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## Emotional processes underlying national narcissism

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### ABSTRACT

Within the current manuscript, we assumed that national narcissism should be linked to poor emotion recognition skills and negative emotionality. In a series of four mixed-methodology studies, we found positive relations between national narcissism and one's own impairment of emotion recognition, lower levels of facial emotion recognition, and higher levels of antagonistically oriented emotions. We also demonstrated that an inability to recognize emotions of others (characteristic for national narcissism) may, in turn, translate into dehumanization of in-group and out-group. By highlighting these relations, we argue that group defensiveness can be linked to a specific form of emotionality.

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### KEYWORDS

national narcissism; emotion recognition skills; emotions; dehumanization

Within the present literature, the most basic distinction of social groups is that they could be either considered as a group one is attached to (i.e., the in-group) or not (i.e., the out-group). The cause of this differentiation is that the perception of the in-group (vs. out-group) is frequently different. Within the literature, a specific type of identification with the nation, associated with an exaggerated positive image and feelings of importance of a group to which one belonged, is conceptualized as national narcissism (A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). National narcissism has been found to fuel psychological insecurity (e.g., Marchlewska, Górska et al., 2022) and go hand in hand with perceiving out-group members as a source of great danger to the in-group. Although different behaviors associated with national narcissism are well-known (e.g., out-group negativity; A. Golec de Zavala, 2018), the emotional processes related to this type of identification with the nation are still not well known. For instance, even though national narcissism is generally linked to negative affectivity (A. Golec de Zavala, 2019), less is known about its more nuanced connections to specific experienced emotions and the processes related to emotional cognition. Does feeling a constant threat, which is a distinctive feature of a defensive (i.e., narcissistic) in-group identity, may be related to a specific form of emotionality? What role can these emotional processes play in reinforcing intergroup hostility?

To illustrate the goal of this paper, consider a situation where Pat is sitting on a bus, and Mat, a foreigner known for being extroverted, smiles at Pat. Although this interaction may seem straightforward, its interpretation can vary depending on the level of national narcissism. Individuals low in national narcissism are likely to perceive Mat's smile as a friendly and positive gesture, reflecting his sociable nature. However, individuals high in national narcissism might interpret the same smile as condescending or mocking, perceiving it as a subtle insult to their national identity. These contrasting interpretations reflect the heightened sensitivity to perceived disrespect or criticism that is characteristic of national narcissism.

In this paper, we aim to explore the processes underlying these divergent reactions, focusing on the emotion-related mechanisms associated with national narcissism. Specifically, we hypothesize that the

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

way individuals feel about their national in-group is linked to their emotional functioning, including their ability to recognize the emotions of others. This work is the first to examine the relationships between national narcissism, experienced emotions, and impairments in emotion recognition, as well as their potential connections to out-group negativity, such as dehumanization.

## National narcissism and its concomitants

Classic theorizing and contemporary research in the domain of social psychology differentiates between defensive and secure types of in-group identity (e.g., Cichocka, 2016; Marchlewska; Górska et al., 2022). Defensive national identity is frequently operationalized as national narcissism, which is further defined as an exaggerated image of one's national group, associated with a need for external validation (e.g., Cislak et al., 2021; A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Empirical research showed that narcissistic identity was usually built on individual weaknesses (e.g., low self-esteem; A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; high attachment anxiety; Marchlewska; Górska et al., 2022 or inability to actively cope with stressors; Molenda et al., 2023). On one hand, those who identified with their nation narcissistically were hypersensitive, perceived threats to their nation even in ambiguous intergroup situations, while on the other, they put their own interest before the interest of their nation (Marchlewska et al., 2020). Thus, those scoring high on national narcissism are not only hostile for the out-groups, but also for the in-groups.

There is a robust link between national narcissism and negative perceptions of others, including in-group members (Marchlewska et al., 2020; Molenda et al., 2023). However, these studies do not fully explain why individuals high in national narcissism perceive others negatively. Previous research suggests that such individuals interpret situations as threatening, even when the cues are ambiguous (e.g., Cichocka, 2016). This exaggerated perception of threat may explain why national narcissism is associated with intergroup conspiracy beliefs (Cislak et al., 2021; Górska et al., 2022; Marchlewska; Górska et al., 2022), conspiracy intentions (Molenda et al., 2023), and hostile intentions toward both in-group and out-group members.

In fact, national narcissism might be considered a threat-based identity (e.g., Cichocka, 2016). While individuals high in national narcissism are particularly sensitive to perceived signs of disrespect or criticism (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2013), this sensitivity does not necessarily reflect an accurate ability to recognize emotions. Instead, it stems from an exaggerated perception of threat, leading to misinterpretation of ambiguous emotional cues, such as interpreting a smile as mockery (e.g., smiling at vs. laughing at). This aligns with findings that impairments in emotion recognition can exacerbate hostility and negative perceptions of others (García-Sancho et al., 2014). In this work, we propose that such difficulties in recognizing and understanding emotions contribute to the observed hostility in individuals high in national narcissism, including behaviors such as dehumanization.

