



Relational entitlement moderates the associations between support matching and perceived partner responsiveness



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 November 2015

Revised 10 August 2016

Accepted 29 August 2016

Available online 30 August 2016

Keywords:

Support

Entitlement

Perceived partner responsiveness

Romantic relationships

Daily diaries

ABSTRACT

Support often fails to lead to beneficial results. One personality factor which may differentiate between individuals' responses to support is an excessive sense of relational entitlement (SRE; the perception of what one deserves within a romantic relationship). We examined SRE as a moderator of the association between support matching and daily perceived partner responsiveness (PPR). We found overall positive effects for support matching, negative effects for underprovision, and limited effects for overprovision. We also found that men (but not women) with an excessive SRE experienced a greater increase in their PPR when their supportive needs were met; additionally, both men and women with an excessive SRE experienced a greater decrease in PPR when their supportive needs were not met.

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1. Introduction

The Skillful Support Model (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009) proposed a theoretical framework of the different factors involved in the provision of skilled support. One of these hypothesized factors was the provision of support that appropriately matches the need or wish of the recipient (Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Horowitz et al., 2001). In our recent work (Bar-Kalifa & Rafaeli, 2013; see also Brock & Lawrence, 2009; Reynolds & Perrin, 2004), we demonstrated that mismatched support (and particularly, support that is underprovided) may matter as much as matched support. In the current study, we aimed to go one step further, and to explore the idea that recipients may not be equally sensitive to either matches or mismatches.

Several personality factors have been presumed to be associated with the general effects of support; these include attachment security (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rholes, 2001; Collins, Ford, & Feeney, 2011), self-esteem (Gleason, Iida, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008), and relational self-construal (Heintzelman & Bacon, 2015). In the current work, we aimed to examine a personality factor which has yet to be considered in conjunction with social support (or with matches/mismatches in it). Specifically, we assessed the extent to which recipients' sense of relational entitlement (SRE) moderates the effects of these matching states. To

our knowledge, though many researchers (e.g., Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000) have examined the role of personality in close relationships, this is the first study to suggest an individual differences factor as a possible moderator of the effects of support matching.

1.1. Sense of relational entitlement

According to the agency model of narcissism in relationships, entitlement is one of the five fundamental qualities of narcissism (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). Campbell et al. (2004) conceptualized general psychological entitlement as a stable and pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others. Other researchers have expanded the concept and differentiated between three basic entitlement-related attitudes: excessive, restricted, and assertive entitlement (Kriegman, 1983; Levin, 1970; Moses & Moses-Hrushovski, 1990).

People characterized by *excessive* entitlement believe they deserve to have their needs and wishes satisfied regardless of others' feelings, needs, or rights, and feel comfortable behaving however they desire. Those characterized by *restricted* entitlement may look as if they are uncertain of their legitimate right to express their needs and receive attention. They are likely to behave in an introverted manner and in particularly modest, bashful, and cautious ways. Finally, those characterized by *assertive* entitlement seem to hold a healthy and adaptive sense of what response they may realistically expect from others regarding their preferences, needs and rights (George-Levi, Vilchinsky, Tolmacz, & Liberman, 2014).

We wish to suggest that excessive entitlement is the entitlement attitude most likely to be associated with strong reactions

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to the fulfillment or unfulfillment of relational expectations, and as such, may be particularly relevant when examining support matching and mismatching effects. This is in line with much of the literature pertaining to the effects of one's general sense of entitlement (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Horney, 1950; Murray, 1964).

In a line of studies, Campbell et al. (2004) showed excessive entitlement to have a pervasive and largely destructive association with social behavior. For example, excessive entitlement was associated with competitive or greedy choices, selfish approaches to romantic relationships, and aggression following ego threat. Other authors have found excessive entitlement to put people at risk for emotional and interpersonal problems: it is associated with poor self-esteem, with more attachment insecurity, and with signs of emotional reactivity and instability, as manifested in neuroticism, negative mood, distress, depression, loneliness, unforgiveness, social anxiety, lack of life satisfaction and lower levels of marital adjustment and relationship satisfaction (Exline et al., 2004; George-Levi et al., 2014; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011; Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010). Thus, the present study focused solely on excessive entitlement attitudes.

