



Individuals higher in psychological entitlement respond to bad luck with anger



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ABSTRACT

Three studies examined the relationship between psychological entitlement and anger in the context of bad luck. Anger is often described as an emotion that arises when a person experiences a negative outcome for which someone else was responsible. Simple bad luck, without an intentional agent clearly responsible for one's misfortune, should therefore not usually engender anger. However, we predicted that individuals higher in psychological entitlement, with their high expectations for personal outcomes and tendency to moralize them, would be more likely to experience anger after bad luck as compared to individuals lower in psychological entitlement. We found that psychological entitlement was, indeed, positively correlated with anger after bad luck, and with perceptions of injustice (Study 1). The relationship between entitlement and anger was specific to personally-experienced bad luck; entitlement was not correlated with anger when people recalled an unfair event (Study 2), or when they imagined that bad luck happened to someone else (Study 3).

1. Introduction

Anger is an outward-focused, negatively valenced emotion with many important consequences for individuals, groups, and societies (Barclay et al., 2005; Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009; Harmon-Jones, 2003; Harmon-Jones, 2004; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 1991; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). First, anger affects social relationships. People who are angry are more likely to behave aggressively (Berkowitz, 1990; Hortensius et al., 2012; Porath & Pearson, 2012; Wyckoff, 2016), retaliate (Barclay et al., 2005; Lazarus, 2000), and punish others (Lerner et al., 1998). They are less likely to trust others (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005), be honest toward others (Yip & Schweitzer, 2016), or take their perspectives (Yip & Schweitzer, 2019). Second, anger affects decision making. People who are angry are more likely to make risky choices (Lerner & Keltner, 2001), and use heuristic or other more simplistic methods of cognitive processing (Bodenhausen et al., 1994; Lerner et al., 1998; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). Third, anger has mixed effects on task performance. People who are angry perform better on some work and athletic tasks and worse on others (Baas et al., 2011; Woodman et al., 2009; Zitek & Jordan, 2011). Finally, displays of anger affect how a person is judged by others. For example, people who express anger are seen as more competent and are conferred higher status (Tiedens, 2001).

Given anger's wide-ranging consequences, it is essential to understand its causes. Research suggests that anger is a moral emotion

(Haidt, 2003; Lomas, 2019), often arising when people experience an unfair event caused by someone else (Barclay et al., 2005; Mikula et al., 1998). People get angry when they believe that the person who harmed them should have acted differently (Tavris, 1982). For example, one of the most common causes of anger is being treated disrespectfully (Miller, 2001). People experience anger when they attribute responsibility for a negative situation to another person (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), and the greater the responsibility they assign to another person for an injustice, the angrier they feel about it (Lamm, 1986). For example, in one experiment, participants who received an inequitably small offer from another person in an ultimatum game felt the angriest when they believed that this person intended to act unfairly (Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996). In fact, according to the recalibrational theory of anger, anger functions to help people obtain satisfactory outcomes in interpersonal conflicts and negotiations; expressing anger encourages others to consider more strongly one's own welfare (Sell et al., 2009; Sell et al., 2017). Thus, anger is thought to be a functional way of responding to conflicts with others, especially when a person has a strong bargaining position. It signals to others the costs that might befall them if they do not place greater weight on the angry person's interests. In sum, across many lines of research, anger has been shown to be directed toward another person who is perceived as not properly valuing the angry individual.

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Of course, sometimes bad things happen that are not the fault of anyone in particular. Some undesirable situations are attributed to “bad luck” and perceived as resulting from accident or chance (Pritchard & Smith, 2004). If a person loses a lottery or misses a flight due to weather, no moral agent intended these outcomes; the individual experienced bad luck, not an injustice. When someone gets a bad outcome due to random, impersonal bad luck, we would not usually expect this person to respond with the level of anger they would after injustices caused by other people, as feeling angry would not help this person resolve the issue (see Sell et al., 2009).

