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RELATIONAL ENTITLEMENT AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS WITH QUALITY OF
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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Abstract

Previous studies have found that sense of entitlement is harmful to many aspects of people's lives. This study explored the effect of a specific type of entitlement, namely entitlement in romantic relationship or relational entitlement, on the quality of close relationships as well as people's general well-being. This study incorporated multiple methodologies, including a behavioral task, interview, and questionnaires, to measure participants' relational entitlement, romantic competence, attachment orientation, couple satisfaction, and general well-being. The results showed that the newly designed behavioral task to measure relational entitlement managed to pinpoint participants with the best and the worst romantic competence and couple satisfaction, even though the task was questionable in terms of its validity. Findings also showed a strong association between relational entitlement and insecure attachment styles.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Entitlement is a “pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004, p. 31). Sense of entitlement has attracted research interest from psychologists on a number of topics, such as the role of entitlement in academic performance (e.g., Kopp, Zinn, Finney, & Jurich, 2011), selfish behaviors following induced entitled attitudes (e.g., Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010), and associations between parenting traits and children’s entitlement (e.g., Sergin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Murphy, 2012). However, little research has explored the effect of entitlement in interpersonal settings, especially romantic relationships. Many studies have found that entitlement is associated with a wide range of maladaptive personality characteristics, such as lack of self-control (Raskin & Terry, 1988), trait anger (Witte, Callahan, & Perez-Lopez, 2002), and interpersonal violence (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). All these maladaptive personality traits are likely to exert negative impacts on close relationships. Given the significance of romantic relationships in people’s lives, it is important to examine the role of sense of entitlement in intimate relationships.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Relational Entitlement

While many scales try to capture a global sense of entitlement, some psychologists have noticed that a person's sense of entitlement might differ for different aspects of people's lives. For example, Kriegman (1983) indicated that individuals who did not present entitled attitudes in occupational settings might express their exaggerated sense of entitlement in other personal aspects of life, such as interactions with strangers. On this basis, it is reasonable to believe that individuals who exhibit a global sense of entitlement may or may not show the same attitude in romantic relationships, and vice versa. Therefore, the measurement of relational entitlement should be separated from the measurement of general entitlement. In this study, relational entitlement, or sense of entitlement in romantic relationships, was defined as "the extent to which an individual expects his or her relational wishes, needs, and fantasies should be fulfilled by a romantic partner" (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011, p. 77).

Entitlement and Justice Theories

Many justice theories have tried to analyze the mechanism of successful romantic relationships. For example, according to the social-exchange theory, people by their nature try to maximize their own benefits in close relationships (Homans, 1958). People's expectations about their partners and people's acts of caring in a romantic relationship are derived solely from an established social contract that clearly sets rules of fairness in allocating resources for both partners. In other words, partners will not be kind or generous to each other unless they expect these behaviors to lead to equal or greater personal benefits.

The equity theory proposes that people allocate resources between partners in terms of the ratio of inputs to outcomes (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Specifically, people judge the equitableness of their relationships by comparing their own inputs to outcomes ratio with that of their partners. Individuals who perceive that their benefits from the relationship are inequitable will become distressed and attempt to restore equity.

A more integrated theory proposed that people engage in rational choice in the selection of a particular rule of resource allocation based on specific situations (Deutsch, 1975). People will allocate resources evenly when they wish to promote interpersonal harmony (Deutsch, 1985). If instead they want to encourage productive efforts, people will allocate rewards on the basis of relative contribution (Leventhal, Kanuza, & Fry, 1980). Lastly, people will distribute resources on the basis of need if, for example, the partners become disabled (Deutsch, 1985). In general, people's choices in each of the three situations reflect their beliefs that a particular rule of fairness is essential in romantic relationships.

According to the three theories above, entitled people may not be able to establish stable long-term romantic relationships, because their sense of deservingness over others is likely to violate the general rule of fairness in resource allocation. In a relationship where both partners want to maximize benefits (as social-exchange theory postulates), the more entitled partner will expect more benefits from the other partner, who in return is not likely to submit to the expectation, because every extra reward for the entitled partner may be at the cost of the other partner's owned or potential resources. In a relationship where resources are attributed based on contribution (as the equity

theory argues), the entitled partner will also violate the rule of fairness by requesting more rewards than what he or she actually contributes. As a result, the other partner will become stressed about the perceived imbalanced inputs to outcome ratios. As for the relationship where the resources are allocated based on needs, entitled people's sense of deservingness over others by nature is in opposition to the principle of need-based resources distribution.

In general, entitled people are likely to violate the rule of fairness in close relationships by expecting more resources than justified from their partners. This expectation will probably transform into behaviors that will distress their partners, leading to a potential fundamental conflict within the relationship. Therefore, entitled people should experience less satisfied relationships because of the difficulty in obtaining what they expect or to maintain a harmonious relationship. Consequently, they should also experience more negative moods, such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness.

The present study tested whether participants with a strong sense of relational entitlement experienced a lower level of satisfaction in relationships and more distressed affects. The study also explored potential precursors of relational entitlement, namely the development of insecure attachment styles.

Entitlement and Attachment Theory

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958) has inspired thousands of studies on interpersonal relationships. The theory postulates that infants seek proximity and support from their primary caregivers. A separation from the primary caregiver will trigger the infant to carry out attachment behaviors—crying, clinging, searching—in order to re-establish proximity to the primary caregiver to protect the infant from potential dangers

out there in the world. Over time, an attachment behavioral system will form to regulate proximity to an attachment figure.

Individual differences in the attachment system originate from caregivers' response patterns to infants' need for proximity and support (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). "Securely attached" babies have a supportive mental representation of the caregiver figure that is always responsive and available when needed. "Insecurely attached" babies, on the other hand, do not have such a representation due to lack of an experienced consistent availability of and comfort from their caregivers. Specifically, Ainsworth classified children into three types of attachment, one *secure* type and two insecure types: *avoidant*, and *resistant* (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Children with secure attachment are able to use the caregivers as a secure base for exploration in novel situations. Upon separation with the caregivers, secure children may be overly distressed but will recover immediately upon reunion. Children with avoidant attachment explore novel situations independently. They do not become distressed upon separation with the caregiver and show signs of ignoring and avoiding the caregivers upon reunion. Children with resistant attachment seek proximity and contact from the caregivers frequently, which does not allow them to explore novel situations freely. Upon separation, resistant children will become very distressed and will seek contact from the caregiver and then angrily resist it upon reunion.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that the emotional bond that develops in romantic relationships between adults is partly a function of the same attachment behavioral system developed during infancy. As people naturally develop stable expectations concerning their environment, these expectations form a script with which

people can function. In other words, interactions with caregivers during infancy and childhood build a script following which the person interacts with other people, especially the romantic partner. Studies have supported this argument by finding strong links between attachment classification to parents and attachment type to romantic partners (e.g., Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Main, Goldwyn, & Hesse, 2003). It is found that secure adults tend to be satisfied with their romantic relationships. Their relationships are characterized by trust, commitment, and interdependence. Avoidant adults (often called dismissing-avoidant) tend not to rely on others and are not comfortable with intimacy. Resistant adults (often called preoccupied-ambivalent) tend to worry if their partners are available, responsive, and attentive, and they are also overly dependent on their partners. In general, the attachment type to parents seems to stay within individuals and will be expressed in romantic relationships with similar behavioral patterns.

