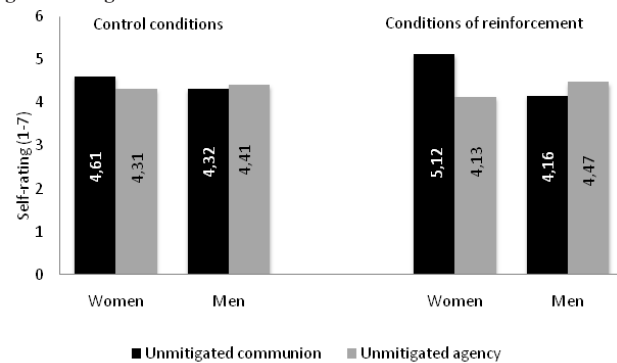
However, both these interactions were moderated by an interaction between all three factors: biological sex, content, and reinforcement of the sex role,  $F(1, 124) = 25.01$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.17$ . As shown in the right-hand panel of Figure 2, much bigger differences in the level of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion among women and men were revealed under conditions of sex role reinforcement: women ascribed much more unmitigated communion ( $M = 5.12$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ) than unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ ;  $t(31) = 7.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.96$ ) to themselves, whereas men did the opposite, i.e. ascribed more unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.47$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ) than unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.16$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ;  $t(31) = 2.82$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.46$ ) to themselves. Under such conditions women were characterised by greater unmitigated communion ( $M = 5.12$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ) as compared to men ( $M = 4.16$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ;  $t(58.119) = 6.12$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.54$ ), whereas men were characterised by greater unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.47$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ) as compared to women ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ ;  $t(56.394) = 2.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.58$ ). In the no-reinforcement condition, smaller differences in the levels of reported characteristics were revealed both for women and men (women:  $M_{uc} = 4.61$ ;  $SD = 0.38$ ;  $M_{ua} = 4.31$ ;  $SD = 0.34$ ;  $t(30) = 5.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.83$ ; men:  $M_{ua} = 4.41$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ;  $M_{uc} = 4.32$ ;  $SD = 0.60$ ;  $t(32) = 3.01$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.16$ )<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, in the group of women the level of unmitigated communion was higher ( $M = 4.61$ ;  $SD = 0.38$ ) than among men ( $M = 4.32$ ;  $SD = 0.60$ ;  $t(54.793) = 2.28$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.57$ ). All of the other simple effects were insignificant ( $ps > 0.08$ ).

As for unmitigated forms of agency and communion, the direct influence of stereotype activation on self-report in the area related and not related to the role differs between women and men. Under activation, women ascribe to themselves more unmitigated communion ( $M_{w0} = 4.61$ ;  $SD = 0.38$ ;  $M_{w1} = 5.12$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ;  $t(64.581) = 4.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.11$ ), but do not lower significantly their self-evaluation of unmitigated agency ( $M_{s0} = 4.31$ ;  $SD = 0.43$ ;  $M_{s1} = 4.13$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ ) at the same time. Under the influence of the stereotype activation, men ascribe to themselves neither significantly more agency ( $M_{s0} = 4.41$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ;  $M_{s1} = 4.47$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ) than in neutral conditions, nor significantly less communion ( $M_{w0} = 4.32$ ;  $SD = 0.60$ ;  $M_{w1} = 4.16$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ).

The third analysis of variance was carried out in a 2 (reinforcement condition)  $\times$  4 (psychological gender)  $\times$  2 (content: agency vs communion) experimental design with repeated measures on the last factor. The analysis showed a main effect of psychological gender,  $F(1, 124) = 5.76$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.13$ , which means that regardless of the remaining factors, feminine ( $M = 5.13$ ;  $SD = 0.52$ ) and androgynous women ( $M = 5.29$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ ) evaluated themselves higher than masculine ( $M = 4.98$ ;  $SD = 0.42$ )