Although we would not expect bad luck to cause much anger in general, psychological entitlement may be an individual difference predicting the degree to which people respond to bad luck with anger. Psychological entitlement is the belief that one is more deserving of positive outcomes than other people are (Campbell et al., 2004), without concern for actual level of merit (Fisk, 2010). According to one influential model (Grubbs & Exline, 2016), individuals with a relatively greater sense of entitlement are more likely to desire great things and have high expectations that their desires will be met. For example, students higher in academic entitlement desire and expect good grades (Greenberger et al., 2008). More entitled individuals not only have high expectations for how their lives *will* go, they demonstrate a sense of moral desert about how their lives *should* go—they are more likely to agree with statements such as “great things should come to me,” “things should go my way,” and “I deserve more things in my life” (Campbell et al., 2004). For example, students higher in academic entitlement also believe that their professors should accommodate their desires by responding to their emails quickly and by allowing them to schedule exams and assignments around their vacations (Greenberger et al., 2008). Consequently, when individuals higher in psychological entitlement do not get what they want, they may be quick to perceive that they have suffered an injustice (Grubbs & Exline, 2016). Individuals higher in psychological entitlement are more likely to believe that they are being mistreated (Exline et al., 2004; Harvey et al., 2014; McCullough et al., 2003), that everyday requests are unfair impositions on them (Zitek & Jordan, 2019), and that their organizations are unjust (Lee et al., 2019).

According to Grubbs and Exline’s (2016) model, more entitled people’s lofty expectations—and the way they interpret the likely frequent violations of these expectations—can create vulnerability in these individuals to various forms of psychological distress, such as dissatisfaction, threat, and anger. For example, psychological entitlement is linked to lower job satisfaction (Harvey & Martinko, 2009), lower relationship satisfaction (Ackerman et al., 2011; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011), and lower life satisfaction (Reysen et al., 2017; Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2017). Moreover, psychological entitlement and related characteristics are associated with increased anger in a variety of situations (e.g., Grubbs et al., 2013; Sell et al., 2009; Witte et al., 2002; Zell & Moeller, 2017). This past work on psychological entitlement has not directly examined anger in response to bad luck, but following Grubbs and Exline’s (2016) model, we hypothesize that even impersonal bad luck will lead individuals higher in psychological entitlement to report increased anger. These individuals may expect and believe that they should have good outcomes even in chance circumstances. When they then experience bad luck, they may perceive it as unjust and thus angering, even though no intentional agent is responsible for their situation.

In this paper, we report three studies that tested the hypothesis that people higher in entitlement, compared to those lower, are more likely to experience anger after bad luck. In Study 1, we examined whether psychological entitlement and self-reported anger after bad luck (from random assignment in a study) were positively correlated, and if people higher in psychological entitlement were more likely to perceive bad luck as an injustice. In Study 2, we examined whether this relationship between psychological entitlement and anger would be stronger when participants recalled receiving a bad outcome due to bad luck instead of due to unfair treatment by someone else, as we would expect people with

lower psychological entitlement not to feel angry in situations in which there was nobody else to blame (whereas everyone should feel some anger in response to unfair treatment). In Study 3, to test whether this effect is due to a violation of expectations about personal outcomes, we examined whether the relationship between entitlement and anger existed only for one’s own bad luck (as compared to the bad luck of others). Across studies, we investigated whether anger might arise in some people (i.e., those higher in psychological entitlement) even when there was no interpersonal problem to solve and nobody else to blame, and instead the individuals had simply experienced impersonal bad luck.

2. Study 1

In Study 1, to examine whether individuals higher in psychological entitlement are indeed more likely to feel angry after even simple bad luck, we had participants get “randomly assigned” to complete a boring task instead of a fun task (i.e., they experienced bad luck) and then self-report their level of anger. To test other aspects of Grubbs and Exline’s (2016) model, we also asked participants to report their expectations for the kind of luck they would have and their perceptions of injustice after experiencing bad luck. We predicted that participants higher in psychological entitlement, as compared to participants lower in psychological entitlement, would expect better luck, would perceive bad luck as more of an injustice, and would feel angrier after experiencing bad luck.

