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The assertive sense of relational entitlement, emotions and couple satisfaction: a mediation model

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Abstract: Some personality factors and interpersonal variables have a significant impact on relationship satisfaction. The sense of relational entitlement (SRE; what individuals perceive they deserve within a romantic relationship) is an interpersonal construct that can lead to changes in satisfaction. In this study, we examined the assertive sense of relational entitlement as a predictor of couple satisfaction and the additional mechanisms that explain this relationship. 147 individuals involved in romantic relationships completed measures related to their entitlement, positive and negative emotions, gratitude and satisfaction. The results showed that individuals with a higher assertive relational entitlement reported lower satisfaction. This association was mediated by negative emotions. This study fills a gap in the literature by discussing whether assertive entitlement is related to couple satisfaction and how one’s emotional state accounts for this link. Finally, we consider that the effects of assertive relational entitlement on the functioning of a couple should be explored by further studies, especially in association with other concepts.

Keywords: assertive sense of relational entitlement, emotions, gratitude, satisfaction, mediation analysis

Introduction

Relational satisfaction can be defined as “the interpersonal evaluation of the positivity of feelings for one’s partner and attraction to the relationship” (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) and represents an important factor determining the well-being and the future of a romantic couple. Moreover, by studying satisfaction, we investigate the mechanisms which help us to prevent or alleviate relational distress (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Over the years, satisfaction was studied in relation with some contextual variables such as life stressors, transition or poverty (Fellows, Chiu, Hill, & Hawkins, 2016; Jackson, Krull, Bradbury, & Karney, 2017) but also with many personality variables, such as attachment or narcissism (Campbell & Foster, 2002; Candel & Turliuc, 2019a). However, it is important to note that many other interpersonal variables

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contribute to the variation in the level of satisfaction. One such variable could be the sense of relational entitlement (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011).

From a theoretical perspective, one's sense of entitlement represents the subjective perception of what one deserves in a specific situation (George-Levi, Vilchinsky, Tolmacz, & Liberman, 2014). It can be manifested in different contexts, such as work or education (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004), and in recent years, some authors developed a related concept that links entitlement directly with the romantic domain. Considering that romantic relationships are the main context where people expect to meet their emotional needs and wishes, Tolmacz and Mikulincer (2011) proposed the term "sense of relational entitlement" to name the specific form of entitlement that appears within one's romantic relationship. Therefore, relational entitlement is the extent to which an individual feels that a romantic partner should fulfill his or her wishes, needs, and expectations (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). Some empirical studies concentrated on the link between the sense of relational entitlement and relational satisfaction (Candel & Turliuc, 2019b; George-Levi et al., 2014; Tolmacz, Mahajna, & Efrati, 2017; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011), but the mechanisms that explain the association remain unclear.

It is also important to note that the sense of entitlement and consequently, the sense of relational entitlement is not a unidimensional concept. General entitlement can take exploitative (narcissistic) and non-exploitative forms (Grubbs & Exline, 2016), while relational entitlement was conceptualized as having three dimensions: assertive, excessive and restricted (Moses & Moses-Hrushovski, 1990; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). The negative links between the maladaptive forms of relational entitlement (excessive and restricted) and relational satisfaction received empirical support, but the associations between assertive relational entitlement and satisfaction are less clear. Thus, the main aim of this study was to further explore how assertive relational entitlement affects satisfaction and which are the mechanisms for this influence, if any.

We, therefore, present two main directions for this study. Firstly, we had the goal to fill in the gap in the literature regarding the relationship between the assertive form of entitlement and satisfaction. Not only this, but we consider that it is important to also verify how assertive entitlement determines couple satisfaction. Hence, we propose three new variables that might mediate this association: gratitude, positive affect and negative affect.