## Individual and social consequences of constant threat feelings

Although neglected for a long time, emotions, which are both powerful and changeable, are now seen as one of the key factors necessary to understand the attitudes toward in-groups and their consequences, such as the dynamics of intergroup conflicts (Halperin, 2016; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Levy et al., 2017). The feeling of threat can have a wide variety of negative individual and group-level consequences, for instance, experienced feelings of threat tend to increase the intensity of experienced negative emotions (Chen et al., 2020; Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Mackie et al., 2000). Also, constant feeling of threat is related to how one recognizes one's own and others' emotions, and this emotional luggage secondarily impacts how one perceives and interprets a situation (Flechtsenhar et al., 2022; W. G. Stephan & Mealy, 2009). That is, anxiety and the feelings of being threatened are related to the impairment in recognizing own emotional states (Devine et al., 1999; Karukivi et al., 2010; Marchesi et al., 2005). Thus, when individuals perceive the positive image of the in-group as being under

constant threat, this may result in an increased intensity of experiencing negative emotions, such as fear, anger, or shame (Smith, 1993; W. G. Stephan & Mealy, 2009). Moreover, emotional difficulties – also linked to negative emotionality – might lead to prejudice and lower out-group acceptance, lower support for conflict resolution policies, greater support for aggressive policies in an intergroup conflict situation, political intolerance, and lower support for democratic values (e.g., Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Steele et al., 2019; Westerlund et al., 2020, 2021).

In the light of this evidence, we propose that there is a specific pattern of emotion-related processes related to national narcissism, which may explain its link to hostile perceptions of others. First, the ability to recognize one's own internal states is linked to both obvious and subtle biases (Önal et al., 2021). Second, specific internal states that drive hostility are among the most reliable indicators of conflict between groups (Bar-Tal, 2007; Lerner et al., 2003). Third, individuals with higher levels of explicit prejudice tend to encounter difficulties in interpreting the facial expressions of others (Andrzejewski, 2009). Additionally, people tend to perceive internal states in others based on stereotypes. For example, hostile states are identified more quickly in the faces of out-group members, while anxious states are identified more quickly in the faces of in-group members (Bijlstra et al., 2010, 2014; A. Golec de Zavala, 2019).

Taking these findings together, it might be expected that national narcissism should also be related to a) difficulties in recognizing and comprehending one's own emotions; b) propensity to experience mostly negative emotions; and c) impairments in recognizing the emotions of others. Thus, for an individual who experiences hardships in their emotional sphere, lives in a feeling of constant threat, is exposed to experiencing mostly negative emotions, and is more prone to misunderstand the emotions of others, it might be easier to act with hostility rather than hospitality. To address this issue within the current paper, we investigate how national narcissism is related to difficulties in recognizing one's own emotions, emotions themselves, the ability to recognize the emotions of others, and whether this ability could explain the dehumanization of others.

## Current studies

The main goal of the current paper was to explore the relationships between national narcissism and emotion-related phenomena. Based on previous studies (Devine et al., 1999; Karukivi et al., 2010; Marchesi et al., 2005), we expected (H1) that national narcissism would be positively related to the impairment in recognizing one's own emotions. However, more difficulties in recognizing one's own emotions do not necessarily need to mean that such individuals do not feel anything at all (Edwards et al., 2020). Indeed, existing research indicates that national narcissism is related mostly to negative emotionality (A. Golec de Zavala, 2019). Thus, our second research problem regarded specific emotions related to national narcissism. We expected (H2) to find a significant positive relationship to antagonistically oriented emotions of anger, disgust, and contempt (Boyle, 1987; E, 2009). Third, we examined not only the experienced emotions associated with national narcissism, but we also assessed if national narcissism was associated with impaired abilities to recognize the emotions of others. Given that we already expected that national narcissism should be related to the impaired ability to recognize own emotional states and should be primarily linked to antagonistic emotions, which are both related to prejudice (Bar-Tal, 2007; Lerner et al., 2003; Önal et al., 2021), we also expected to find that national narcissism would be negatively related to recognizing the emotions written on the faces of others (H3). Finally, taking it altogether, we hypothesized that the impairments experienced in the emotional sphere might clarify some of the variance explaining why national narcissism is associated with dehumanization. We expected that (H4) the ability to recognize the emotions of others would account for the relationship between national narcissism and dehumanization. Summing up, the aims of the current paper are not only to understand the feelings behind national narcissism, but we also strive to demonstrate a potential mechanism explaining why individuals with higher national narcissism might be more prone to derogate others.

We present the results of four studies conducted to test four hypotheses regarding emotional phenomena in the context of national narcissism according to the following scheme. First, we present descriptions of each of the four studies along with a description of the methods used. Second, we present the results, indicating which study's data was used to test each hypothesis. Finally, we discuss the results in the general discussion section. This structured approach comprehensively explains the relationship between the research findings and the hypotheses being tested.