2.1. Method

We aimed to recruit 200 participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk), and 202 ended up taking part (130 men, 69 women, 2 other, 1 unreported; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.4$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.3$).¹ Participants first completed the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES; Campbell et al., 2004), the most commonly used measure of the entitlement disposition. The PES includes items such as “I honestly feel I’m just more deserving than others” and “Great things should come to me” (1 = *strong disagreement*, 7 = *strong agreement*). Then, as a filler, participants completed the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling et al., 2003), indicating whether certain characteristics (e.g., “sympathetic and warm”) described them. Participants were then asked, “When rolling dice, what kind of luck do you expect to have?” (1 = *very bad luck*, 4 = *average luck*, 7 = *very good luck*).

Next, we told participants that we were interested in how people responded to having good or bad luck and that we were going to randomly assign them to a fun humor-perceptions task or a boring processing-accuracy task based on the virtual roll of a die. After participants saw a preview of the fun and boring tasks (rating a comic strip and counting letters in a paragraph, respectively), participants learned the outcome of their die roll, and they were told that they had been assigned to the boring task on processing accuracy. We explicitly told participants that they had “bad luck” to reinforce the notion that the outcome was due to chance. (In reality, all participants were assigned to the same task.) We then measured participants’ perceptions of injustice and feelings of anger about their bad luck. For our measure of injustice perceptions, we took the mean of participants’ ratings on the following two items: “It feels unfair that I have to complete the boring task,” and “I feel like I have suffered an injustice” (1 = *strong disagreement*, 7 = *strong agreement*). Then, using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *an extreme amount*), participants responded to the anger subscale of the Discrete Emotions Questionnaire (DEQ; Harmon-Jones et al., 2016). Finally, participants completed the processing-accuracy task, reported demographic information, and were asked to respond to a simple attention check where they had to select a 7 if they were reading the

¹ In all studies in this paper, the number of participants we recruited was predetermined and set after pilot testing based on what we thought would lead to adequate power. Our analyses were conducted after all data had been collected.

question. Data from participants who correctly answered this question were used in the study ($N = 162$).²

2.2. Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix for this study. As predicted, entitlement was significantly correlated with expectations, perceptions of injustice, and anger. Thus, participants who were higher in psychological entitlement were more likely to expect good luck when rolling dice, perceive it as unjust when they had bad luck, and report increased anger after bad luck. We also tested whether perceptions of injustice might explain the relationship between entitlement and anger. Indeed, when both entitlement and perceptions of injustice were entered into a model predicting anger (see Table 2), the coefficient for entitlement was reduced significantly (bias-corrected 95% CI with 10,000 iterations = [0.20, 0.44]; Hayes, 2013), demonstrating that increased perceptions of injustice partially accounted for the relationship between entitlement and anger after bad luck.

In sum, this study showed that, consistent with our predictions based on Grubbs and Exline's (2016) model, people higher in psychological entitlement felt angrier after experiencing bad luck from an ostensibly random, computer-generated system. They expected better luck and then perceived it as more of an injustice when they had bad luck. This greater sense of injustice may have explained, at least partly, why the more entitled individuals were angrier. Although the results were consistent with our predictions, Study 1 had weaknesses. We used a cross-sectional correlational design, which limited our ability to draw conclusions. We could not be confident in the causal relationships among our variables, and response bias may have contributed to our results. Furthermore, we had no condition in which participants did not suffer bad luck, and the only emotion we examined was anger, and therefore we could not be confident that we would not have obtained the same pattern of results in other situations or with other emotions. In the next study, we aimed to assess the specificity of our results to anger after bad luck.