Assertive relational entitlement and satisfaction

The idea of entitlement was originally perceived as having negative influences on one's well-being (Levin, 1970), and was considered a factor of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2004). Using this conceptualization, many studies found that more entitlement was related to a greater number of relationship-damaging behaviors, such as abuse (Wood, 2004), sexual coercion (Ryan,

Weikel, & Sprechini, 2008) or infidelity (McNulty & Widman, 2014). More broadly, negative entitlement was associated with lower levels of well-being, higher levels of psychological distress and interpersonal conflict (Grubbs & Exline, 2016). When the relational entitlement is discussed, previous studies reported that excessive and restricted entitlement lead to lower satisfaction (George-Levi et al., 2014; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). However, not all entitlement is maladaptive. Some theories examined the forms of healthy, nonpathological, or normal entitlement (see Grubbs & Exline, 2016, for a review). Assertive relational entitlement can be considered one of these forms, as it characterizes those who realistically appraise what they can expect from others and stand up for their preferences (George-Levi et al., 2014). Previous literature offers conflicting results regarding the link between assertive entitlement and satisfaction. Tolmacz and Mikulincer (2011) found no correlation between the two variables, while Georg-Levi and his collaborators (2014) reported that people higher in assertive entitlement had more satisfied partners. In an experimental study, Candel and Turliuc (2019b) found that when the individuals are placed in a situation when the assertive form of relational entitlement becomes salient they report higher satisfaction compared to those who are in a situation where restrictive or excessive entitlement are salient. However, this study offers only incidental evidence for the relationship between assertive entitlement and satisfaction, given that it does not compare between the *assertive entitlement salience* condition and a *no entitlement* condition.

Concluding, the proof for a positive association between assertive relational entitlement and satisfaction is rather unclear. However, the review of other similar concepts might offer some indirect evidence for such a relationship. Firstly, being assertive is positively related to being more satisfied in a relationship (Brassard, Dupuy, Bergeron, & Shaver, 2015; Hinnen, Hagedoorn, Ranchor, & Sanderman, 2008). Secondly, non-exploitative entitlement is associated with traits like humility and self-compassion (Grubbs & Exline, 2016), which are positively related to satisfaction (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Farrell et al., 2015; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Therefore, for the first hypothesis, we expect to find a positive association between the assertive sense of relational entitlement and relational satisfaction.

The mediating role of the affective state

Positive affect and positive close relationships are a source of strength and well-being (Ramsey & Gentzler, 2015), while negative emotions lead to undesired couple outcomes (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). For example, positive emotions act as important determinants for one's relational satisfaction throughout their entire lifetime (Ramsey & Gentzler, 2015), and can alleviate negative responses during conflicts (Driver & Gottman, 2004). On the contrary,

negative emotions are associated with lower levels of satisfaction (Davila, Bradbury, & Fincham, 1998), conflict or even interpersonal violence within the couple (Malik, Heyman, & Smith Slep, 2019). Previous studies also found sufficient evidence to suggest that one's affective states can mediate the links between some personality traits and satisfaction (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1996).

While both types of emotions represent broader concepts, one specific emotion can also determine how couples react and how happy they are. Gratitude is the emotion or state resulting from awareness of the appreciation of that which is valuable and meaningful to oneself (Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010). Previous studies report that the feeling and the expression of gratitude towards the partner is beneficial for one's relationship, leading to higher levels of satisfaction (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Leong et al., 2019) and can even protect against the damaging effects of some negative personality characteristics, such as insecure attachment (Park, Impett, MacDonald, & Lemay, 2019; Vollmann, Sprang, & van den Brink, 2019). Thus, for the second hypothesis, we expect that positive emotions and gratitude (as a trait) would have a positive association with relational satisfaction, while negative emotions would be inversely related to satisfaction.

Previous theoretical and empirical studies suggest a relationship between entitlement and different types of emotions. For example, being more entitled leads to the development of more pronounced negative emotional expressions, such as anger (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013). Assertive entitlement, on the contrary, was not related to neuroticism, had positive correlations with positive mood and negative correlations with negative mood (although both correlations were not significant; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). In addition, people report more positive emotions and less negative emotions when they are in a situation of assertive entitlement compared to excessive and restricted situations (Candel & Turliuc, 2019b). When gratitude is concerned, exploitative entitlement and gratitude are theoretically and empirically presented as opposite constructs (Exline & Hill, 2012; Grubbs & Exline, 2016). Unfortunately, we found no study to explore the relationship between assertive entitlement and gratitude in the context of a romantic relationship. Thus, based on the previously mentioned theoretical and empirical evidence, we formulate the third hypothesis, considering that the emotional state (positive affect and negative affect and gratitude) would mediate the association between assertive relational entitlement and relational satisfaction (see Figure 1).