## Method

In all studies, participants were informed about the purpose and the duration of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary. Data confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Informed consent was obtained from all participants of the four studies before the survey. At any time and for any reason, participants could always refuse to answer a question or stop filling out the questionnaire and not send their data using the "send" button. None of the studies were preregistered. Data for all studies are available at the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/9ct3u>

The scales employed in the present research were part of a larger survey that included measures of various personality and social psychology constructs.<sup>1</sup> Descriptive statistics and estimates of internal consistency for all variables used in the Studies are presented in Table 1.<sup>2</sup> It is important to stress that national narcissism assumes a positive evaluation of the in-group, which is expressed in a positive relation to conventional measures of in-group identity (Cichocka, 2016). For this reason, researchers usually covary out the overlap between national narcissism and national identity, to observe the specific effects narcissistic and secure identity to one's national in-group (cf., Cichocka, 2016; A. Golec de Zavala, 2019; Górska et al., 2020). For this reason, in our analyses we included both, national narcissism and national identity as two separate predictors in all our regression-based analyses. In

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for all variables across study 1, study 2a, study 2b, and study 3.

Variables	STUDY 1			STUDY 2a			STUDY2b			STUDY 3		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha/$ ICC	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
National Narcissism	2.91	1.08	.92	2.44	1.02	.90	1.66	0.72	.81	2.71	1.09	.93
National Identity	3.59	0.77	.90	3.39	1.05	.91	2.91	1.04	.84	3.36	0.64	.90
Recognition of One's Own Emotions	2.77	0.54	.84	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Experience of Joy	-	-	-	3.69	0.87	.67	60.15	28.05	.53	-	-	-
Experience of Interest	-	-	-	3.30	0.92	.74	59.02	28.21	.41	-	-	-
Experience of Surprise	-	-	-	2.64	0.87	.63	34.97	30.38	.36	-	-	-
Experience of Sadness	-	-	-	2.83	1.11	.82	38.08	31.96	.43	-	-	-
Experience of Anger	-	-	-	2.84	1.03	.78	33.60	30.35	.34	-	-	-
Experience of Disgust	-	-	-	2.07	0.90	.69	15.35	22.88	.39	-	-	-
Experience of Contempt	-	-	-	2.20	0.93	.65	16.13	24.39	.36	-	-	-
Experience of Self-Hostility	-	-	-	2.46	1.18	.88	27.09	30.63	.58	-	-	-
Experience of Fear	-	-	-	2.47	1.08	.79	24.46	29.27	.52	-	-	-
Experience of Shame	-	-	-	2.87	1.07	.73	20.41	26.30	.52	-	-	-
Experience of Shyness	-	-	-	2.44	1.11	.82	25.16	29.19	.49	-	-	-
Experience of Guilt	-	-	-	2.74	1.02	.75	26.25	30.67	.48	-	-	-
Recognizing Emotions of Others (no target)	-	-	-	0.91	0.12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Recognizing the Emotions of Others (in-group target), <i>N</i> = 750	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.77	0.17	-
Recognizing the Emotions of Others (out-group target), <i>N</i> = 754	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.76	0.19	-
Dehumanization of Poles	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.28	1.68	-
Dehumanization of Jews	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.86	2.15	-
Dehumanization of African American	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.73	2.03	-
Dehumanization of LGBTQ+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.41	2.55	-
Dehumanization of Russians	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.87	2.94	-
Dehumanization of Ukrainians	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.87	2.12	-

ICCs, which express the % of variance attributable to between-person differences (e.g., 53% of joy variance is due to between-person differences, rather than within-person variations).

addition to the primary analyses, we conducted supplementary analyses controlling for individual narcissism to ensure the robustness of our findings. These additional analyses confirmed that the observed patterns remain largely unaffected (see supplementary materials for details).

## Study 1

### *Participants and procedure*

Data was obtained from Polish people aged between 18 and 84 ( $M = 48.18$ ,  $SD = 16.34$ ). The sample consisted of  $N = 432$  individuals (225 women, 207 men) and was representative in terms of gender, age, and settlement size for the Polish adult population. The study was conducted using the computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) technique by an external research company. This sample was used to test H1.

### *Measures*

#### *National narcissism*

It was measured with a five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale by A. Golec de Zavala et al. (2013) of the Collective Narcissism Scale by A. Golec de Zavala et al. (2009) adapted to the national context. Participants rated their agreement to each statement (sample item: “Polish people deserve special treatment”) using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*definitely disagree*) to 5 (*definitely agree*). The scale was internally consistent.

#### *National identity*

This construct was measured with the full 12-item version of Social Identity Scale (Cameron, 2004), adapted to the Polish context by Bilewicz and Wójcik (2010); sample item: “Generally, I feel good when I think about myself as Polish”). Participants used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*definitely disagree*) to 5 (*definitely agree*). The measure also appeared to be internally consistent. The scale was internally consistent.

#### *Recognition of one’s own emotions*

We administered the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby et al., 1994; Ścigała et al., 2020) in Study 1. TAS-20 is a self-report questionnaire that consists of 20 items (sample item: “I find it hard to describe how I feel about people”). Each item was rated by the participants on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), which were aggregated as a composite score.