3. Study 2

In the previous study, people higher in psychological entitlement were angrier after bad luck as compared to people lower in psychological entitlement. Moreover, the more entitled individuals were more likely to perceive their experience of bad luck as constituting an injustice. In this study, we further investigated whether more entitled individuals experience and respond emotionally to bad luck similarly to the way they do to injustice by asking participants to recall and write about a time when they experienced a negative outcome due to bad luck or unfair treatment. Whereas everyone, regardless of their degree of psychological entitlement, is likely to report feeling some anger after unfair treatment, we thought that only more entitled people—who are more likely to expect good outcomes even in situations of chance (see Study 1)—would feel angry after bad luck. Therefore, we hypothesized that we would find an interaction between the event recalled and entitlement on anger such that there would be a stronger relationship between entitlement and anger in the bad luck condition than in the unfair treatment condition. In other words, we expected psychological entitlement to have more predictive power for anger when individuals were recalling impersonal bad luck, an event that should only violate the moral expectations of the more entitled people.

3.1. Method

We aimed to recruit 400 participants from mTurk, and 401 ended up taking part (201 men, 199 women, 1 other; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.5$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.4$). As

² Please see our OSF page for more information about the survey materials for all studies: https://osf.io/fbzjg/?view_only=87ae4b999d7f4e2588353f17-d2e0ac83

Table 1

Descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations, and Cronbach's alphas (shown in bold on the diagonal) for Study 1.

| Measure | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|
| 1. Entitlement | 3.26 (1.49) | 0.93 | | | |
| 2. Anger | 2.26 (1.80) | 0.52* | 0.98 | | |
| 3. Perceived injustice | 3.50 (1.94) | 0.43* | 0.71* | 0.91 | |
| 4. Expectations of luck | 4.10 (1.31) | 0.39* | 0.25* | 0.05 | – |

* $p < .05$.

in the previous study, participants began by completing the PES as a measure of entitlement ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.31$, $\alpha = 0.92$) and then the TIPI as a filler. Next, participants were randomly assigned to recall and write about a time when they had bad luck (and nobody was to blame for it) or a time when they were treated unfairly (and somebody was to blame). Specifically, in the bad luck condition, participants were instructed:

Please recall an incident from your life when **a bad thing happened to you because of bad luck**. Think about a time when bad luck befell you, not a time when someone else was to blame for the bad outcome. Perhaps a random drawing turned out poorly for you, for example. Please describe the situation in which you had bad luck—what happened, how you felt, etc. Try to write at least four sentences.

Participants wrote about events such as accidents, injuries, illnesses, broken equipment, bad weather, and losing at cards, a coin flip, or a cash drawing. In the unfair treatment condition, participants were instead instructed:

Please recall an incident from your life when **a bad thing happened to you because of unfair treatment**. Think about a time when someone else was to blame for the bad outcome. Perhaps you were wronged or slighted by someone, for example. Please describe the situation in which you experienced unfairness—what happened, how you felt, etc. Try to write at least four sentences.

Participants wrote about events such as being blamed or punished for something that someone else did, not getting credit for their hard work, being treated poorly by others, and experiencing prejudice.

Participants then indicated their level of agreement (1 = *strong disagreement*, 7 = *strong agreement*) that what happened to them was just, fair, justified, and appropriate, and we took the mean of their responses to these four items as a measure of justice perceptions ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.57$, $\alpha = 0.97$). Then, using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *an extreme amount*), participants filled out the full DEQ, which has subscales for eight total discrete emotions (for anger: $M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.79$, $\alpha = 0.92$). Finally, participants reported demographic information and responded to an attention check asking them to select 2. Data from participants who correctly answered the attention check were used in the study ($N = 397$).