So how is the attachment theory related to entitlement? Infants' needs for proximity and support are similar to the sense of entitlement, because these needs require caregivers to provide intensive care and support (so that it is difficult for the caregivers to provide the same level of care and support to anyone else) whereas the infants could not offer anything in turn. In other words, infants' attachment behaviors seem to express a sense of deservingness over others (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). When the infant carries the same attachment needs into adulthood and the needs are not met, insecure behaviors (avoidant or resistant) will be formed together with doubts concerning his or her sense of entitlement. Tolmacz and Mikulincer (2011) found that the sense of entitlement in romantic relationships was positively and significantly correlated with

neuroticism, adult attachment anxiety, adult attachment avoidance, negative mood, loneliness, and social anxiety, but negatively and significantly associated with agreeableness, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and marital adjustment. The fact that relational entitlement was positively correlated with both attachment avoidance and anxiety might be due to different kinds of entitlement from these two attachment styles. People with attachment avoidance may be entitled to flexible partners who can come and leave at their wishes; people with attachment anxiety may be entitled to partners who are extremely caring and are available at any time. In either case, people with insecure attachment are more likely to encounter partners who cannot meet their attachment needs, and these unsatisfied needs seem to exert negative influence on other aspects of people's lives.

However, no studies up to date have examined the relation between people's attachment style to their parents and relational entitlement. Even though previous studies have found strong connection between parental attachment and romantic attachment, we should not assume an association between attachment to parents and relational entitlement. Moreover, no studies have measured relational entitlement other than using questionnaires. Even though people's ideas and expectations about romantic relationships play a significant role in the quality of romantic relationships, it is usually the behaviors as a reflection of the ideas that actually damage the relationships. Therefore, measuring entitled behaviors in romantic relationships may provide a new perspective in analyzing relational entitlement. This study designed a new behavioral task to measure relational entitlement and examined the relationship between attachment orientation and relational entitlement using both questionnaires and the behavioral task.

Entitlement and Romantic Competence

Individual relational entitlement as an attitude or expectation may not directly impede his or her satisfaction in romantic relationships. Instead, it is usually the external expression of the entitled beliefs through behaviors that actually lead to distress in close relationships. These behaviors are a good reflection of individual romantic competence, which is a set of skills for people to function well in romantic relationships. Davila, Sternberg, Miller, Stroud, Starr, and Yoneda (2009) adopted a broad definition of romantic competence by combining criteria from social-cognitive models, attachment theory, and models of emotion regulation.

Social cognitive models of interpersonal problems emphasize the role of mutuality in relational functioning (e.g., Yeates, Schultz, & Selman, 1990). Mutuality in social cognitive models refers to the ability to think through and respect the needs of both partners in different interpersonal situations. A high level of mutuality requires an individual to take care the self and the partner's needs in a relationship, whereas a low level of mutuality reflects an ignorance of self or the partner's needs. Importantly, mutuality is different from justice in romantic relationships that was discussed above, because mutuality focuses on both partners' needs, which includes but is not limited to the amount or ratio of earned resources for both partners.

The attachment theory suggests that a good relationship with one's parents should build him or her an adaptive insight about close relationship. Namely, people with an adaptive insight should be able to learn from prior experiences (e.g., Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004), pay attention to both intimacy and autonomy needs (e.g., Cassidy & Shaver, 1999), and maintain a level of trust in self and others in face of threats

to secure (Mikulincer, Shaver, Pereg, 2003).

Theories of emotion regulation emphasize an adaptive ability to experience and express a range of emotions in contextually appropriate ways (Cole, Michel, & Teli, 1994). Therefore, people with a poor skill of emotion regulation may experience or express extreme emotions (excessive or restricted) in contextually inappropriate ways (e.g., feeling devastated for a break-up), and fail to effectively cope with these extreme emotions (e.g., self-harm behaviors).

In general, Davila and her colleagues developed a romantic competence interview to measure adolescents' romantic competence as an adaptive ability of keeping mutuality as a core principle in relationships, learning from previous experiences to improve one's knowledge about maintaining a harmonious relationship, and being able to experience and express a range of emotions without losing one's control for the emotions to reach the extreme.

Based on this definition of romantic competence, people on the two extreme ends of relational entitlement should experience a low level of romantic competence as well as satisfaction in relationships. Specifically, people with a high level of relational entitlement would probably have a low mutuality by ignoring the partner's needs; people who were too generous in romantic relationships (i.e., frequently sacrificing one's needs in cater to the desires of the partner) also have a low mutuality by ignoring the self needs. This low level of mutuality in both cases may influence other domains in the construct of romantic competence (i.e., insight and emotion regulation) and should result in poor romantic competence skills and low satisfaction in relationships.

Present Study

The purpose of this study was to examine: (a) the effectiveness of the behavioral task in measuring relational entitlement, (b) the relationship between the behavioral aspect of relational entitlement and other important variables that could impact or reflect the quality of romantic relationship, such romantic attachment styles, romantic competence, and couple satisfaction (c) whether relational entitlement is associated with a specific parental/romantic attachment style.

I propose that (1) the results of the behavioral task should be significantly and positively correlated with the attitudinal relational entitlement measured by questionnaires; 2) participants with extremely high or low sense of relational entitlement should have a lower level of romantic competence and experience a lower level of relational satisfaction and a higher level of negative moods in comparison to mildly entitled participants; (3) participants with relational entitlement should be classified into one of the insecure parental and romantic attachment styles.

Chapter 3: Method

Participants

Ninety-four Towson undergraduates and graduates participated in the study (67 females and 27 males; mean age = 19.22; 3.4% = Asian, 10.1% = African American, 2.2 % = Hispanic, 84.3% = Caucasian). Each participant received 4 credits through research pool to fulfill class requirement. All participants were required to be in some kind of romantic relationships currently for at least 1 month in order to participate the study. Two participants were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of signing up the study but ended the relationship at the point of participating the experiment.

Measurement

General Entitlement. The Psychological Entitlement Scale was used to measure students' general entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004). The scale has 9 items ($\alpha = .867$; e.g., "I demand the best because I'm worth it," "People like me deserve an extra break now and then"). The items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Scores from this scale have been found moderately related to narcissism, self-esteem, superiority, and exploitativeness (Campbell et al., 2004).

Relational Entitlement. Sense of Relational Entitlement Scale is a 33-item scale assessing entitlement-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in romantic relationships (SRE; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). Ratings are done on a 7-point Likert Scale ($\alpha = .934$; i.e., 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The items are divided into five domains: (a) Vigilance of negative aspects of partner and relationship ($\alpha = .90$, e.g., I am possessed with my partner's faults), (b) Sensitivity to relational transgressions and frustrations ($\alpha = .85$, e.g., When my partner frustrates me, I can't let it go), (c) Assertive entitlement ($\alpha = .71$, e.g., I

insist on getting what I deserve in my relationship), (d) Expectations for partner's attention and understanding ($\alpha = .70$, e.g., I expect my partner to understand me without having to explain myself), (e) Restricted Entitlement ($\alpha = .71$, e.g., I'm often preoccupied with the question if I deserve my partner). Scores from this scale have been found moderately associated with neuroticism, self-esteem, positive and negative moods, loneliness, and life satisfaction (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). However, as Tolmacz and Mikulincer found a positive correlation between assertive entitlement and restricted entitlement as two opposing subscales ($r = .19, p < .05$), the restricted entitlement subscale was not included in the analysis of the current study.