## Study 2a

### *Participants and procedure*

The sample included  $N = 417$  (246 women, 171 men), aged between 18 and 73 ( $M = 27.88$ ,  $SD = 8.92$ ). The study was also conducted using the CAWI technique. Participants were recruited via social media among Polish users. This sample was used to test H2 and H3.

### *Measures*

#### *National narcissism*

It was measured as in Study 1 with the use of a five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale by A. Golec de Zavala et al. (2013).

### **National identity**

This construct was assessed with three items borrowed from Cameron's (2004; see also Górska et al., 2020): "I feel strong ties to other Poles," "In general, being a Pole is an important part of my self-image," and "In general, I'm glad to be a Pole." Participants also used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*definitely disagree*) to 5 (*definitely agree*).

### **Experienced emotions**

We used the Differential Emotions Scale-IV (DES IV). DES-IV (Izard, 1993) is a self-report questionnaire used to assess individuals' emotional experience. It consists of 12 three-item subscales that assess interest/excitement, enjoyment, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, guilt, shame, shyness, and self-hostility. Each item rates the presence or absence of the target emotion on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often*). In Study 2b, which was a daily diary study, we asked the participants whether they experienced each of the emotions listed above using a response scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*all the time*).

### **Recognizing the emotions of others**

We used the Averaged Karolinska Directed Emotional Faces (AKDEF; Lundqvist & Litton, 1998). AKDEF is a set of black and white pictures of human facial expressions. The pictures contain an average female and an average male displaying seven different emotional expressions. In our studies, each emotional expression was presented by two pictures – a man and a woman.

## **Study 2b**

### **Participants and procedure**

This sample was collected in a seven-day long longitudinal diary design. First, participants completed a set of baseline measures, including a measure of national narcissism and national identity. On the next day, each participant received an instruction on how to download the application and launch the study, which was available starting from the next day for seven consecutive days. The study was set to be completed at 7 PM and each participant was asked to rate the emotions felt that day. In total, we gathered data from  $N = 199$  individuals, who provided  $N = 1277$  observations for each group (out of 1387 possible notifications). The observed pattern of missing observations, however, was missing completely at random ( $\chi^2_{(2)} = 1.43$ ;  $p = .489$ ). This study was part of larger data collection efforts, and each participant was remunerated with approximately 12€ upon completion. Moreover, participants with a high response rate were entered into a raffle of three additional vouchers worth approximately 220 € each. The methodology of the whole study has been registered [<https://osf.io/24bpr>]. This sample was used to test H2

### **Measures**

#### **National narcissism**

It was measured as in Study 1 and 2a using a five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2013).

#### **National identity**

It was measured as in Study 2a with the use of three-item version of oSocial Identity Scale (Cameron, 2004).

### **Experienced emotions**

These emotions were measured as in Study 2a with the use of DES-IV (Izard, 1993) in a seven-day long longitudinal diary design.

## **Study 3**

### **Participants and procedure**

Data for Study 3 was obtained through an online survey (CAWI), conducted on a nationwide sample of Polish people by an external research company, which has been used in academic studies before (e.g., Szczepańska et al., 2024). We managed to recruit 1504 participants (786 women, 718 men) aged between 18 and 96 years old ( $M = 46.10$ ,  $SD = 16.06$ ). This sample was used to test H3 and H4.

### **Measures**

#### **National narcissism**

It was as in Study 1, 2a, and 2b using a five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2013).

#### **National identity**

This construct was measured with the full 12-item version of Social Identity Scale (Cameron, 2004) as in Study 1.

#### **Recognizing the emotions of others**

It was measured by using the AKDEF (Lundqvist & Litton, 1998) as in Study 2a. However, in this study, we instructed half of the participants that the presented faces were the faces of their in-group members (i.e., Polish people), and the other half was instructed that the presented faces were the faces of out-group members (i.e., Jews). The faces between the two conditions were all the same.

#### **Dehumanization**

Based on past research, we used the Ascent scale of blatant dehumanization (Kteily et al., 2015). In Study 3, it was measured using a reverse-scored scale ranging from 1 to 9, where participants indicated how evolved they considered a few groups: Poles (considered as in-group) as well as Jews, African Americans, LGBTQ+, Russians, and Ukrainians (considered as out-groups). A higher score indicated a higher dehumanization of the group of reference.

## **Results**

### **Test of hypothesis 1 – is national narcissism related to the impairment in recognizing one's own emotions?**

To test this hypothesis, we used the results of Study 1 regarding the measure of national narcissism, national identification, and recognition of one's own emotions. At the zero-order level, the relation between national narcissism and difficulties in the recognition of one's own emotions ( $r = .17$ ;  $p < .001$ ) was significant and positive, while the relation between the latter to national identity ( $r = -.14$ ;  $p = .005$ ) was significant and negative, providing initial support for H1. To disentangle the shared variance between national narcissism and national identity, which might have influenced the observed results, we also analyzed a linear regression model with difficulties in recognition of own emotions as outcome and national narcissism and national identity as independent variables. The analyzed model appeared significant ( $F_{(2,429)} = 19.34$ ;  $p < .001$ , adj.  $R^2 = .08$ ) and we found that while national