androgynous men ( $M = 4.99$ ;  $SD = 0.51$ ). These effects were moderated by an interaction between psychological gender and the type of ascribed characteristics,  $F(1, 120) = 31.82$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.43$ . This interaction means that feminine women ascribed more communion ( $M = 5.45$ ;  $SD = 0.34$ ) than agency ( $M = 4.80$ ;  $SD = 0.44$ ;  $t(28) = 5.12$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.31$ ) to themselves and that androgynous women also ascribed more communion ( $M = 5.46$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ ) than agency ( $M = 5.12$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ;  $t(33) = 2.75$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.67$ ) to themselves. But masculine men ascribed more agency ( $M = 5.20$ ;  $SD = 0.52$ ) than communion ( $M = 4.76$ ;  $SD = 0.52$ ;  $t(28) = 4.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.01$ ) to themselves and androgynous men also ascribed more agency ( $M = 5.24$ ;  $SD = 0.57$ ) than communion ( $M = 4.73$ ;  $SD = 0.45$ ;  $t(28) = 4.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.99$ ) to themselves.

**Figure 2.** The level of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion in the group of women and men under control conditions and under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex.



However, the above interaction is moderated by a second-degree interaction between three factors: psychological gender, content, and the sex role reinforcement,  $F(1, 120) = 17.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.30$ . Under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex, feminine women ascribed more communion ( $M = 5.46$ ;  $SD = 0.34$ ) than agency ( $M = 4.40$ ;  $SD = 0.60$ ;  $t(14) = 5.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 2.15$ ) to themselves. A similar dependence was visible for androgynous women – the level of communion was higher ( $M = 5.61$ ;  $SD = 0.37$ ) than the level of agency ( $M = 5.01$ ;  $SD = 0.67$ ;  $t(16) = 3.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 1.10$ ). In the group of masculine men, after the stereotypical role associated with the male sex was reinforced, the level of agency was significantly higher ( $M = 5.16$ ;  $SD = 0.32$ ) than the level of communion ( $M = 4.55$ ;  $SD = 0.51$ ;  $t(14) = 4.65$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ,  $d = 1.42$ ), similarly to the group of androgynous men where the level of agency ( $M = 5.65$ ;  $SD = 0.38$ ) was higher than the level of communion ( $M = 4.59$ ;  $SD = 0.43$ ;  $t(16) = 7.95$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 2.61$ ). It is worth noting that feminine women were characterised by a higher level of communion ( $M = 5.46$ ;  $SD = 0.34$ ) than masculine men ( $M = 4.55$ ;  $SD = 0.51$ ;

<sup>4</sup>  $M_{ua}$  – mean unmitigated agency;  $M_{uc}$  – mean unmitigated communion

$t(24.693) = 5.69, p < 0.001, d = 2.09$ ) and androgynous men ( $M = 4.59; SD = 0.43; t(30) = 6.16, p < 0.001, d = 2.24$ ). Androgynous women were also characterised by a higher level of communion ( $M = 5.61; SD = 0.37$ ) than masculine men ( $M = 4.55; SD = 0.51; t(25.222) = 6.49, p < 0.001, d = 2.37$ ) and androgynous men ( $M = 4.59; SD = 0.43; t(32) = 7.35, p < 0.001, d = 2.54$ ). Masculine men ascribed more agency ( $M = 5.16; SD = 0.32$ ) to themselves than feminine women ( $M = 4.44; SD = 0.60; t(28) = 4.06, p < 0.001, d = 1.49$ ), and androgynous men ascribed a higher level of agency ( $M = 5.65; SD = 0.38$ ) to themselves than feminine women ( $M = 4.44; SD = 0.60; t(30) = 6.84, p < 0.001, d = 2.4$ ) and androgynous women ( $M = 5.01; SD = 0.67; t(25.514) = 3.38, p < 0.001, d = 1.17$ ).