Parental Attachment Type. The Inventory on Parent and Peer Attachment was used to assess participants' quality of attachment to their mothers ($\alpha = .83$), fathers ($\alpha = .91$), and peers ($\alpha = .82$) by examining their perceptions of positive and negative affective dimensions of the relationships with their parents and close friends (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The scale is comprised of 25 items in each of the mother, father, and peer sections, on a 5-point Likert Scale (i.e., 1 = *almost never or never true*, 5 = *almost always or always true*.) Each section is divided into three subscales, namely Trust ($\alpha = .93 - .95$, e.g., my mother/father/friend respects my feelings), Communication ($\alpha = .92 - .96$, e.g., I tell my mother/father/friend about my problems and troubles.), and Alienation ($\alpha = .71 - .88$, e.g., I get upset easily around my mother/father/friend). Parental attachment scores from this inventory have been found moderately and highly related to scores from the Family Environmental Scale, and parental and peer attachment scores have been found moderately associated with stability of self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and negative emotions (Armsten & Greenberg, 1987).

Romantic Attachment Type. The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire was used to assess participants' romantic attachment style (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). It is a 36-item scale on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The items are divided into subscales of attachment related anxiety ($\alpha = .93$, e.g., I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love), and avoidance ($\alpha = .86$, e.g., I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.) Insecure attachment styles measured with this questionnaire have been found moderately related to anxiety, depression, loneliness, and interpersonal distress (e.g., Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007).

Relationship Satisfaction. The Couples Satisfaction Index was used to measure participants' satisfaction in current relationships ($\alpha = .97$, Funk & Rogge, 2007). The scale includes 32 items and has a variety of questions with different response formats (e.g., Rate the quality of the relationship on a 6-point scale, where "0" represents boring and "5" represents interesting; Indicate the degree of happiness of the relationship on a 7-point scale where "0" is extremely unhappy and "6" is perfect). The scale was developed from eight well-validated self-report measures of relational satisfactions, and the final items were selected based on the results of principle-component analysis and item response theory. Compared to other measures of relational satisfaction, this index was shown to have higher precision of measurement and greater power of detecting differences in level of satisfaction. Moreover, the scale demonstrated strong convergent validity with other measures of relational satisfaction, and strong construct validity with anchor scales from the nomological net surrounding satisfaction.

Self-reported Mutuality. The Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire was used to assess participants' self-reported mutuality in close relationship ($\alpha = .78$; MPDQ; Genero, Miller, & Surrey, 1992). The scale includes 22 items that measure both the self and the partner's perspective (also from the point view of the participant) on the level of mutuality in close relationships. Items are rated on a six-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = more often than not, 5 = most of the time, 6 = all of the time). Genero et al. (1992) reported high inter-item reliability and test-retest reliability correlation coefficients. The MPDQ was also highly correlated with other measures, such as relationship satisfaction and relationship cohesion, which supported its construct validity.

Negative Emotions. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales Short Version (DASS, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996) were used to assess participants' negative emotional states. The DASS scale ($\alpha = .92$) is divided into three subscales, namely depression ($\alpha = .87$; e.g., "I couldn't seem to experience any positive feelings at all"), anxiety ($\alpha = .83$; e.g., "I was aware of dryness of my mouth"), and stress ($\alpha = .83$; e.g., "I tended to over-react to situations"). Each of the subscales includes 7 items, on a 4-point Likert Scale (i.e., 0 = *did not apply to me at all*, 3 = *applies to me very much, or most of the time*).

UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996) includes 20 items designed to measure subjective feelings of loneliness as well as social isolation ($\alpha = .883$, i.e., "There is no one I can turn to"). The scale is on a 4-point scale (i.e., 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often). The scale showed a high internal consistency as well as test-retest reliability (i.e., a range of α from .89 to .94). The scale has shown good convergent validity by

significant correlations with other measures of loneliness, and good construct validity by significant correlations with measures of interpersonal relationships, health, and well-being.

Interview

The Romantic Competence Interview (RCI) is a semi-structured interview that measures individuals' *mutuality*, *insight*, *emotional regulation*, and *global competence* in romantic relationships (Davila et al., 2007). Each domain was scored on a 1 to 5 Likert Scale (i.e., 1 = low, 3 = moderate, 5 = high). As the interview was originally designed for adolescents, the structure and the specific questions of the interview were modified to fit college students' romantic experiences.

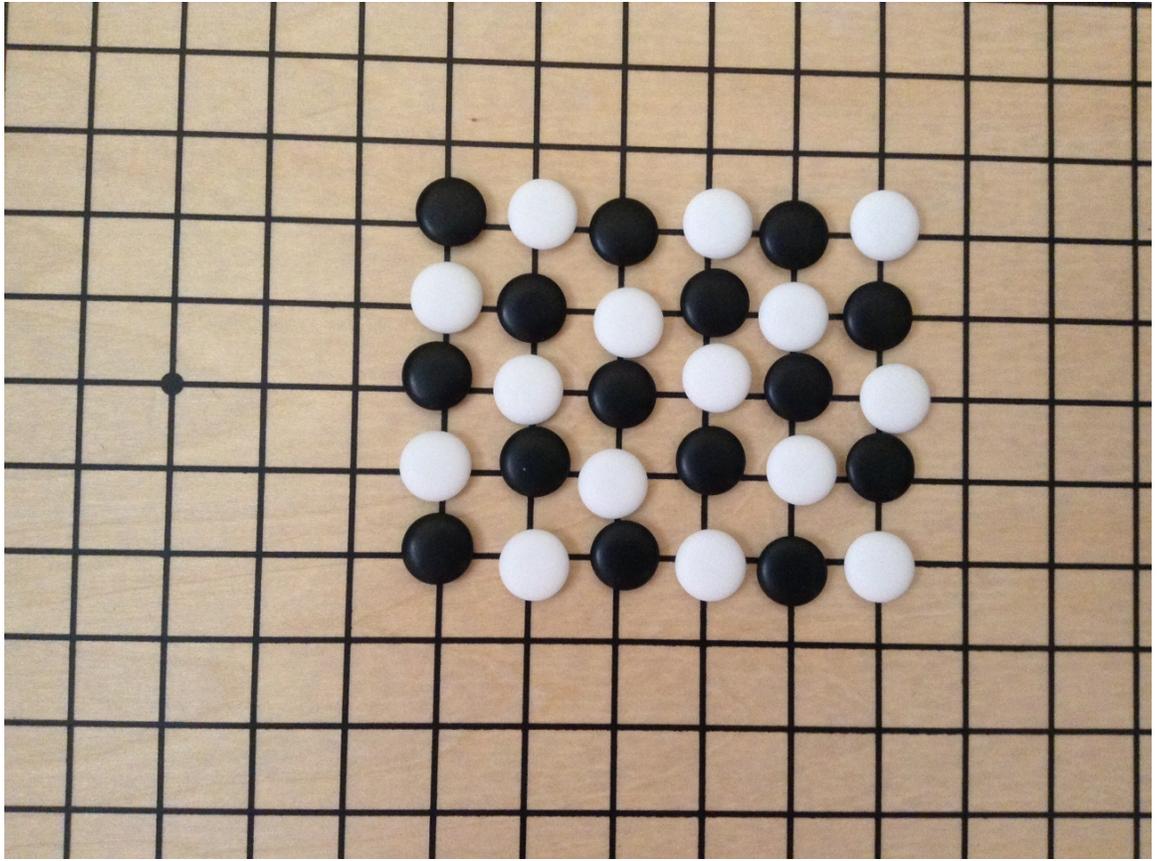
Participants were first asked about dating status and history, followed by the type of partners they would like to be with. Participants then were asked about their general ideas about good/bad romantic relationships, followed by their parents' marital status and quality. The interviewer would then ask participants to respond to a number of hypothetical romantic situations in terms of behaviors, thinking process, and feelings. Finally, participants were asked about how they were doing in their current romantic relationships. Questions were not divided to be scored on the four domains separately. Instead, the four dimensions of romantic competence were coded globally across participants' answers throughout the entire interview.