3.2. Results and discussion

The results of an ordinary least squares regression predicting anger from entitlement centered, writing prompt condition (coded 1/-1), and their interaction revealed that participants in general were angrier about unfair treatment than bad luck, but, as we predicted, this was moderated by psychological entitlement (see Table 3). There was a significantly stronger relationship between entitlement and anger in the bad luck condition as compared to the unfair treatment condition. Put another way, participants who were more entitled responded more similarly in terms of their anger regardless of whether someone else caused their bad outcome (see Fig. 1).³ Importantly, although other

³ Although our a priori plan was to remove only participants who failed the attention check, we also noticed that there were some participants whose

Table 2
Regression coefficients for ordinary least squares regression models predicting anger from entitlement alone and then entitlement and perceptions of injustice.

| | <i>b</i> (<i>se</i>) | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>b</i> (<i>se</i>) | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | Partial <i>r</i> |
|---------------------|------------------------|----------|----------|------------------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| Intercept | 0.20 (0.29) | 0.68 | .499 | −0.74 (0.24) | −3.01 | .003 | |
| Entitlement | 0.63 (0.08) | 7.76 | .000 | 0.32 (0.07) | 4.60 | .000 | 0.34 |
| Perceived injustice | – | – | – | 0.56 (0.05) | 10.32 | .000 | 0.63 |

Note. *N* = 162; *R*² = 0.273, 0.565.

Table 3
Coefficients from an ordinary least squares multiple regression model predicting anger from entitlement (centered), condition (1 = bad luck, −1 = unfair treatment), and their interaction, and the simple slopes.

| | <i>b</i> (<i>se</i>) | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | Partial <i>r</i> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| Intercept | 3.97 (0.08) | 49.1 | .000 | |
| Entitlement | 0.23 (0.06) | 3.75 | .000 | 0.19 |
| Condition | −0.69 (0.08) | −8.59 | .000 | −0.40 |
| Entitlement × condition | 0.18 (0.06) | 2.85 | .005 | 0.14 |
| Simple slope for bad luck condition | 0.41 (0.09) | 4.75 | .000 | 0.23 |
| Simple slope for unfair condition | 0.06 (0.09) | 0.63 | .530 | 0.03 |

Note. *N* = 397; *R*² = 0.197.

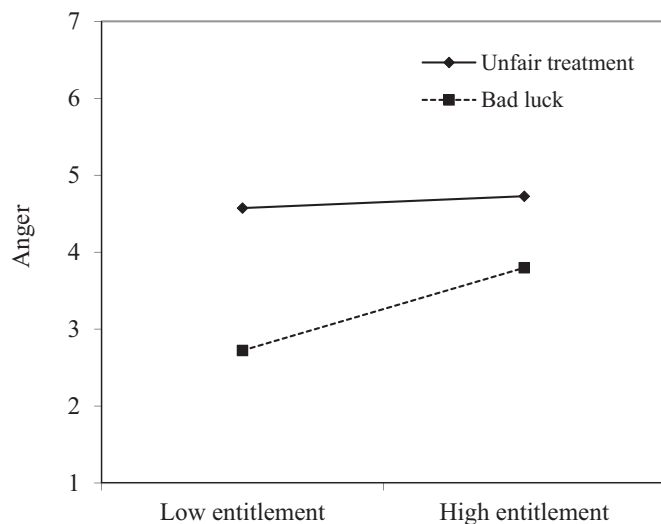


Fig. 1. The relationship between entitlement and anger when people recalled bad luck or unfair treatment. (Low and high entitlement represent *M* ± 1 *SD*.)

emotions from the DEQ were affected by the writing prompt condition and participants' psychological entitlement, only anger showed the predicted pattern where the relationship between entitlement and the emotion was significantly stronger and more positive in the bad luck condition than the unfair treatment condition.