Method

Participants

A number of 153 questionnaires were distributed among undergraduate students from a northeastern Romanian University. All students were involved in a romantic relationship with duration of more than six months and were not married when they completed the questionnaires. The participation was rewarded with course credits. From the total sample, we retained only 147 participants, the other six providing incomplete questionnaires. In the final sample, 76 participants were females and 71 were male. For the female participants, the mean age was 21.28 years (SD = 1.31 years, Min = 18.00 years, Max = 28.00 years) and the mean relationship duration was 32.42 months (SD = 23.98 months, Min = 6 months, Max = 108 months). For the male participants, the mean age was 23.42 years (SD = 2.71 years, Min = 18.00 years, Max = 29.00 years) and the mean relationship duration was 30.54 months (SD = 22.37 months, Min = 6 months, Max = 90 months). For the whole sample, the mean age was 22.31 years (SD = 2.32 years, Min = 18.00 years, Max = 29.00 years) and the mean relationship duration was 31.51 months (SD = 23.16 months, Min = 6 months, Max = 108 months).

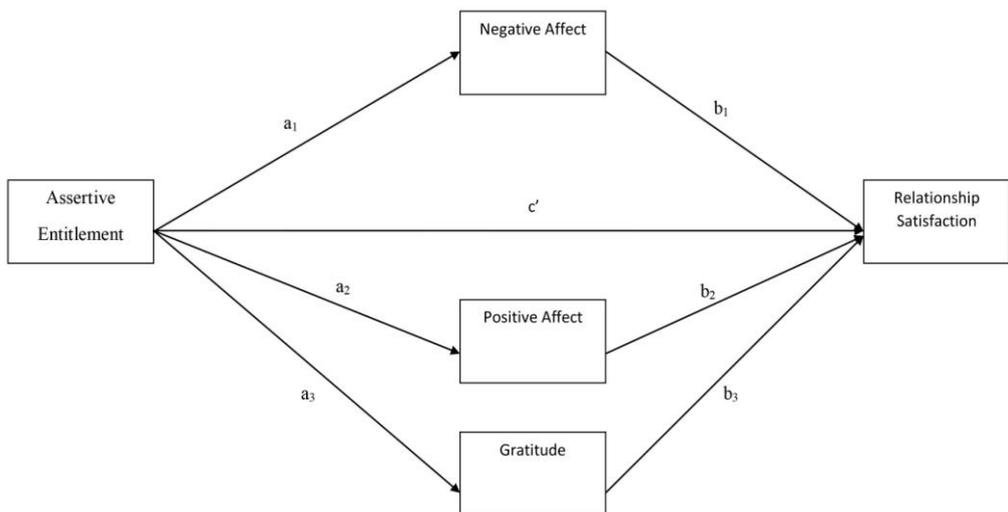


Figure 1. The proposed theoretical model of the relationship between assertive sense of relational entitlement and couple satisfaction mediated by affective states.

Measures

Affective state. To measure positive and negative affect, we used the 10 items short-form of the Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale (Thompson, 2007). Participants rated 10 emotional states, five for positive affect (*active, determined, attentive, inspired, and alert*) and five for negative affect (*upset, hostile, ashamed, nervous, afraid*) concerning how they usually feel within their relationship on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). For the Positive Affect, Cronbach's α was .71. For the Negative Affect factor, Cronbach's α was .68. While an Alpha of .71 is generally considered as acceptable, a value of .68 is lower than the convention (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). However, the number of items affects Cronbach's Alpha and the scales with fewer items usually present lower coefficients (Cortina, 1993). Thus, for a scale with only five items, we consider that an Alpha of .68 is borderline acceptable.