The interview took 30-60 minutes depending on the length of participants' answers. All interviewers were graduate students in clinical or experimental psychology (plus one advanced undergraduate student who was part of an intensive undergraduate clinical training program) who were trained in the proper procedures for conducting these

interviews by the original developer of the interview, Dr. Joanne Davila, and continued to receive training on interview and coding skills by Dr. Mattanah, principal investigator of the study, who has extensive experience conducting semi-structured clinical interviews. Interviewers were also carefully trained to code the interviews using a training manual developed by Dr. Davila. Coder reliability was enhanced by regular coder meetings held throughout the duration of the study. Based on a sample of 28 interviews double-coded by two interviewers, coders were substantially reliable across the four dimensions coded in this interview (Mutuality: Intra-Class Correlation (ICC) = .67; $\alpha = .80$; Learning/Insight: ICC = .64; $\alpha = .77$; Emotion-Regulation: ICC = .59; $\alpha = .74$; Global Score: ICC = .72; $\alpha = .84$).

Behavioral Tasks

“Go” Game. This behavioral task was designed to measure participants’ sense of relational entitlement. Each participant first placed black and white “go” pieces onto the “go” board one next to the other for 5 minutes (See Picture 1). At the end of the task, the participant was offered to choose a reward for completing the task. After the participant chose the reward, the experimenter asked the participant, “is it prize for yourself or for your partner?” Once the participant answered the question and chose a reward, the experiment asked the participant whether s/he was willing to repeat the task to get another reward, without implying whether the second reward was for the participant self or the partner. If the participant chose to repeat the task, the experiment asked once more whether the prize was for the participant him or herself or the partner after the participant pick the second reward upon completing the task.



Picture 1. The participants were asked to fill out the whole “go” board with black and white pieces in this pattern. They were not allowed to use the pieces to form any patterns other than the specific pattern this picture demonstrates.

During the task, the experimenter quietly observed the participant completing the “go” task and coded the participant’s attitude and behaviors on a 4-point Likert scale (e.g., 1 = *showed clear signs of being stressed or annoyed with the task*; 4 = *positively completed the task*). If the participants did not choose any rewards for their partner, the reason why they did not obtain any rewards for their partner were asked. The experimenter then further coded participants’ sense of relational entitlement based on their task results (i.e., 1 = *got two rewards for the partner*, 2 = *got one reward for the partner only*, 3 = *got one reward for the partner first and repeated the task for another reward for self*, 4 = *got one reward for self and repeated the task for another reward for*

partner, 5 = got one reward for self only, 6 = got two rewards for self only). Since the task was obviously very boring, participants who were willing to obtain prizes for their partners were considered less entitled in romantic relationships and more willing to sacrifice for the goodness of the partner, vice versa.

Procedure

Each participant first received the RCI interview with an interviewer, and then completed the “go” task, followed by an online survey consisting of all the scales presented above in addition to some demographic questions. The survey was accessed through “[surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com)” and took about 30-45 minutes to complete. After the completion of the survey, the participant was debriefed.

Chapter 4: Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, and normality test result of each variable were reported in Table 1. Variables that were not normally distributed and showed moderate to severe skewness in histogram graphs were transformed according to the direction and severity of skewness (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005, p. 32). Variables that were not normally distributed but were not transformed were either not used in any multivariate analysis, the histogram tables showed normal distribution, or the transformation did not improve the normal distribution.

Table 1

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Each Variable

Measure	M	SD	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Transformed KS
General Entitlement	2.97	1.16	.066	
Go Task	3.53	1.60	.29**	
RCI_Mutuality	3.43	.80	.14**	
RCI_Insight	3.62	.67	.15**	
RCI_Emotion Regulation	3.44	.72	.17**	
RCI_Global	3.54	.67	.18**	
Mutual Psyc Develop Q	4.81	.51	.07	
SRE_Vigilance	2.64	1.30	.15**	.09*
SRE_Sensitivity	3.39	1.18	.05	
SRE_Assertive Entitlement	3.75	1.11	.09	
SRE_Expectation	4.31	1.29	.12*	

SRE_Mean	3.52	1.02	.07	
Anxiety_Attachment	3.22	1.30	.11*	
Avoidance_Attachment	3.57	.97	.11*	.07
Couple Satisfaction	4.98	.89	.18*	.06
DASS_Depression	1.61	.57	.17**	.11**
DASS_Anxiety	1.60	.60	.22*	.13**
DASS_Stress	1.98	.65	.10*	
UCLA_Loneiness	1.68	.46	.09	
IPPA_M_Alienation	2.44	.87	.12**	
IPPA_M_Trust	4.10	.86	.15**	
IPPA_M_Communication	3.75	1.02	.11*	
IPPA_M_Attachment	3.85	.86	.09	
IPPA_F_Alienation	2.47	.96	.12**	
IPPA_F_Trust	3.83	1.11	.15**	
IPPA_F_Communication	3.28	1.20	.08	
IPPA_F_Attachment	3.57	1.10	.10*	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Correlations Between RE and Romantic Relationship Functioning

My first hypothesis was that the “go” task should be significantly correlated with both general and relational entitlement, and the “go” task should be significantly correlated with outcome variables (i.e., RCI subscales, couple satisfaction, distress, and loneliness.) in a similar pattern as how relational entitlement was correlated with these outcome variables. To test my first hypothesis, bivariate correlations were conducted to examine the correlations among the three entitlement variables and other outcome

variables (see Table 2).

Table 2
Intercorrelations for Scores on SRE, Go Task, RCI, DASS, and UCLA Loneliness

Measures	SRE	Go
Mutuality	-.244	-.381
Insight		-.318
Emotion Regulation	-.205	
Global	-.219	-.328
CSI	-.394	
Overall Distress		
Loneliness	.369	.214

Note. All coefficients are significant at $p < .05$

The results showed that the “go” task was correlated with neither general entitlement nor relational entitlement, but relational entitlement was significantly correlated with general entitlement ($r = .509$, $p < .05$), which confirmed the validity of the Scale of Relational Entitlement. Moreover, the mean of SRE subscales was significantly and negatively correlated with multiple subscales of RCI and couple satisfaction, but positively correlated with negative emotions. The go task, similar to the SRE, was also significantly and negatively correlated with subscales of RCI, and significantly and positively correlated with loneliness. However, the “go” task was not significantly correlated with general entitlement or sense of relational entitlement.

As the “go” task was significantly correlated with three subscales of RCI, a multiple regression model was used to test whether RCI scores could predict the “go” task performance (Table 3). The results indicated that after controlling for the self-report

mutuality in romantic relationships, RCI significantly predicted the go task performance, with the mutuality subscale being the primary significant predictor.

Table 3

Regression Analysis Predicting the Go Task Performance from RCI Scores

Step and predictor variable	R^2	ΔR^2	β	t
Step 1	.026	.014		
MPDQ			-.161	-1.480
Step 2	.201*	.161*		
RCI_Mutuality			-.414*	-2.720*
RCI_Insight			-.179	-1.225
RCI_Emotion Regulation			.197	1.454

Note. * $p < .01$

Detailed Examination of “Go” Task Data

My second hypothesis was that participants at the two extremes on the level relational entitlement should both suffer from poorer romantic competence, couple satisfaction, but higher negative moods. To test this hypothesis, participants were divided into six groups based on their “go” task scores, and the means and standard deviations of dependent variables were compared across the groups.