As for our measure of justice perceptions, participants in the unfair treatment condition perceived the event they wrote about as less just (*M* = 1.67, *SD* = 1.17) than did participants in the bad luck condition (*M* = 3.01, *SD* = 1.64), *t*(395) = 9.29, *p* < .001, *d* = 0.94. The correlation between entitlement and justice perceptions in the bad luck condition was negative, *r* = −0.072, *p* = .308, as we had predicted, but the effect was very small and non-significant. We had expected a

(footnote continued)

recalled events did not fit the prompts. Four participants in the unfair condition and 13 participants in the bad luck condition provided responses that were coded as “definitely wrong” or “probably wrong.” When we reanalyzed the data after also excluding responses from these participants, the results shown in Table 3 were the same—there was a significant condition by entitlement interaction, and a significant simple slope in the bad luck condition.

stronger relationship here, similar to what we obtained in Study 1 when we found that individuals higher in entitlement reported greater perceptions of injustice after the bad luck.

In sum, this study showed that while everyone was similarly angry after recalling unfair treatment, people higher in psychological entitlement were more likely to be angry after bad luck than people lower in psychological entitlement. This predicted interaction pattern appeared for only anger, providing some support for the idea that more entitled people react emotionally to bad luck as if it were an unfair event caused by someone else.

4. Study 3

In the previous two studies, entitlement was associated with increased anger after experiencing bad luck. In Study 3, we assessed whether more entitled individuals also felt angry after bad luck that affected someone else or if they felt angry after bad luck only when it affected them personally. Because entitlement involves a moralization of personal outcomes, we hypothesized that only personally-experienced bad luck would induce anger.

In addition to assessing anger after one's own or another's bad luck, we also examined pity. We wanted to test whether our effects were specific to anger, and we thought that pity would serve as a useful comparison because it is also an outward-focused emotion. Individuals higher in psychological entitlement tend to be more selfish, less empathetic, and less compassionate (Campbell et al., 2004; Moeller et al., 2009; Zitek et al., 2010), and therefore they might not feel as bothered by bad luck suffered by someone else. Thus, we expected that individuals higher in psychological entitlement would feel less pity after someone else's bad luck as compared to individuals lower in psychological entitlement. This study was preregistered at <https://aspredicted.org/699mp.pdf>.

4.1. Method

We advertised our study as an extra credit opportunity to undergraduates in an introductory course, and 100 took part (43 men, 57 women; *M*_{age} = 19.0, *SD*_{age} = 1.35). Participants began by completing the PES as a measure of entitlement (*M* = 3.30, *SD* = 1.13, *α* = 0.87). Participants then read scenarios about bad luck that befell them (own bad luck condition) or someone else (other's bad luck condition). We used a within-subjects design, as we assumed that we would not have sufficient power to detect an interaction in a between-subjects design given our limited sample size (we expected *N* to be in the range of 90–140). Based on the effect size from a pilot study, we were optimistic that we would have sufficient power with this sample size if we used a within-subjects design. The scenarios were presented in a random order for each participant. The own bad luck scenario was as follows:

Imagine that your flight gets cancelled due to weather. You find out that a flight on another airline to the same city happens to have one extra seat and is departing soon. The airline randomly selects a passenger to move to the other flight, and they end up choosing someone else for this flight over you. You are going to have to wait until the next day to get a flight to your destination, and the other person will get there soon. The other person is very lucky, and you are very unlucky.

The scenario in the other's bad luck condition was the same except that the participant and other person were reversed such that the participant was the lucky one to get randomly selected for the flight that was departing soon.

Participants then rated the extent to which they felt the following emotions after each scenario: anger, irritation, sympathy, and pity (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *an extreme amount*). We took the average of the first two items as a measure of anger in the own bad luck and other's bad luck conditions ($M = 4.43, SD = 1.65, \alpha = 0.84$; $M = 1.37, SD = 0.64; \alpha = 0.68$) and the average of the other two items as a measure of pity in each condition ($M = 2.10, SD = 1.18, \alpha = 0.46$; $M = 3.85, SD = 1.55, \alpha = 0.74$). Past research has indicated that anger and pity are two important emotions in how people respond to others; thus, we compared them here, using measures similar to those utilized in prior studies (see Corrigan et al., 2003; DePierre et al., 2013). Because the DEQ, which we used to measure anger in Study 2, does not have a pity subscale, we did not use it in this study.