**Table 2.** National narcissism and national identity as predictors of the experienced emotions.

	National narcissism		National identity	
	Study 2a	Study 2b	Study 2a	Study 2b
Joy	.06	-.01	.18**	.18*
Interest	.02	-.05	.18**	.23**
Surprise	.27***	.15*	-.08	.22**
Sadness	.02	.07	-.11	-.10
Anger	.15**	.24**	-.11	-.21**
Disgust	.37***	.27***	-.20***	-.16*
Contempt	.30***	.23**	-.17**	-.19**
Self-Hostility	.09	.07	-.15*	-.10
Fear	.18**	.13*	-.18**	-.08
Shame	.01	.10	-.02	-.08
Shyness	.12*	.07	-.07	-.04
Guilt	.03	.07	.05	-.13

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

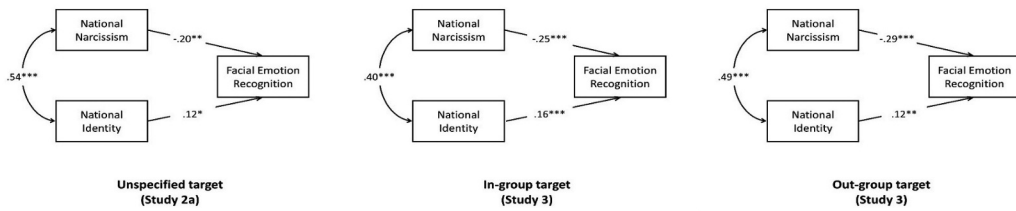
We also analyzed 12 DSEM models in which national narcissism and national identity were regressed on gross variability of each emotion (controlling for the emotion's person mean; see Baird et al., 2006). Results revealed that neither national narcissism nor national identity predicts variability in emotion across the period of seven days. The supplementary materials contains the results of analyzes controlling for individual narcissism.

narcissism was related positively ( $B = 0.14$ ;  $SE = 0.03$ ;  $\beta = .28$ ;  $p < .001$ ), national identity was negatively related to difficulties in recognizing one's own emotions ( $B = -0.18$ ;  $SE = 0.04$ ;  $\beta = -.26$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The effects remain unchanged when controlling for individual narcissism (see supplementary materials). Thus, the first hypothesis was confirmed in full.

### **Test of hypothesis 2 - what are the experienced emotions in national narcissism?**

To test this hypothesis, we used the results of Study 2a and Study 2b, regarding the measure of national narcissism, national identification, and experienced emotions. At the zero-order level (Study 2a), national narcissism was positively related to joy ( $r = .15$ ;  $p = .002$ ), surprise ( $r = .23$ ;  $p < .001$ ), contempt ( $r = .21$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and disgust ( $r = .26$ ;  $p < .001$ ), whilst national identity was positively related to joy ( $r = .21$ ;  $p < .001$ ), interest ( $r = .19$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and negatively to sadness ( $r = -.10$ ;  $p = .038$ ). In Study 2b, to calculate zero-order relations, we computed a person mean score for each emotion. National narcissism was positively related to surprise ( $r = .22$ ;  $p = .002$ ), anger ( $r = .16$ ;  $p = .025$ ), disgust ( $r = .21$ ;  $p = .003$ ), and contempt ( $r = .17$ ;  $p = .015$ ), whilst national identity was positively related to joy ( $r = .17$ ;  $p = .015$ ), interest ( $r = .22$ ;  $p = .002$ ), and surprise ( $r = .25$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Given that data in Study 2b had a nested character (i.e., time nested in person), in further analyses we used the Dynamic Structural Equation Modeling approach (DSEM; Asparouhov et al., 2018; McNeish et al., 2021), while in Study 2a, we analyzed 12 linear regression models with national narcissism and national identity entered as independent variables. Given that missing data in such longitudinal designs are largely expected, the DSEM gives the possibility to weight each participant's contribution based on how many responses they contributed, as responses from participants who provided 90% of responses would be more reliable than responses from participants who provided 20% responses. This analysis was carried out in Mplus v. 8.3 using the Bayes estimator (McNeish & Hamaker, 2020; Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

Results of the regression analysis (Study 2a) and DSEM (Study 2b) are given in Table 2. The results across either self-reported or longitudinally assessed experienced emotions were nearly perfectly congruent. More specifically, national narcissism was a positive predictor of all three antagonistically oriented emotions of anger, disgust, and contempt in both studies. We also demonstrated that national narcissism was positively related to surprise and fear. Relation to shyness was significant, albeit weak, only in Study 2a. In turn, national identity was related to



**Figure 1.** National narcissism and national identity predicting facial emotion recognition. *Note.* Left = Unspecified target (Study 2a),  $F_{(2,414)} = 6.30$ ;  $p = .002$ ;  $\text{adj. } R^2 = .03$ ; middle = In-group target (i.e., Poles; Study 3),  $F_{(2,747)} = 22.63$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\text{adj. } R^2 = .06$ ; right = Out-group target (i.e., Jews; Study 3),  $F_{(2,751)} = 28.00$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\text{adj. } R^2 = .07$ . The effects for national narcissism remain unchanged when controlling for individual narcissism (see supplementary materials).

positive emotionality through its positive association to joy and interest and was negatively related to antagonistically oriented emotions of anger (only in Study 2b), disgust, and contempt. In Study 2b, we found that national identity was also related to surprise. Taken together, these findings provide support for our main hypothesis that national narcissism should be related to heightened levels of anger, disgust, and contempt (H2).