Relationship Satisfaction. The four items version of the Couple Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007) was used to measure relationship satisfaction. It assesses how the respondents feel within their current romantic relationship. The items (e.g., "I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner") are rated on a scale from 1 to 6 and higher scores indicate a greater level of couple satisfaction. The scale demonstrates excellent internal consistency, Cronbach's $\alpha=.91$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The Sense of Relational Entitlement. We used the Romanian version of the Sense of Relational Entitlement scale (Candel, 2018). This scale contains 18 items that assess each person's relational entitlement type. The scale offers different scores for excessive (8 items), restricted (3 items) and assertive entitlement (3 items) and expectations from the partner (4 items). The items are rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). For this study, we were interested only in the assertive entitlement factor (e.g. "I insist on getting what I deserve out of my relationship"). The measurement offered an acceptable internal consistency, Cronbach's $\alpha=.71$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Gratitude. Gratitude was measured using the Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Scale (GRAT) – Short Form (Thomas & Watkins, 2003). The instrument was already used in other Romanian studies (i.e. Măirean, Turliuc, & Arghire, 2019). The scale assesses trait gratitude and consists of three factors: a lack of a sense of deprivation, an appreciation for simple pleasures, and an appreciation for others. Given that we were interested in the gratitude that appears within an interpersonal context, we used only the "appreciation for others" factor, which contains 4 items (e.g. I couldn't have gotten where I am today without the help of many people). The items are rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much). The results show a good internal consistency for the four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Procedure

The questionnaires were filled in a pen and paper format. The students received their questionnaires, which they completed at home. Before the study, the participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and were reassured of their anonymity.

Statistical Analyses

The descriptive statistics and the correlational analyses were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. The analyses regarding the mediation model were performed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017). Bootstrapped confidence intervals were used to empirically validate the indirect effects.

Results

Preliminary analysis

The means, standard deviations and gender differences are presented in Table 1. We found no differences between the male participants and the female participants regarding their scores at gratitude, positive affect, negative affect and relational satisfaction. However, female participants reported significantly higher ($p = .003$) levels of assertive entitlement ($M_{\text{female}} = 4.49$) compared to the male participants ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.86$).

Table 2 presents the bi-variate correlations between the variables. Assertive relational entitlement positively correlated with negative affect ($r = .23$, $p = .005$), and was negatively associated with relational satisfaction ($r = -.18$, $p = .02$). Higher levels of negative affect were linked with lower levels of satisfaction ($r = -.19$, $p = .02$), and with higher levels of positive affect ($r = .21$, $p = .01$). Positive affect was related with satisfaction ($r = .36$, $p < .001$). Finally, we found no significant correlation between gratitude and any other variable.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and gender differences

	Male (n = 71)		Female (n = 76)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Assertive Entitlement	3.86	1.67	4.49	1.22	-3.01**
Negative Affect	1.77	0.45	1.91	0.44	-1.93
Positive Affect	3.33	0.59	3.29	0.49	0.43
Gratitude	6.36	1.67	6.7	1.57	-1.38
Relational Satisfaction	5.29	0.84	5.34	0.79	-0.32

Note: ** $p < .01$

Model Testing

To test the first hypothesis, we examined the association between assertive relational entitlement and relational satisfaction, which we found to be significant and negative ($b = -.13, p = .01$). Secondly, in order to test the second hypothesis, we examined the relationship between the emotional state and satisfaction. The results revealed that negative affect has a significant and negative association with satisfaction ($b = -.42, p = .002$) and that positive affect has a significant and positive association with satisfaction ($b = .67, p < .001$). Gratitude did not have a significant association with satisfaction ($b = .03, p = .37$).

To test the third hypothesis, we firstly verified the relationship between assertive relational entitlement and emotional state. The results are displayed in Figure 2. The assertive sense of relational entitlement predicted negative affect ($b = .08, p = .006$), but did not have significant relationships with either positive affect ($b = .06, p = .06$) or gratitude ($b = .15, p = .14$). After introducing the mediators in the analysis, the direct effect of assertive relational entitlement on relational satisfaction remained significant ($b = -.14, p = .002$). We also found one significant indirect effect, through negative affect ($b = -.03, CI\ 95\ \% = -.06; -.008$). This model explained 29 % of the outcome’s variance. Corroborating all of the previous results, we can conclude that the relationship between assertive relational entitlement and relational satisfaction is partially mediated by negative affect (see Figure 2 for more details).