Finally, participants reported demographic information and were asked to respond to the same attention check as in Study 2. All participants in this study passed the attention check; therefore all data were included in our analyses.

4.2. Results and discussion

To analyze the data with its repeated observations, we ran linear mixed effects regression models with a random intercept for the participant. As shown in Table 4, our results for anger came out as predicted. Participants were angrier in the own bad luck condition than in the other's bad luck condition overall, and there was a significant interaction such that there was a positive relationship between entitlement and anger in the own bad luck condition and no relationship in the other's bad luck condition (see also Fig. 2). Thus, as we predicted, entitlement was related to anger only when the bad luck harmed the participant rather than someone else.

A different pattern emerged for pity, as we expected. As shown in Table 5, participants felt more pity overall in the other's bad luck condition than in the own bad luck condition. There was again a significant interaction between condition and entitlement, but now there was a significant negative relationship between entitlement and pity in the other's bad luck condition and no relationship in the own bad luck condition.

In sum, individuals higher in psychological entitlement reported increased anger after bad luck that affected them personally but not after bad luck that affected someone else. On the other hand, individuals higher in entitlement reported decreased pity when the other person experienced bad luck but not when they personally experienced it.

5. General discussion

Across three studies, people higher in psychological entitlement were more likely to feel angry after experiencing, recalling, or

Table 4

Coefficients from a linear mixed model predicting anger from entitlement (centered), condition (1 = own bad luck, -1 = other's bad luck), and their interaction, and the simple slopes.

| | <i>b</i> (<i>se</i>) | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | Partial <i>r</i> |
|---|------------------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| Intercept | 2.90 (0.09) | 32.2 | .000 | |
| Entitlement | 0.15 (0.08) | 1.82 | .071 | 0.18 |
| Condition | 1.53 (0.08) | 19.1 | .000 | 0.89 |
| Entitlement × condition | 0.28 (0.07) | 3.93 | .000 | 0.37 |
| Simple slope for own bad luck condition | 0.42 (0.11) | 3.97 | .000 | 0.27 |
| Simple slope for other's bad luck condition | -0.13 (0.11) | -1.25 | .213 | -0.09 |

Note. $N = 100$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.63$ (fixed effects), 0.67 (total).

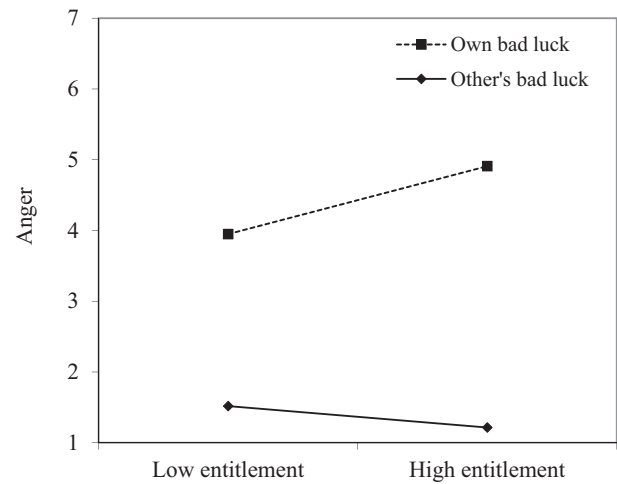


Fig. 2. The relationship between entitlement and anger in the own bad luck and other's bad luck conditions. (Low and high entitlement represent $M \pm 1 SD$.)