Presented in Table 4 are the means and standard deviations of scores of SRE, Couple Satisfaction, RCI Mutuality subscale, MPDQ, Romantic Avoidant Attachment, overall distress, and loneliness as grouped by the score from the “go” task. For all the variables, participants who received the highest score on the “go” task received the

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for Scores on SRE, Go Task, RCI, DASS, and UCLA Loneliness for groups assigned by the “Go” task

Measures	Go	1	2	3	4	5	6
N		7	31	3	7	39	5
SRE	M	3.05	3.62	3.62	3.57	3.37	4.53
	SD	1.22	1.13	.24	.76	.89	.82
CSI	M	5.21	5.03	5.71	4.96	5.04	4.03
	SD	.50	1.06	.04	.77	.76	1.00
Mutuality	M	3.57	3.87	4.50	3.21	3.26	2.75
	SD	.89	.62	.00	.86	.71	1.09
MPDQ	M	4.91	4.88	5.23	4.66	4.77	4.50
	SD	.53	.61	.06	.27	.47	.09
Avoidant Attachment	M	3.09	3.41	2.67	3.52	3.71	4.31
	SD	.40	1.00	.25	.58	1.00	1.09
Overall Distress	M	1.45	1.76	1.29	1.76	1.72	2.11
	SD	.37	.58	.21	.37	.53	.60
Loneliness	M	1.62	1.59	1.35	1.70	1.76	1.98
	SD	.52	.41	.41	.28	.50	.43

highest means on the SRE, and romantic avoidant attachment, Overall Distress, and Loneliness, but the lowest means on the rest variables. However, for participants who received a score of 3 from the “go” task, they showed the exactly the opposite pattern in terms of the means for all the variables. A one-way ANOVA test was used to confirm the

difference in the means of variables among the six groups determined by the “go” task. However, only the difference in the RCI mutuality subscale was significant ($F_{(5, 91)} = 4.937, p < .05$), but the post-hoc Schaffe tests could not pinpoint which groups differed significantly from which other groups. As Figure 1-4 shows, the relationship between the “go” task results and these dependent variables may not be linear. Therefore, another one-way ANOVA was used for trend analyses, and Table 5 displays the results. Specifically, the results showed a quadratic relationship in RCI Mutuality and couple satisfaction in relation to the “go” task, and a linear relationship in avoidant attachment, SRE, and overall distress in relation to the “go” task.

Figure 1-4.

Mean Scores of RCI Mutuality, Couple Satisfaction, Avoidant Attachment, Overall Distress, and Loneliness in Relation to the “go” task scores.