Table 2. Correlation coefficients

	1	2	3	4
1. Assertive Entitlement	1			
2. Negative Affect	0.23**	1		
3. Positive Affect	0.14	0.21**	1	
4. Gratitude	0.12	0.05	0.16	1
5. Relational Satisfaction	-0.18*	-0.18*	0.36**	0.1

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

All of the analyses were performed while controlling for the participants’ age and their relationship’s length. Age had a significant and negative effect on satisfaction ($b = -.06, p = .02$), while the effect of the length of the relationship was not significant ($b = .002, p = .34$).

Discussions

This study expended previous research by examining the underlying mechanism linking assertive relational entitlement and relational satisfaction. We proposed that assertive entitlement would be positively related to

satisfaction, that gratitude, positive and negative emotions would also be associated with satisfaction and that the emotional state would mediate the relationship between assertive relational entitlement and satisfaction.

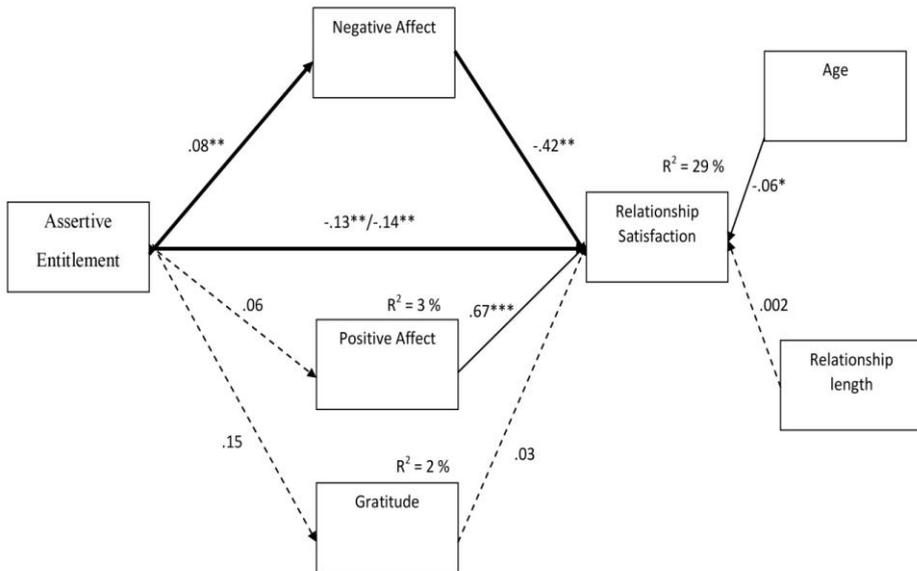


Figure 2. The complete mediation model. The relationship between assertive sense of relational entitlement and couple satisfaction: the mediation role of affective states (on the C path, the first score represents the total effect and the second score represents the direct effect).

Previous literature showed that assertiveness is related to positive relational outcomes such as relational (Hinnen et al., 2008) or sexual satisfaction (Brassard et al., 2015). In addition, a non-exploitative, self-assertive sense of entitlement is associated with self-worth, personal value, and willingness to assert one's dutifully earned rights (see Grubbs & Exline, 2016 for a review). However, people feel differently entitled in different contexts. Thus, Tolmacz and Mikulincer (2011) proposed the concept of relational entitlement to explicitly measure the way people feel entitlement within their romantic relationship. Some studies reporting on the relationship between assertive relational entitlement (as a form of relational entitlement) and satisfaction showed that being assertively entitled led to greater satisfaction (compared to being excessively or restrictively entitled; Candel & Turluc, 2019b) or at least is not damaging to one's level of satisfaction (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011; George-Levi et al., 2014). However, our results contradicted previous findings,