### **Test of hypothesis 3 – does national narcissism relate to impaired recognition of others' emotions?**

Hypothesis 3 was tested using the results obtained in Study 2a and Study 3, regarding the measure of national narcissism, national identification and recognizing the emotions of others. In general, national narcissism was negatively related to the results of the emotional recognition task ( $r = -.14$ ,  $p = .005$ ), while national identity was unrelated to it ( $r = .01$ ;  $p = .790$ ). The same pattern of relations was replicated regardless of feedback provided, whether the presented faces were from the in-group or from the out-group for both national narcissism (in-group:  $r = -.19$ ;  $p < .001$ ; out-group:  $r = -.24$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and national identity (in-group:  $r = .05$ ;  $p = .140$ ; out-group:  $r = -.01$ ;  $p = .900$ ). When entered into a linear regression model, which is illustrated in Figure 1, national narcissism remained a significant negative predictor, regardless of condition. National identity, in turn, after residualizing its shared variance with national narcissism, appeared as a significant and positive predictor of recognizing the emotions of others task under all conditions. Thus, the results of these analyses also provided full support for H3.

### **Test of hypothesis 4 (study 3) – proposing a mechanism explaining why national narcissism is related to the dehumanization of others**

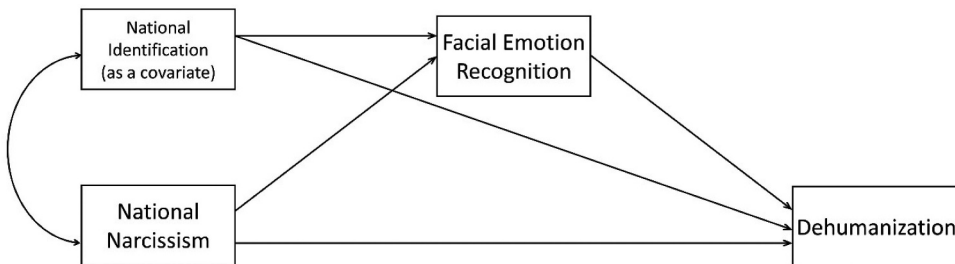
Hypothesis 4 was tested using the results obtained in Study 3, regarding the measure of national narcissism, national identification, recognizing the emotions of others, and dehumanization. At the zero-order level (presented as supplementary tables), national narcissism was systematically related to higher dehumanization of the out-groups and was unrelated to the dehumanization of the in-group (i.e., Poles). In turn, both national identity and the emotion recognition task were found to be related to lesser dehumanization of the out-groups and the in-group. To account for the shared variance between the national identity and national narcissism, in sum, we tested seven mediation models, the results of which are given in Table 3. In these models, dehumanization was the dependent variable, and national narcissism was the independent variable. National identity was entered as a covariate, while emotion recognition was a mediator of the relation between national narcissism and dehumanization. The conceptual model is presented as Figure 2.

All of the tested mediation models were significant ( $p$ 's  $< .001$ ), and all of the direct effects of national narcissism on emotion recognition and dehumanization were found significant as well (including dehumanization of the in-group). In the same vein, the effects of emotion recognition on

**Table 3.** Results of the analyzed mediation models of the relation between national narcissism and the dehumanization through emotion recognition controlling for national identity (for in-group,  $n = 750$  and out-group target condition,  $n = 754$ ).

Dehumanized groups	Condition	X->Y	M->Y	Indirect
<b>IN-GROUP</b>				
Poles	In-Group	0.07[.04, .19]	-1.31[-2.00, -0.61]	0.05[0.02, 0.09]
	Out-Group	0.17[.05, .29]	-1.26[-1.89, -0.63]	0.06[0.03, 0.10]
<b>OUT-GROUPS</b>				
Jews	In-Group	0.65 [0.50, 0.80]	-1.29[-2.18, -0.41]	0.05[0.02, 0.09]
	Out-Group	0.69[0.54, 0.83]	-1.41[-2.19, -0.62]	0.07[0.03, 0.12]
African Americans	In-Group	0.59[0.44, 0.74]	-1.46[-2.31, -0.62]	0.06[0.02, 0.10]
	Out-Group	0.55[0.41, 0.69]	-1.94[-2.67, -1.20]	0.10 [0.05, 0.14]
LGBTQ+	In-Group	0.95[0.79, 1.12]	-1.50[-2.51, -0.48]	0.06[0.02, 0.12]
	Out-Group	0.92[0.75, 1.10]	-1.03[-1.95, -0.11]	0.05[0.01, 0.10]
Russians	In-Group	0.82[0.61, 1.03]	-1.38[-2.60, -0.16]	0.05[0.01, 0.11]
	Out-Group	0.68[0.47, 0.89]	-1.28[-2.40, -0.16]	0.06[0.01, 0.12]
Ukrainians	In-Group	0.53[0.37, 0.68]	-1.11[-1.99, -0.23]	0.04[0.01, 0.08]
	Out-Group	0.56[0.41, 0.70]	-1.84[-2.62, -1.05]	0.09[0.05, 0.14]

Note. The estimate of X->M was the same in all models:  $-0.04[-0.05, -0.03]$  for in-group condition and  $-0.05[-0.06, -0.04]$  for out-group condition.