Figure 1

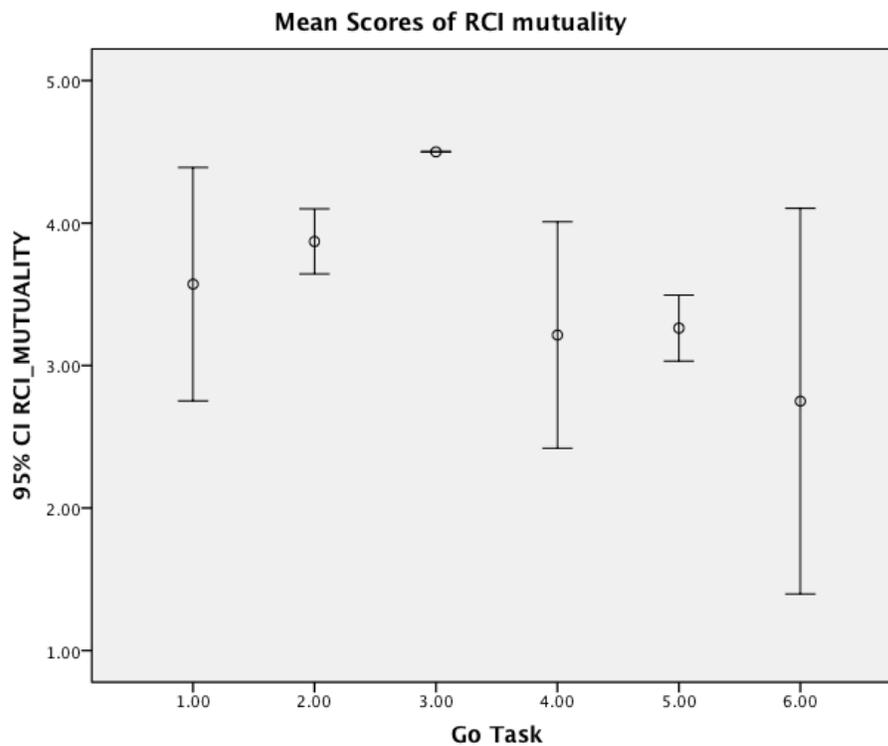


Figure 2

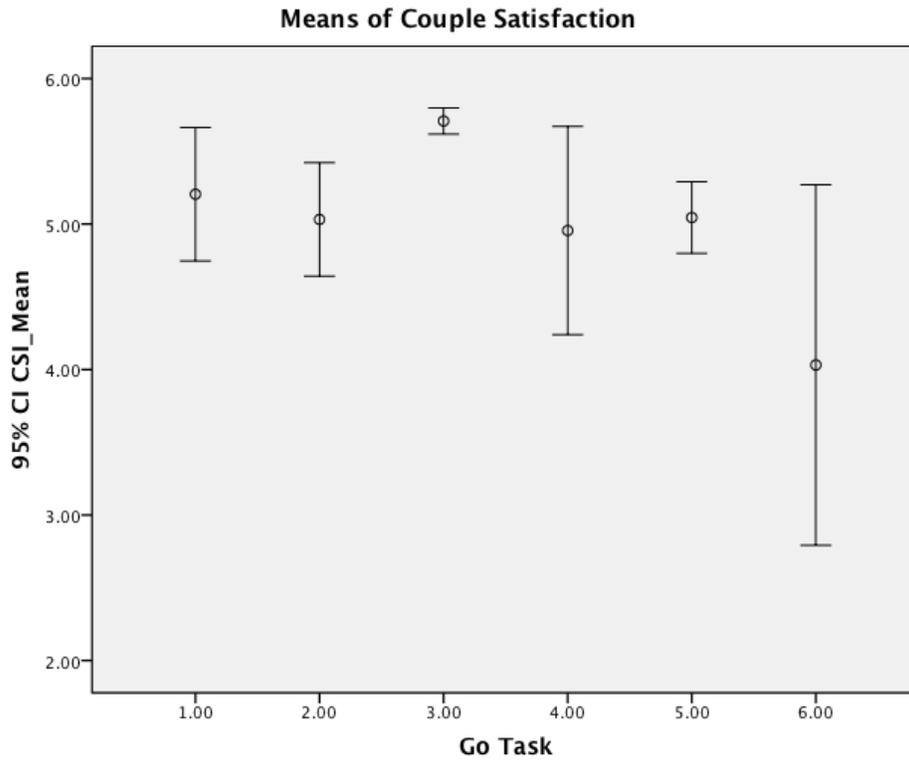


Figure 3

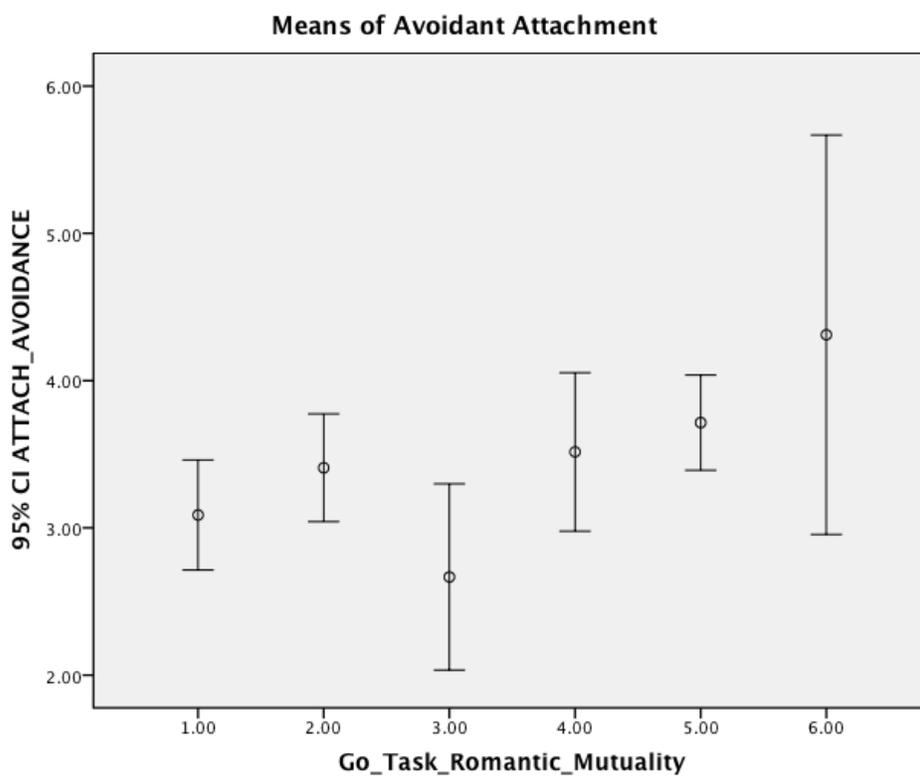


Figure 4

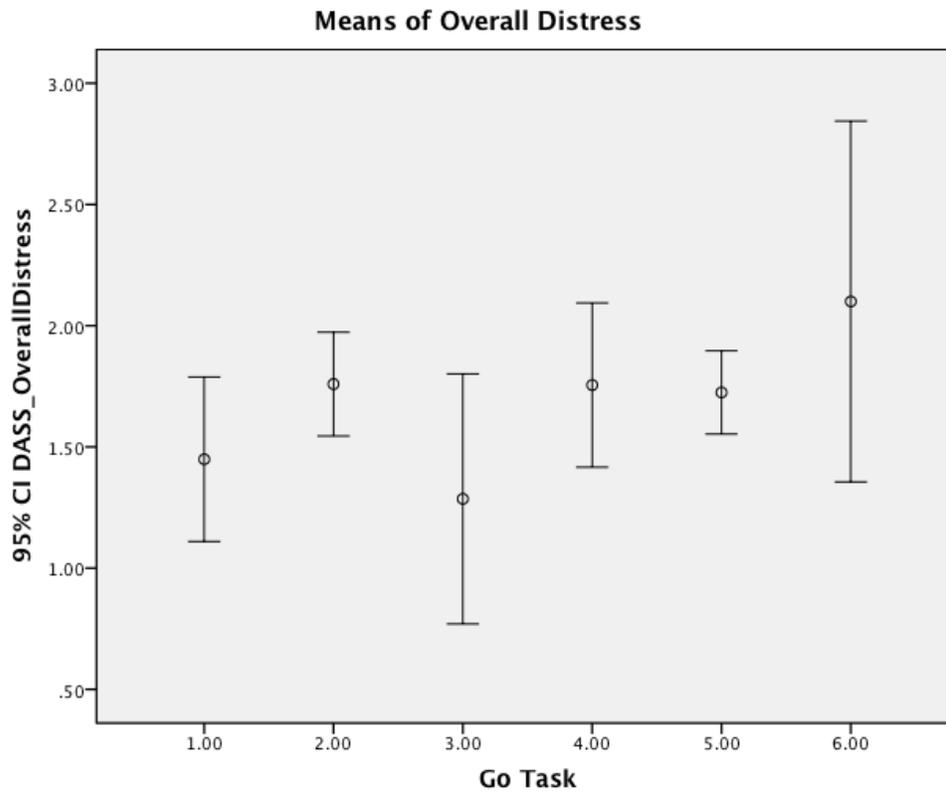


Table 5

Trend Analysis of Mutuality, Couple Satisfaction, Avoidant Attachment, Relational Entitlement, and Negative Emotion in Relation to the “Go” Task Scores.

Measures	Term (unweighted)	F
RCI Mutuality	Quadratic	4.807
Couple Satisfaction	Quadratic	4.318
Avoidant Attachment	Linear	6.871
Sense of Relational Entitlement	Linear	4.497
Overall Distress	Linear	4.891

Note. All results above were significant at $p < .05$

Associations between relational entitlement and attachment styles

The third hypothesis was that relational entitlement should be significantly correlated with insecure parental and romantic styles. Bivariate correlations were conducted between relational entitlement variables and attachment variables.

Presented in table 6, the results demonstrated that the “go” task was negatively and significantly correlated with peer trust, and positively and significantly with romantic avoidant attachment style. Vigilance was significantly correlated with most of the attachment styles variables except for father communication. Sensitivity was positively and negatively correlated with mother, father, and peer alienation, and both insecure romantic attachment styles. Assertive entitlement was only positively and significantly correlated with peer alienation. Expectation was positively and significantly correlated with peer alienation and anxiety attachment style.

As the “go” task was significantly correlated with romantic avoidant attachment, another model was used to examine whether the “go” task performance could predict romantic avoidant attachment, after controlling for the self-reported mutuality (Table 7). The results showed that the model significantly predicted avoidant attachment.

Relational Entitlement and Couple Satisfaction

In order to explore which variables could predict couple satisfaction, another multiple regression model was used to predict couple satisfaction using the “go” task performance, Experiences in Close Relationships, RCI scores, and SRE scores, entered in this sequence separately (Table 8). The results indicate that the model significantly predicted couple satisfaction, with avoidant attachment, RCI mutuality, and vigilance being the significant predictors of couple satisfaction.

Table 6
Intercorrelations of “Go” Task, SRE Subscales, IPPA Subscales, and Romantic Attachment Styles

Measure	Go Task	Vigilance	Sensitivity	Assertive Entitlement	Expectations
1. Mother Alienation		.317	.292		
2. Mother Trust		-.253			
3. Mother Communication		-.234			
4. Mother Attachment		-.278			
5. Father Alienation		.215	.205		
6. Father Trust		-.265			
7. Father Communication					
8. Father Attachment		-.239			
9. Peer Alienation		.561	.475	.217	.222
10. Peer Trust	-.206	-.284			
11. Peer Communication		-.235			
12. Peer Attachment		-.267			
13. Romantic Attachment Anxiety		.608	.506		.203
14. Romantic Attachment Avoidance	.250	.536	.290		

Note. All correlations above were significant at the level of $p < .05$.