thus our first hypothesis was not confirmed. We found a negative association between assertive entitlement and satisfaction. People who report more assertive entitlement in their relationship also seems to have lower levels of satisfaction. Although surprising, these results can find their explanation when we examine other correlates of assertive entitlement. In the case of assertive entitlement, the persons focus on thier needs, desires and rights, on what they receive in the relationship, and not on what they can offer to the partner. When a person wants more rewards from the partner, even in an assertive manner, he / she feels less gratified in that relationship, and reports a lower satisfaction in the couple (Turliuc, 2004). Described as the ability to appropriately and realistically evaluate those things that one can expect from his or her partner (George-Levi et al., 2014), assertive entitlement is still related to some facets of narcissism, such as superiority, self-sufficiency, and vanity (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). Also, having higher levels of non-exploitative entitlement does not automatically imply that a person has lower levels of manipulativenness, irresponsibility, or callousness (Lessard, Greenberger, Chen, & Farruggia, 2011). Corroborating these findings with the fact that narcissism is negatively related to satisfaction (Foster, 2008), we consider that there is some support in affirming that assertive entitlement might also lead to lower satisfaction, but not to such extent comparing to the other two facets of relational entitlement.

Our second hypothesis was partially confirmed. As predicted, higher levels of negative emotions lead to lower levels of satisfaction, while higher levels of positive emotions lead to higher levels of satisfaction. For the mood predictors, our results supported the previous findings (Gordon & Baucom, 2009; Watson et al., 2000) reporting that both negative and positive emotions contribute to relational satisfaction. In general, the persons who are more positive and happier tend to report higher levels of satisfaction, while for those who are more on the neurotic side, their negative emotional side might damage their satisfaction. On the contrary, we found no significant relationship between gratitude and relational satisfaction. These results are in opposition to the previous findings reporting that when people feel more gratitude towards their partners and the action of their partners, they also are more satisfied with their relationship (Algoe et al., 2010; Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012). However, it is important to note that most previous studies used different measures for gratitude, either as the daily emotion response to the interactions with the partner (Algoe et al., 2010) or as the extent to which the participants felt appreciative of their partner (Gordon et al., 2012). In this study, we used a measurement that assessed general, trait-like gratitude, which, although specific to the interpersonal domain, does not necessarily overlap with the more precise gratitude towards the partner that was used in other studies. Several other explanations could be taken into account. Firstly, the mean level of satisfaction for the current sample was high for both males and females (5.29 out of 6 for

males and 5.34 out of 6 for females). This shows that the participants were very satisfied with their relationship, which is a possible consequence of many other traits and processes above and beyond gratitude. Secondly, gratitude is lower in younger adults (compared to middle-aged and older adults; Chopik, Newton, Ryan, Kashdan, & Jarden, 2019). Given that our sample was entirely composed of young adults, it is possible that they experience lower levels of gratitude and not necessarily towards their partners (they might be more grateful to their parents and friends for their support).

The third hypothesis was also partially supported. We found that one's negative emotions represent a significant mediator between their assertive entitlement and their relational satisfaction. Being more assertively entitled leads to stronger negative emotions and this, as previously mentioned, lead to lower levels of satisfaction. Given that assertive relational entitlement was related to both narcissism and global entitlement (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011) and that global entitlement is related to negative emotions such as anger (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013), our results tend to confirm the previous findings. We found assertive entitlement to be unrelated to either positive emotions or gratitude. In regards to the relationship between assertive entitlement and positive emotions, our study confirms the findings of Tolmacz and Mikulincer (2011). The results might simply confirm the fact that assertive entitlement does not contribute to better functioning nor improve one's mood. Gratitude can be seen as an opposite of entitlement (especially of the maladaptive types of entitlement; Grubbs & Exline, 2016), but in this study, their association was not significant, nor entitlement predicted gratitude. These results are similar to those found by MacKenzie and Baumeister (2019), who reported a non-significant relationship between entitlement and gratitude. A possible explanation for this it that assertive relational entitlement is a healthier type of entitlement, but it is still characterized by a reluctance to neglect one's own needs in favor of a partner's needs (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). Thus, although the participants were assertive, they remained entitled to some positive outcome so they were not grateful for receiving them.