**Figure 2.** Conceptual illustration of the tested mediation models.

dehumanization were also all found significant. Finally, we found that all the indirect effects were significant, regardless of whether we analyzed the in-group or any of the out-groups. These results demonstrate that the ability to recognize the emotions of others partially mediates the relationship between national narcissism and dehumanization, providing further support for H4. Importantly, this pattern was consistent across both in-group and out-group conditions, suggesting that the impaired emotional recognition associated with national narcissism operates similarly regardless of the target group.

## Discussion

Within the current manuscript, we investigated the link between national narcissism and emotional-related phenomena. We found consistent evidence that an increased level of national narcissism was related to a decreased level of emotional functioning and emotion recognition abilities. Specifically, our research revealed that national narcissism was associated with greater impairment in identifying and describing one's own feelings. We provided evidence demonstrating that national narcissism was not only related to an impaired recognition of own emotions, but also to a higher frequency of experiencing especially antagonistically oriented emotions (i.e., anger, disgust, and contempt). This could be either interpreted in a twofold manner. That is, national narcissism might be related to an increased accessibility to experience negative emotions or such propensity to experience more negative emotions could result from the subjective feelings of being threatened (Cichočka & Cislak, 2020; A. Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020; Szczepańska et al., 2024). Processing, experiencing, and coping with these emotional experiences can aggravate and affect

how individuals respond to other people (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). For instance, perceiving out-group members as menacing is commonly associated with increased intolerance and derogation (W. G. Stephan & Finlay, 1999; C. W. Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Thus, given that people's emotions can be associated with their intergroup attitudes, an individual's general emotional abilities could also play an important role in molding intergroup emotions and attitudes (Makwana et al., 2021).

To assess these emotional abilities, we examined the degree to which national narcissism was related to recognizing facial expressions of emotions. Obtained results supported our expectations that national narcissism was related to deficits in the ability to recognize facial expressions. Specifically, national narcissism was negatively related to an accurate identification of emotions reflected on the faces presented to study participants. According to the intergroup emotion theory, emotions are the predecessor of intergroup behavior and can be targeted to the in-group, the out-group, or a specific member of any of those (Mackie et al., 2009). Therefore, emotions may play an important role in explaining prejudice (Makwana et al., 2021). As shown by previous research, threat conditions (as opposed to safety conditions) can also result in slower and less accurate reactions to emotional stimuli (Flechsenshar et al., 2022; Lane et al.; Lane et al., 1997).

### ***Theoretical implications***

Results of our studies extended previous research on the character of national narcissism. For the first time, we described the specificity of the functioning and the processing of information about the emotions of others in relation to national narcissism. Recent research on emotionality associated with national narcissism has been restricted to its association with negative affect (A. Golec de Zavala, 2019) or managing the emotions of others (Molenda et al., 2023). In a series of four mix-methodology studies, we have created a description of several different aspects of emotional functioning that form a consistent pattern of emotional properties directly related to national narcissism. Although the association of emotions and emotional skills with prejudice is well documented in research (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Makwana et al., 2021; Tapias et al., 2007), the potential associations of emotional recognition with collective narcissism and negativity have not been discussed so far.

Results of our studies provided robust evidence that individuals scoring high on national narcissism had more difficulties in recognizing both their own, as well as others' emotional states. Furthermore, national narcissism was also related to heightened levels of antagonistically oriented emotions. The tested mediation model revealed that the ability to recognize the emotions of others partially mediated the relation between national narcissism and dehumanization. To illustrate the practical implication of our results, consider the situation where Pat (the local) is sitting in a bus in front of Mat (the foreigner) who smiles at Pat. Those scoring low on national narcissism could both smile back and think that Mat is a nice person. However, those who are high on national narcissism might read the very same cue as a threatening situation, as Mat the foreigner is laughing at Pat the local. Recent research provided evidence that individuals like Pat (i.e., with higher levels of national narcissism), are scoring high on anxious attachment (Marchlewska et al., 2022), which in turn predicts hostility (A. G. Golec de Zavala, 2011; A. Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020; A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; Szczepańska et al., 2024). Also, as national narcissism is described as paranoid and searching for threats (e.g., in conspiracy theories; Cisiak et al., 2021; Górska et al., 2022; Marchlewska; Górska et al., 2022; Molenda et al., 2023), the mere fact that Mat is a foreigner may evoke Pat's hostile attribution. Our research adds a further layer to this description. That is, we provided evidence that it is not only the question of how Pat is attached or whether he is paranoid. The results of our mediation model explain this process, stipulating that Pat is more easily provoked because of the impaired ability to recognize the emotional expressions of others. Thus, the current research provides a missing piece of the process, explaining why those scoring high on national narcissism might be more prone to assess others as threatening and tend to derogate them in an attempt to diminish this threat.