An individual's sense of entitlement may differ within different life contexts and thus, be specific to a certain relationship or situation (Kriegman, 1983; Moses & Moses-Hrushovski, 1990). The idea of contextualized personality – i.e., that individuals' personality is often manifested in different manners within each context or social role – has gained considerable attention among personality researchers (e.g., Bleidorn & Ködding, 2013; Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Dunlop, 2015; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Though the idea of contextualized personality has been examined mainly in regard to personality traits (e.g., the Big-5; Dunlop, 2015), it has also been explored with regards to more relational traits such as attachment orientations (Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011; Gillath, Hart, Nettle, & Stockdale, 2009). Whereas there are various life domains in which the sense of entitlement may be activated, it has been suggested that one particular important context is romantic relationships. Since high levels of reciprocity, commitment, intimacy and passion are distinctive characteristics of such relationships, it is only natural they should cultivate unique entitlement issues (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). For instance, it has been suggested that excessive entitlement beliefs and values extend from, or co-occur with, proprietariness (i.e., viewing a romantic partner as a type of property) in a relationship and may result in severe violence (Hannawa, Spitzberg, Wiering, & Teranishi, 2006).

The sense of entitlement present within romantic relations has only recently begun to be studied empirically. The concept of *relational* entitlement has been defined as the extent to which an individual expects his or her relational wishes, needs, and fantasies to be fulfilled by a romantic partner (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). It also refers to a person's affective and cognitive responses to a romantic partner's failure to meet these wishes, needs, and fantasies. People with an excessive sense of relational entitlement (SRE) are more sensitive to relational transgressions and frustrations, are more vigilant to negative aspects of their partner and relationship, and have higher expectations for their partner's attention and understanding (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). As such, it seems likely that these individuals respond more strongly to the support matches and mismatches occurring within their romantic relationship.

1.2. Support within intimate relationships

Social support is a staple of close relationships (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Thoits, 2010). A large body of research has documented considerable mental and physical

benefits for the perception that support is available and forthcoming (see reviews by Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Cohen, 1988; Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Pinquart & Duberstein, 2010; Uchino, 2004). For instance, a number of studies indicate that social support is associated with better immune functioning (e.g., Lutgendorf et al., 2005; Miyazaki et al., 2005) and deficits in social support have been found to predict future increases in depressive symptoms during adolescence (Lewinsohn, Hops, Roberts, Seeley, & Andrews, 1993; Sheeber, Hops, Alpert, Davis, & Andrews, 1997; Slavin & Rainer, 1990; Stice, Ragan, & Randall, 2004).

Whereas in childhood individuals turn mainly to their primary caregivers for support, in adulthood, they often seek help from within their committed, romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). For example, among married couples, partners are most likely to turn to each other for support in times of need (e.g., Beach, Martin, Blum, & Roman, 1993; Dakof & Taylor, 1990). Social support is also considered a key element of relationship maintenance and marital well-being (e.g., Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Bradbury & Karney, 2004), and availability of dyadic support predicts both individual and relational positive outcomes (e.g., Bradbury et al., 2000; Cutrona, Russell, & Gardner, 2005). Relatedly, support is associated with relationship satisfaction (e.g., Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Cutrona & Suhr, 1994; Julien & Markman, 1991). Furthermore, the longitudinal course of marriage is strongly influenced by the extent to which couples' support transactions help them adapt to stressors and life transitions (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). For instance, people often identify lack of spousal support as a major reason for relationship dysfunction and dissolution (e.g., Baxter, 1986; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

Though *perception* of support availability is consistently associated with positive outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988), *actual* support transactions are not uniformly beneficial and may even cause harm to the recipient (e.g., Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Fisher, Nadler, & Whitcher-Alagna, 1982; Krause, 1997; Nurullah, 2012). For example, a study of breast cancer patients found enacted support to be ineffective in reducing patients' distress or promoting physical recovery (Bolger, Foster, Vinokur, & Ng, 1996). Another study found decreased adjustment following reports of support provision in examinees preparing for the New York State Bar Examination (Bolger et al., 2000).

Different explanations have been put forward for this apparent paradox. Support receipt may threaten recipients' self-esteem and sense of competence, emphasize the stressor at hand or the recipient's distress, or alternatively raise feelings of indebtedness and inequity between the partners in a relationship (Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Bolger et al., 2000; McClure et al., 2014; Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009). It has been suggested that in order to circumvent these costs (and indeed, to maximize its benefits) support must be skillfully provided and matched to the specific needs of the recipient, in terms of both quality and quantity (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009; Rini & Dunkel Schetter, 2010).

1.3. Support matching and mismatching

A prominent conceptualization of support matching was presented in Cutrona, Cohen, and Igram's (1990) Optimal Matching Theory. This model proposes that whereas *action facilitating* support (i.e., instrumental support) is most beneficial when a recipient is coping with a controllable stressor, *nurturant* support (i.e., emotional support) is viewed as more effective for coping with uncontrollable stressors. Interestingly, only partial empirical support has been found for this theory: whereas instrumental support has been found to be associated with greater satisfaction when recipient's

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