Despite findings only one significant mediation path between assertive relational entitlement and relational satisfaction, a few implications emerge from these results. Most importantly, we consider that the state of assertive relational entitlement should be further investigated. Other authors view the adaptive and non-exploitative side of entitlement as another term for a healthy, positive self-view (Grubbs & Exline, 2016). Assertive relational entitlement (Grubbs & Exline, 2016) also contains elements of a positive self-view, but as we showed, its effects are not always beneficial for a relationship, as the individuals are more focused on what they deserve than on what they can offer in their relationship. One cannot forget that assertive entitlement also presented significant

correlations with some elements of narcissism and in this study, lead to an increase in negative affect, which was followed by a decrease in satisfaction. Even though previous studies had shown that being assertively entitlement is less damaging for one's relational outcomes compared to being excessively or restrictively entitled (Candel & Turliuc, 2019b), we present further proof that assertive entitlement can still cause some damage (in opposition to Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). One important perspective could be offered by a study conducted by Crowe, LoPilato, Campbell, and Miller (2016). The authors differentiate between two types of entitlement, one that is emotionally stable and one that is emotionally vulnerable. The correlational pattern between these two types of entitlement and the Big Five Factors reveal a similar image with that reported by Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011. Vulnerable entitlement had positive correlations with neuroticism, and negative correlations with agreeableness and consciousness, which is similar to the correlations of unhealthy relational entitlement (restricted and excessive). Interestingly, assertive entitlement correlated with the Big Five factors (not significant / negative associations with neuroticism; positive correlations with consciousness) in a similar way compared to the emotionally stable entitlement. These similarities add to the perspective that assertive relational entitlement might be only a more emotionally stable version of entitlement, without a complete absence of the antagonistic behavior.

Secondly, assertive relational entitlement was not related to gratitude in our sample. In general, exploitative, maladaptive entitlement is seen as an opposite to gratitude (Grubbs & Exline, 2016), but non-exploitative entitlement is not necessarily an orthogonal concept compared to exploitative entitlement (Lessard et al., 2011). Thus, one must not assume that healthy entitlement automatically leads to higher levels of gratitude. However, our results do not imply that assertive entitlement has no positive effect on satisfaction. Many other concepts can explain such relationships and future research should concentrate on finding those mechanisms that indirectly contribute to higher relational satisfaction for those who are more assertively entitled.

When interpreting these results, several limitations should also be noted. Firstly, we used a cross-sectional design that cannot allow us to conclude any causality regarding the relationships we mentioned. Moreover, given that both entitlement and gratitude can be conceptualized as both traits and states, other designs (such as longitudinal or daily diary design) might be more appropriate when studying these concepts. Furthermore, we used only one type of relational entitlement, while most of the previous studies used all the three / five types. Given that the previous studies (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011; George-Levi et al., 2014) reported a significant and positive correlation between the facets of relational entitlement, one study that assesses all of them can yield different

results. Finally, we measured only trait gratitude. Future studies could also include measures of offered and received gratitude towards and from the partner.

Despite its inherent limitations, our study proposes several strengths and advantage. To our knowledge, this is the first study to include measurements of assertive relational entitlement and gratitude and to evaluate the emotional state as a possible mediator between assertive entitlement and relational satisfaction. We found that assertive entitlement harms satisfaction, which can change the perspective offered by the previous studies. Considered healthier, assertive entitlement can also have damaging effects, especially when taking into account its associations with narcissism. We also found one significant mechanism explaining this relationship. Our findings imply that people who are higher in assertive entitlement also feel stronger negative emotions and thus suffer from reduced relational satisfaction. Although leading to higher satisfaction, positive affects cannot buffer the effect of assertive entitlement on relational satisfaction. However, it is important to further explore how other variables account for this link.

In conclusion, we shed some light on the mechanisms that link assertive relational entitlement and relational satisfaction. Negative emotion becomes an important concept in these relationships and learning how to work around such damaging outcomes might allow us to concentrate on other factors that might indirectly associate assertive entitlement with higher levels of satisfaction.

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