### **Limitations and future directions**

Although our research, which used mixed methodologies, sheds new light on the possible role of the emotions in explaining the character and consequences of national narcissism, it is not without limitations. All studies were conducted in one cultural context (i.e., Poland), making our findings less generalizable. Therefore, future research could use samples drawn from different countries and cultural contexts, because emotional functioning can be different cross-culturally (Denham et al., 2015; Friedlmeier et al., 2011; Lim, 2016). Moreover, our research is limited by the fact that we were solely relying on self-reported data, which constrains from making any causal claims. While the daily diary design partially addresses this limitation, there are some novel and promising experimental approaches allowing to gather longitudinal data, such as the Competitive Behavioral assessment of Rivalry and Admiration (i.e., COBRA task, Szücs et al., 2023), which could allow to assess emotional reactions to experimentally manipulated victory-to-lose ratio. Our longitudinal design was also limited by its relatively short length (i.e., 7 days), which was too short to adequately capture inertia, variability, and fluctuations in emotional states (Stapp et al., 2023), which would allow assessing if national narcissism and national identity are not only related to person means, but also to the underlying momentary processes. Thus, future studies should employ a study which will be more intensive in nature (i.e., lasting for longer or including momentary assessments of emotional states). Finally, these studies (conducted in both naturalistic and experimental settings) could be enriched by assessing biological data or even be triggered by biological sensing (e.g., a survey could be initialized after detecting a deviation from mean heart rate; Behnke et al., 2023; Hoemann et al., 2023).

To better understand the relationship between national narcissism and emotional functioning, it could be worth conducting experimental studies to manipulate and observe the consequences of strengthening (or weakening) national narcissism on, e.g., facial emotion recognition. This aligns with previous findings highlighting the interplay between national narcissism and interpersonal emotional phenomena, such as loneliness, which emphasize the need for further exploration of these dynamics in diverse social contexts (Rogoza et al., 2024). Furthermore, interventions aimed at enhancing emotional skills, such as emotional intelligence training programs, could be implemented to examine their impact on national identification processes. These interventions could involve structured training sessions focusing on emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills. Subsequently, the influence of these changes on individuals' national narcissism and national identity could be measured. Research by Kotsou et al. (2011) demonstrated that emotional intelligence training can significantly improve emotional well-being and social functioning, suggesting a potential pathway for influencing national narcissism. In summary, integrating experimental methodologies and emotional skill training into future research could provide valuable insights into the causal relationships between national narcissism and emotional functioning. These approaches not only promise to enrich understanding of these complex dynamics but also offer practical implications for designing interventions aimed at fostering secure national identification.

Emotional functioning and evaluations appear to come naturally to people. Even though emotions and emotion recognition are often conceived as something that is innately within us and does not need to be learned or trained, Eickers and Prinz (2020) suggest that emotion recognition might be defined as a skill. Skills differ from mere instincts in that they are sensitive to social context, flexible, and multifaceted. Thereby, the other possible future direction in this area would be to investigate if long-term interventions aimed at improving emotional functioning skills (i.e., emotion recognition and emotional awareness) could result in a decrease of national narcissism. Another possible future direction in this area would be to investigate if long-term interventions aimed at improving emotional functioning skills (i.e., emotion recognition, and emotional awareness) could result in a decrease of national narcissism.

## Conclusion

The current paper is the first to comprehensively grasp the emotional underpinnings of national narcissism through the investigation of its relations to difficulties in recognizing own emotions, the experienced emotions, and recognizing the emotions in others. Furthermore, the current manuscript addresses not only the above mentioned *how's* but also offers an explanation of *why* national narcissism predicts derogation of others. Current work contributes to existing studies illustrating hostile attributions of individuals scoring high on national narcissism toward others by describing possible processes which might lead to this final outcome.

## Notes

1. For the full list of measured constructs, see the online supplementary materials.
2. Internal consistency of national narcissism and national identity was good across all studies. Internal consistencies of experienced emotions were either decent (joy, surprise, disgust, contempt) or good (all the others). Given that emotions in Study 2b and out-group negativity in Study 3 were both assessed only with one item, we do not report on internal consistency.

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## Ethics

Studies were conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences (number of approval: 19/IX/2022).

## Author contribution statement

MR: conceptualization, formal analysis, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing  
 MM: conceptualization, methodology, writing – review and editing, supervision  
 RR: conceptualization, formal analysis, writing – review and editing and editing, supervision  
 ZM: writing – review and editing  
 DS: writing – review and editing  
 OM: writing – review and editing  
 DM: supervision

## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings are available at the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/9ct3u>

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This article has earned the Center for Open Science badges for Open Data and Open Materials through Open Practices Disclosure. The data and materials are openly accessible at <https://osf.io/9ct3u>

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