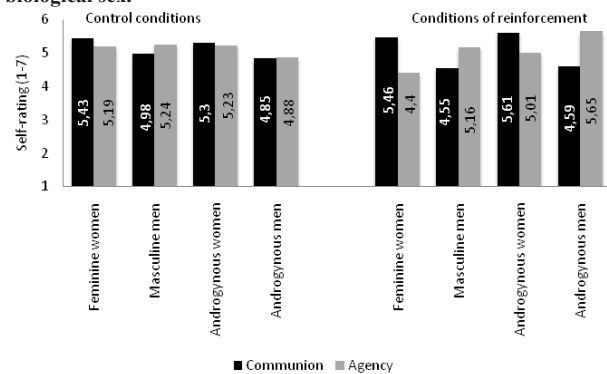
In the control condition, however, the difference in self-rating of communal ( $M = 5.43; SD = 0.35$ ) and agentic characteristics ( $M = 5.19; SD = 0.31$ ) was visible only among feminine women,  $t(14) = 2.71, p < 0.05, d = 0.73$ . In case of masculine men, the difference between self-ascribed agency  $M_{so} = 5.24; SD = 0.36$  and communion ( $M = 4.98; SD = 0.45$ ) turned out to be statistically insignificant.

In addition, feminine women ascribed a higher level of communion ( $M = 5.43; SD = 0.34$ ) to themselves than masculine men ( $M = 4.98; SD = 0.45; t(26) = 2.94, p < 0.01, d = 1.12$ ) and androgynous men ( $M = 4.85; SD = 0.44; t(31) = 4.06, p < 0.001, d = 1.47$ ). Androgynous women were characterised by a higher level of communion ( $M = 5.3; SD = 0.54$ ) as compared to the group of androgynous men ( $M = 4.85; SD = 0.44; t(34) = 2.71, p < 0.01, d = 0.91$ ). Androgynous men, however, ascribed a lower level of agency ( $M = 4.88; SD = 0.46$ ) to themselves than feminine women ( $M = 5.19; SD = 0.31; t(31) = 2.14, p < 0.05, d = 0.79$ ) and androgynous women ( $M = 5.23; SD = 0.34; t(34) = 2.58, p < 0.05, d = 0.86$ ). All of the other simple effects were insignificant ( $ps > 0.09$ ).

As for mitigated forms of agency and communion, the influence of the sex stereotype activation on self-report in the area related and not related to the gender role is similar in the group of feminine women and masculine men. The sex stereotype activation does not influence an increase of an evaluation in the area related to the role, but influences an evaluation decrease in the area not related to the role. Women report similarly on their community under both conditions ( $M_{wo} = 5.43; SD = 0.34$ ) ( $M_{wl} = 5.46; SD = 0.34$ ), lowering the level of own agency at the same time ( $M_{so} = 5.19; SD = 0.31; M_{sl} = 4.4; SD = 0.60; t(27) = 4.11, p < 0.001, d = 1.65$ ). Men describe their agency in a similar way ( $M_{so} = 5.24; SD = 0.36$ ) ( $M_{sl} = 5.16; SD = 0.32$ ), lowering the level of own communion at the same time ( $M_{wo} = 4.98; SD = 0.45; M_{wl} = 4.55; SD = 0.51; t(27) = 2.38, p < 0.05, d = 0.89$ ). As for mitigated forms of agency and communion, the influence of the sex stereotype activation on self-report in the area related and not related to the gender role is similar also in the group of androgynous women and androgynous men. In this case, however, the sex stereotype activation does influence an increase of an evaluation in the area related to the role, but does not influence an evaluation decrease in the area not related to the role. Androgynous women ascribe to themselves more

communion as a consequence of the activation influence ( $M_{wo} = 5.3; SD = 0.54; M_{wl} = 5.61; SD = 0.37; t(32) = 2.68, p < 0.05, d = 0.23$ ), with no significant decrease in agency ( $M = 5.23; SD = 0.34; M = 5.01; SD = 0.67$ ). Androgynous men, however, influenced by self-stereotype, ascribe to themselves more agentic characteristics ( $M_{so} = 4.48; SD = 0.46; M_{sl} = 5.65; SD = 0.38; t(34) = 5.41, p < 0.001, d = 2.77$ ), they describe their own communion similarly in both conditions ( $M_{wo} = 4.85; SD = 0.44; M_{wl} = 4.59; SD = 0.43$ ).

**Figure 3.** The level of agency and communion with regard to psychological gender under control conditions and under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex.