Table 7

Regression Analysis Predicting Romantic Avoidant Attachment

Step and predictor variable	R^2	ΔR^2	β	t
Step 1	.290**	.282**		
MPDQ			-.539**	-5.794**
Step 2	.330**	.313**		
Go task			.201*	2.176*

Note. * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

Table 8

Regression Analysis Predicting Couple Satisfaction

Step and predictor variable	R^2	ΔR^2	β	t
Step 1	.028	.017		
Go task			-.166	-1.600
Step 2	.292**	.268**		
Attachment Anxiety			-.219	-1.882
Attachment Avoidance			-.359*	-3.004*
Step 3	.338**	.292**		
RCI_Mutuality			.319*	2.296*
RCI_Insight			-.027	-.205
RCI_Emotion Regulation			-.144	-1.161
Step 4	.497**	.435**		
SRE_Vigilance			-.757**	-4.550**
SRE_Sensitivity			.283	1.468
SRE_Assertive entitlement			.130	1.029
SRE_Expectations			-.071	-.575

Note. * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

Chapter 5: Discussion

The Validity and Implication of the “Go” Task

The results did not support the first hypothesis, because the “go” game as a behavioral task was not significantly correlated with the general entitlement, or the attitudinal relational entitlement measured by the questionnaire. However, both “go” task and SRE were significantly correlated with RCI subscales and loneliness in the same direction. Moreover, it is important to notice that the “go” task score was mostly significantly correlated with the RCI interview scores, which was also a behavioral measurement, whereas general entitlement and SRE were measured with questionnaires. Therefore, it is possible that the “go” task was not significantly correlated with SRE because of the difference between participants’ attitudes and actual behaviors. After all, people would not likely admit that they are entitled in relationships.

Another possibility to explain the lack of validity of the “go” task might be that the task measured mutuality rather than entitlement, as the “go” task was significantly correlated with RCI mutuality, and the RCI mutuality was the only significant predictor of the “go” task in the regression model. Even though a high level of mutuality would require individuals not to be entitled in close relationships, a low level of mutuality does not necessarily contain relational entitlement exclusively. Therefore, though similar to each other, mutuality and relational entitlement are two different concepts. Moreover, the essence of the “go” task did require the participants to think about the partner’s need (i.e., getting a reward for the partner). More importantly, the task managed to measure the two sides to mutuality, namely ignoring the partner’s need (i.e., getting two rewards for self) and ignoring the self need (i.e., getting two rewards for the partner). SRE, on the other

hand, contains five subscales measuring multiple dimensions of relational entitlement (i.e., vigilance to partner's negative behavior, sensitivity to relational transgression, etc.) that the "go" task might not fully capture.

Even though the validity of the "go" task is in question, its results still provided some meaningful implications. Specifically, the results showed significant difference between participants who received 6s (i.e., two rewards for self) and 3s (i.e., one reward for the partner first and a second reward for self) from the "go" task in self-reported mutuality, interview mutuality, avoidant attachment, and couple satisfaction. Even though no significant difference was found in other variables, participants who received 3s and 6s also received the highest/lowest scores in overall distress and loneliness respectively. These findings suggested that the task was able to pinpoint the participants who had the best and the worst romantic competence, quality of romantic relationships, and general well-being.

Moreover, these results were consistent with the quadratic trend between the "go" task and RCI mutuality/ couple satisfaction, suggesting that participants who received a median score of the "go" task tended to be more mutual with their partner and therefore experience more satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Interestingly, even though participants who received 3s and 4s from the "go" task all obtained one reward for themselves and another reward for their partner, the sequence of the recipients made a difference in determining which group had better romantic function in general. All the participants were not notified in advance that they would have a second chance to obtain another reward. Therefore, participants who received 3s from the "go" task were the ones who were willing to sacrifice by not obtaining any reward for

themselves, whereas participants who received 4s (as well as 5s and 6s) still prioritized their own interests ahead of their partner's interests. This finding suggests that positive mutuality in romantic relationships is not absolute equality. Instead, willingness to prioritize partner's interests over self interests seems to lead to better results in romantic relationships, probably because this willingness reflects individual's trust in receiving the same level of treatment from his or her partner. Romantic relationships may work better when each partner is willing to allow the other partner to obtain more interests from the relationship, which will result in not only an equal division of resources but also an increased amount of resources for both partners.

However, looking after partner's interests alone does not lead to the best romantic functioning. Even though participants who received 1s and 2s also chose a reward for their partner first, they differed from participants who received 3s as the former did not choose a reward for themselves. This finding was consistent with the definition of romantic competence of this study, because being aware of individual's own interests in the relationship is also an important criterion of romantic competence. Specifically, ignorance of self interests may reflect the tendency of being exploited by the partner in romantic relationship, whether the partner prioritizes his or her own interests at the first place or becomes used to receiving more interests than an even split.

In general, these results supported the second hypothesis that participants on the two ends of relational entitlement should experience poorer romantic competence and less relational satisfaction but higher negative emotions in comparison to mildly entitled participants.

Relational Entitlement and Attachment Styles

The results mostly replicated the study of Tolmacz and Mikulincer (2011) that vigilance and sensitivity were significantly correlated with both romantic insecure attachments, and expectation was significantly correlated with attachment anxiety only. These results suggest a strong connection between relational entitlement and insecure attachment in romantic relationships, therefore in support of the third hypothesis.

Moreover, most SRE subscales were correlated with mother, father, and peer alienation. According to attachment theory (for a review, see Cassidy & Shaver, 2008, chapter 15), chronic unavailability from the caregiver forces the infant to deal with the consequent frustration and fear. This fear may continue into childhood and adulthood if the infant continues to experience constant possibility of separation or abandonment from the caregiver in need of support and protection. This fear and anxiety of separation can also provoke individuals to develop maladaptive coping strategies centered on chronic vigilance (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). Therefore, it is possible that relational entitlement is one of these maladaptive coping strategies that people with insecure parental attachment develop and carry over into their romantic relationships.

It is important to notice that that vigilance of negative traits in the partner was not only significantly correlated to most IPPA subscales but also had the highest correlations with all three sources of alienation. These results suggest that if insecure parental attachment contributes to the development of entitled beliefs in close relationships, vigilance of negative traits in the partner or the relationship could be the maladaptive strategy that individuals with relational entitlement would most likely to develop. This strategy may help relieve individuals from blaming themselves for their

partner's unavailability in times of needs, therefore protecting individual's self-esteem. Even though Tolmacz and Mikulincer (2011) found a negative and significant correlation between vigilance and self-esteem, this finding is not contradictory to the possibility that individuals with relational entitlement engage in vigilance thoughts for self-esteem protection, even though the strategy is not effective.

The relationship between each SRE subscale and attachment style may also be explained in a more systematic way. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a model of attachment style based on individual's dichotomized evaluation of self and the partner. Specifically, securely attached people have positive images of their partners and themselves, preoccupied (equivalent to anxiety) individuals have positive images of others but negative self views, fearful individuals have both negative views of others and selves, and dismissing (equivalent to avoidance) individuals have positive views of self but negative views of others (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
Model of Adult Attachment from Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991).

		Self (Dependence)	
		Positive	Negative
Other (Intimacy)	Positive	Secure: comfortable with intimacy and autonomy	Anxiety: seeking intimacy, low autonomy
	Negative	Avoidance: dismissing of intimacy, high independence	Fearful: dismissing of intimacy, low autonomy

Dependence on others varies based on the valence of self-regard as a positive evaluation of self decreases the need to depend on others to promote self-esteem and vice

versa. Intimacy with others also varies in a similar manner as negative image of others decreases the desire to build intimacy with others and vice versa.