The fourth analysis of variance used a 2 (sex role reinforcement) x 4 (psychological gender) x 2 (content: unmitigated agency vs unmitigated communion) design with repeated measures on the last factor. This analysis showed two main effects, i.e. of content and of psychological gender. The main effect of a characteristic,  $F(1, 120) = 22.14, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.15$ , shows that regardless of the remaining factors, the participants reported a higher level of unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.54; SD = 0.47$ ) than of unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.32; SD = 0.43$ ). The main effect of psychological gender,  $F(1, 124) = 5.47, p < 0.05$ , means that regardless of the remaining factors masculine men reported the lowest level of characteristics ( $M = 4.02; SD = 0.51$ ) as compared to androgynous women ( $M = 4.57; SD = 0.53$ ), feminine women ( $M = 4.50; SD = 0.40$ ) and androgynous men ( $M = 4.61; SD = 0.58$ ). The analysis revealed also two first-degree interactions: between biological sex and content,  $F(1, 120) = 28.05, p < 0.001; \eta^2 = 0.41$ , as well as between the reinforcement condition and content,  $F(1, 120) = 6.87, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.05$ . Both interactions were moderated by an interaction between all three factors: psychological gender, the type of ascribed characteristics, and reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given sex,  $F(1, 120) = 8.07, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.16$ . As can be seen in the right-hand panel of Figure 4, much bigger differences in the levels of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion were revealed under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex: feminine women ascribed much more unmitigated communion ( $M = 5.06; SD = 0.53$ ) than unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.09; SD = 0.39; t(14) = 5.23, p < 0.001, d = 2.08$ ) to themselves; similarly, androgynous

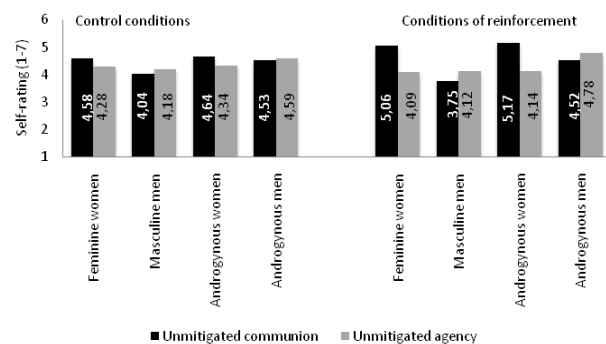
women also ascribed much more unmitigated communion ( $M = 5.17$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ ) than unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.14$ ;  $SD = 0.56$ ;  $t(16) = 5.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.85$ ) to themselves; masculine men did the opposite, i.e. ascribed more unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.12$ ;  $SD = 0.54$ ) than unmitigated communion ( $M = 3.75$ ;  $SD = 0.50$ ;  $t(14) = 4.01$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.7$ ) to themselves. Under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex, like under control conditions, no differences between the levels of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion in the group of androgynous men were recorded. In addition, feminine women ascribed more unmitigated communion ( $M = 5.06$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ) to themselves than masculine men ( $M = 3.75$ ;  $SD = 0.50$ ;  $t(28) = 6.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 2.54$ ) and androgynous men ( $M = 4.52$ ;  $SD = 0.62$ ;  $t(30) = 2.55$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.93$ ). Similarly, androgynous women ascribed more unmitigated communion ( $M = 5.17$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ ) to themselves than masculine men ( $M = 3.75$ ;  $SD = 0.50$ ;  $t(30) = 7.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 2.70$ ) and androgynous men ( $M = 4.52$ ;  $SD = 0.62$ ;  $t(32) = 3.11$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 1.07$ ). Androgynous men, however, were characterised by a higher level of unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.78$ ;  $SD = 0.61$ ) than feminine women ( $M = 4.09$ ;  $SD = 0.39$ ;  $t(27.504) = 3.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.34$ ) and androgynous women ( $M = 4.014$ ;  $SD = 0.61$ ;  $t(32) = 3.185$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 1.01$ ).

Under no-reinforcement conditions, smaller differences in the levels of reported characteristics were revealed for both feminine and androgynous women as well as masculine men than under conditions of reinforcement (feminine women:  $M_{uc} = 4.58$ ;  $SD = 0.31$ ;  $M_{ua} = 4.28$ ;  $SD = 0.16$ ;  $t(14) = 4.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.8$ ; androgynous women:  $M_{uc} = 4.64$ ;  $SD = 0.45$ ;  $M_{ua} = 4.34$ ;  $SD = 0.43$ ;  $t(14) = 3.58$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.69$ ; masculine men:  $M_{ua} = 4.18$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ ;  $M_{uc} = 4.04$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ ;  $t(14) = 3.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.27$ )<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, feminine women were characterised by greater unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.58$ ;  $SD = 0.31$ ) as compared to masculine men ( $M = 4.04$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ ;  $t(26) = 3.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 1.21$ ), and by lower unmitigated agency ( $M = 4.28$ ;  $SD = 0.16$ ) as compared to androgynous men ( $M = 4.59$ ;  $SD = 0.51$ ;  $t(22.775) = 2.41$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.82$ ). Androgynous women ascribed a higher level of unmitigated communion ( $M = 4.64$ ;  $SD = 0.44$ ) to themselves as compared to masculine men ( $M = 4.04$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ ;  $t(29) = 3.36$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 1.2$ ).

As for unmitigated forms of agency and communion, the direct influence of the stereotype activation on self-report in the area related and not related to the role is different among feminine and androgynous women as well as among masculine and androgynous men. Under the influence of activation, feminine women ascribe to themselves more unmitigated communion ( $M_{w0} = 4.58$ ;  $SD = 0.31$ ;  $M_{w1} = 5.06$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ;  $t(23.029) = 2.89$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 1.34$ ), but their evaluation of own unmitigated agency ( $M_{s0} = 4.28$ ;  $SD = 0.17$ ;  $M_{s1} = 4.09$ ;  $SD = 0.39$ ) does not decrease at the same time. Similarly, androgynous women, under the influence of activation, ascribe to themselves

more unmitigated communion ( $M_{w0} = 4.64$ ;  $SD = 0.45$ ;  $M_{w1} = 5.17$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ );  $t(32) = 3.07$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 1.63$ ), but do not lower significantly their evaluation of own unmitigated agency ( $M_{s0} = 4.35$ ;  $SD = 0.44$ ;  $M_{s1} = 4.14$ ;  $SD = 0.56$ ). Under the influence of stereotype activation, masculine men ascribe to themselves neither more unmitigated agency ( $M_{s0} = 4.04$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ ;  $M_{s1} = 3.75$ ;  $SD = 0.51$ ) than in neutral conditions, nor less unmitigated communion ( $M_{w0} = 4.18$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ ;  $M_{w1} = 4.12$ ;  $SD = 0.55$ ). Similarly, androgynous men, under the influence of the stereotype activation ascribe to themselves neither more characteristics of unmitigated agency ( $M_{s0} = 4.59$ ;  $SD = 0.52$ ) ( $M_{s1} = 4.78$ ;  $SD = 0.62$ ) than in neutral conditions, nor less characteristics of unmitigated communion ( $M_{w0} = 4.53$ ;  $SD = 0.58$ ;  $M_{w1} = 4.52$ ;  $SD = 0.65$ ).

**Figure 4.** The level of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion with regard to psychological gender under control conditions and under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex.



## Discussion

The aim of this study was to verify the importance of reinforcement of the stereotypical sex role for one's identification with this role in a group of individuals entering early adulthood. The research scheme was extended by a psychological gender variable, which had been omitted so far. It was assumed that, both in the case of a division made according to biological sex and according to psychological gender, reminding of characteristics stereotypical for participants' sex, would result in self-perceptions more consistent with the stereotypes, and thus influence the level of agency and communion they would ascribe to themselves, both in their mitigated and extreme forms. These hypotheses have been largely confirmed.