Dependence on others varies based on the valence of self-regard as a positive evaluation of self decreases the need to depend on others to promote self-esteem and vice versa. Intimacy with others also varies in a similar manner as negative image of others decreases the desire to build intimacy with others and vice versa. According to the model, people with anxiety attachment are highly dependent on others to maintain positive self-regard, and their dependence is expressed in a dominating interpersonal style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The results of this study mostly supported the findings of Bartholomew and Horowitz, because anxiety attachment was significantly correlated with vigilance, sensitivity, and expectations. Participants with anxiety attachment were more sensitive to relational transgression and frustration because their self-regard heavily depended on their positive image of the partners. Consequently, any impairment of the relationship would harm participants' self-esteem regardless of the cause of the impairment: if the partner was responsible for the impaired relationship, the participant's self-regard would be damaged due to its close association with their image of the partner; if the participant was responsible, their negative self-image would be confirmed. The same association would also motivate the participants to have high expectations of their partners so that their own self-regard would improve as a result of the improvement to their partner's image. However, the correlation between anxiety attachment and vigilance was not consistent with the model, as anxious participants should have a positive evaluation of their partners rather than frequently paying attention to the negative traits of their partners. It is possible that anxious participants were vigilant about their partner's

negative traits if the partner failed to meet the expectation, and the participant might take this excuse in order to find a better partner to improve their own self-regard indirectly.

Further research is needed to address this issue.

For people with avoidant attachment, they should reflect an avoidance of others for their expectations of aversive consequences of intimacy, and their positive self-image does not require external validation and therefore should be very independent. The results of this study were consistent with this model, as avoidant participants tended to have high level of vigilance, sensitivity, and higher “go” task score (i.e., less mutual and more self-oriented). Specifically, sensitivity to relational transgression and frustration could bias the participant to notice the negative traits but ignore the positive traits of the partner. High sensitivity could also strengthen the participant’s vigilance about partner’s negative traits and consequently confirm the participant’s negative expectations of others. Finally, the participants’ high scores in the “go” task suggested that they might engage in entitled behaviors to confirm their expectations about others, as entitled behaviors could decrease intimacy in the relationship, leading to a lack of warmth from the partner, therefore confirming the participants’ negative expectations about the partner as well as the relationship.

In general, the findings of the current study supported a strong connection between high level of relational entitlement and insecure attachment styles. Future studies may look into the entitlement pattern in people with fearful attachment, which was not covered in the current study.

Predictors of Couple Satisfaction

The results of current study demonstrated that attachment orientation, romantic

competence, and relational entitlement all significantly predicted couple satisfaction.

Multiple previous studies have shown that attachment orientation (for a review see Cassidy & Shaver, 2008, chapter 21) and mutuality are associated with couple satisfaction (e.g., Drigotas, Rusbult, Verette, 1999; Acitelli, Kenny, Weiner, 2011). The current study was consistent with previous findings that insecure attachment impaired couple satisfaction, whereas mutuality enhanced couple satisfaction.

The association between relational entitlement and couple satisfaction was consistent with Tolmacz and Milulincer (2011), as they also found that relational entitlement, after controlling attachment orientation, could predict marital adjustment. Therefore, the current study and previous findings suggest that relational entitlement could predict both dating and marital couples' satisfaction. One application of this result would be to include relational entitlement as a target belief and behavior to diminish in couple therapies.

Moreover, after controlling for attachment orientation and mutuality, relational entitlement, especially vigilance, still significantly predicted couple satisfaction, suggesting that relational entitlement was associated with couple satisfaction beyond its relationship with attachment orientation and mutuality as discussed above. In other words, relational entitlement was not a maladaptive byproduct of romantic attachment styles and therefore could develop as a result of other variables that were not covered in this study. Future studies may look into other possible attributions to relational entitlement, such as parenting styles and other personality traits.

Limitations

As presented in the result section, many variables did not show normal distribution even after transformation, so the results of this study are susceptible to invalidity to some degree. A larger number of participants are needed to solve this problem. Moreover, it is important to mention that the distribution of the “go” task showed an “M” shape, as a consequence of much more participants completing the “go” task only once (i.e., participants who received a score of either 2 or 5) than participants who were willing to repeat the task (i.e., participants who received a score of 1, 3, 4, 6). In order to encourage participants to repeat the task, the repetition of the “go” task could last for two minutes rather than five minutes. Future study is needed to verify the validity of the “go” task as a behavioral measurement for relational entitlement or mutuality.

Another limitation of the “go” task was that it required the participants to be involved in some kind of romantic relationship so that the task could not measure relational entitlement or mutuality for participants whose relationship status is single. Asking the participants to imagine being in a romantic relationship may not work for this task as an imagined relationship probably lack essential elements for romantic relationships such as affection, contexts of normal interactions, and so on. Asking the participants to mentally travel back to a previous relationship may not work either, as any previous relationships by default have ended, and the reason of the break-up with the previous partner may have an impact on the participants’ willingness to choose a reward to the previous partner. Therefore, future studies may try to develop new tasks to measure the behavioral aspect of relational entitlement or mutuality for people who currently are not engaged in any romantic relationships.

Moreover, this study did not account for the dyadic nature of romantic relationships by measuring variables from a single side of each relationship. Mutuality in close relationships is usually generated in the context of relationship. For example, the attitudinal and behavioral aspects of participants' mutuality in relationships were likely under the influence of their perception of their partner's commitment and the partners' actual level of commitment. Previous studies have shown that people are more likely to perceive their relationships to be positive and to engage positive interactions with their partners when they believe that they and their partners share a similar level of actual commitment in the relationship (e.g., Drigotas et al., 1999; Weigel, 2008). On the opposite side, a perceived imbalance of commitment, which could be an accurate observation of the partner's actual commitment or not, creates a sense of insecurity that may lead to a decrease of commitment to reach a new balance of commitment in relationships (Rusbult, Wieselquist, Foster, & Witcher, 1999). Therefore, low level of mutuality reported in this study may not be a result of the participants' poor romantic competence solely, but could be a reflection of their partners' low level of commitment in the relationship. In order to provide a more accurate picture of the relationships between relational entitlement and quality of romantic relationships, future studies are needed to examine both partners' reports of self and the other's romantic competence, relational entitlement, couple satisfaction, and other necessary variables.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between the sense of relational entitlement and the quality of romantic relationships. The results showed a strong association between relational entitlement and insecure attachment orientation. The study also found that a newly designed behavioral task to measure relational entitlement successfully identified participants with the best and the worst romantic competence, couple satisfaction, and general well-being. Even though the behavioral task was not validated as a method to measure relational entitlement, findings of this study should encourage future studies to adopt multiple methodologies to measure variables from more than one perspective.



APPROVAL NUMBER: 14-A019

To: Jonathan Mattanah
8000 York RD
Towson MD 21252

From: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human
Subjects Debi Gartland, Chair

Date: Monday, September 23, 2013

RE: Application for Approval of Research Involving the Use of
Human Participants

Office of University
Research Services

Towson University
8000 York Road
Towson, MD 21252-0001

t. 410 704-2236
f. 410 704-4494

Thank you for submitting an Application for Approval of Research Involving the Use of Human Participants to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRB) at Towson University. The IRB hereby approves your proposal titled:

The romantic relationship study

If you should encounter any new risks, reactions, or injuries while conducting your research, please notify the IRB. Should your research extend beyond one year in duration, or should there be substantive changes in your research protocol, you will need to submit another application for approval at that time.

We wish you every success in your research project. If you have any questions, please call me at (410) 704-2236.

CC:

File

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