Under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical male role, young men ascribed more mitigated agency than communion to themselves. However, young women, under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical female role, ascribed more mitigated communion than agency to themselves. Such differences were not apparent under control conditions. Currently, people in early adulthood, irrespective of their biological sex, are expected, for example, to be available, mobile, able

<sup>5</sup>  $M_{ua}$  – mean unmitigated agency;  $M_{uc}$  – mean unmitigated communion

to work in a group, open when dealing with others and ready to assume various social roles. Therefore, when people do not have to think about themselves in terms of biological sex and when great emphasis is placed on demonstrating a task-oriented approach, there are no differences in the level of stereotypical characteristics that they ascribe to themselves; such differences are, however, observed when the stereotypical role of a given biological sex is reinforced. These results are consistent with Wojciszke and Szlendak's (2010) findings. However, when psychological gender was taken into account, it turned out that under conditions when the sex stereotypical role was not reinforced, a lack of such differences was observed for androgynous individuals and masculine men, whereas feminine women, under control conditions, ascribed more mitigated communion than agency to themselves. Although, as has already been mentioned, one can currently observe that self-perceptions are becoming less consistent with gender stereotypes (Abele, 2003; Diekmann & Eagly, 2000), the fact that young feminine women acquire a gender schema more effectively than young masculine men and young androgynous individuals may be due to the asymmetry between gender stereotypes. It is observed that women are compelled to adopt a communion-like attitude more than men are compelled to adopt an agency-like attitude (Wojciszke, 2010). Therefore, women who have a large proportion of female characteristics all the time function in a way that is consistent with characteristics ascribed to their biological sex, and there is no need to activate these characteristics. Under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with a given biological sex there were differences in the level of ascribed characteristics regardless of psychological gender. Both sex-typed women and women having characteristics that were typical of both sexes ascribed more communion than agency to themselves. Sex-typed and androgynous men, however, ascribed more agency than communion to themselves.

As for unmitigated forms of communion and agency, differences were observed for men and women, both under control conditions and under conditions of reinforcement of the stereotypical role associated with one's own biological sex. Men ascribed more unmitigated agency than unmitigated communion to themselves and women did the opposite. These results show that women focus more on others than on themselves, whereas men focus more on the tasks they carry out than on relationships with others. Under conditions of reinforcement these differences were much bigger, in the group of women in particular, which shows that reinforcement of the role associated with a given biological sex increases women's focus on others and on their relationships with others when their task-oriented approach is suppressed more than it increases men's focus on a task at the expense of their relationships with others. In Wojciszke and Szlendak's (2010) research study, the differences in the way in which the participants ascribed unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion to themselves only occurred under conditions when stereotypes of the biological sexes were activated. The analysis that was carried out by taking into account psychological gender showed that the above

dependence did not concern androgynous men. Men who have characteristics that are typical of both sexes ascribe a similar level of both communion and agency in their extreme forms regardless of conditions. This may be connected with two phenomena that have been observed, i.e. with the already-mentioned asymmetry between gender stereotypes which entails a lack of punishment and thus consent to communion-like behaviours in men as well as with the fact that androgynous individuals function better and adapt more easily to changing conditions as they are not limited by stereotypes of gender roles (Bem, Martyna & Watson, 1976; Andersen & Bem, 1981).

To sum up: as for mitigated form of agency and communion, the analysis taking into account biological sex showed, that both women and men under the influence of the stereotype activation increase theirself-evaluation in the area related to the activated stereotype and decrease in the area not related to this stereotype. A psychological gender variable entered in the study scheme showed a different influence of the sex stereotype activation on self-report in terms of mitigated forms of agency and communion among sex-typed individuals as well as among androgynous persons. Sex-typed individuals lower their self-report in the area not related to the role and do not increase their self-report in the area related to the role, which is the opposite among androgynous individuals. As for unmitigated forms of agency and communion however, the influence of stereotype activation was visible only in the group of women, who regardless of psychological gender ascribe to themselves more unmitigated communion, but do not lower significantly the evaluation of own unmitigated agency. Men under the influence of the activated stereotype, irrespective of psychological gender, ascribe to themselves neither more agency than in neutral conditions, nor less communion, thus the influence of the stereotype activation on self-report concerning unmitigated agency cannot be measured in this group.

The research presented in this article was focused on sex-typed individuals, i.e. feminine women and masculine men, as well as on androgynous individuals. In further research it would be worthwhile to investigate whether self-perceptions of cross-sex-typed individuals (masculine women and feminine men) as well as of undifferentiated individuals (having a low level of characteristics that are regarded as typically male or typically female in a given culture) in the context of characteristics and behaviours associated with a given sex change when self-stereotypes of the biological sexes become activated.

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