Table 5

Coefficients from a linear mixed model predicting pity from entitlement (centered), condition (1 = own bad luck, -1 = other's bad luck), and their interaction, and the simple slopes.

| | <i>b</i> (<i>se</i>) | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | Partial <i>r</i> |
|---|------------------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| Intercept | 2.97 (0.10) | 30.7 | .000 | |
| Entitlement | -0.15 (0.09) | -1.79 | .077 | -0.18 |
| Condition | -0.88 (0.09) | -9.35 | .000 | -0.69 |
| Entitlement × condition | 0.25 (0.08) | 3.03 | .003 | 0.29 |
| Simple slope for own bad luck condition | 0.10 (0.12) | 0.82 | .411 | 0.06 |
| Simple slope for other's bad luck condition | -0.40 (0.12) | -3.39 | .001 | -0.24 |

Note. $N = 100$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.33$ (fixed effects), 0.35 (total).

imagining bad luck as compared to people lower in psychological entitlement. We found increased anger in more entitled people even when they received a negative outcome that was ostensibly randomly generated by a computer (Study 1) or when they were explicitly told to consider unlucky events that were not caused by someone else (Study 2). These results were specific to personal bad luck. There was not a significant relationship between entitlement and anger when people recalled an unfair event (Study 2) or when they imagined that bad luck happened to someone else (Study 3).

The results of this research build upon Grubbs and Exline's (2016) theoretical model of entitlement. According to this model, more entitled individuals have higher expectations for their own treatment and outcomes, and when these expectations are not met, they react negatively with anger and other types of psychological distress. In the current research, we explored a possible boundary condition of this theory (see Busse et al., 2017), namely, whether entitled individuals' high expectations—and their negative responses to violations of those expectations—extend to outcomes determined by luck rather than by other people's agency. We found that, indeed, individuals higher in psychological entitlement were more likely to expect good luck, and when they experienced bad luck, they had a greater sense of perceived injustice (Study 1). Across all studies, individuals higher in psychological entitlement reported increased anger after bad luck, even though anger typically results from harm caused by someone else (e.g., Barclay et al., 2005) and yet nobody was responsible for their bad outcomes. According to Grubbs and Exline (2016), these feelings of perceived injustice and anger could then lead to a reinforcement of entitled beliefs (see also Zitek et al., 2010). This research thus adds to the literatures on personality and anger (e.g., Pfeiler et al., 2018), the relationship between entitlement and perceptions of unfairness (e.g., Harvey et al.,

2014; McCullough et al., 2003; Zitek et al., 2010; Zitek & Jordan, 2019), and the self-reinforcing nature of entitlement (Grubbs & Exline, 2016).

5.1. Limitations and future directions

Across three studies, we demonstrated that psychological entitlement is related to increased anger following bad luck. Several limitations of our studies should be addressed by future research. First, we used self-report measures of anger; we did not gather any more overt behavioral evidence of anger. Although participants higher in psychological entitlement reported feeling more anger, we did not establish whether this anger was robust enough to be consequential interpersonally or otherwise. Second, we did not ask our participants whether they blamed someone for their bad luck. We tried to emphasize the importance of random chance in our studies, but it is possible that some participants still found a way to place blame on an intentional agent (e.g., on God or on the person who created the random system). If they did blame someone, this could have been either a cause or a consequence of their anger. More entitled individuals are more likely to get angry at God (Grubbs et al., 2013), and feeling angry leads people to perceive others as more responsible for ambiguous events (Keltner et al., 1993). Third, future research should examine the specificity of our results to entitlement, as opposed to other related personality traits (e.g., narcissism or disagreeableness). For example, it is possible that social desirability is an alternative explanation for our results—that people with a relatively greater sense of entitlement are simply more likely to admit that they feel anger after experiencing bad luck than less entitled people are. However, the limited empirical evidence thus far indicates that entitlement (as measured by the PES) has little to no correlation with social desirability (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004; Grubbs et al., 2014), and therefore it is unlikely that this is a full explanation for why more entitled people report more anger after bad luck. Moreover, some research has begun to delineate how different facets of entitlement may have different relationships with measures of psychological distress (Lessard et al., 2011; Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2013), and it may thus also be worth investigating which facet of entitlement is most associated with anger in response to bad luck. Finally, our studies may have been underpowered, particularly Study 2, which tested for interactions between condition and entitlement but was underpowered to detect an average-sized interaction in our field (Aguinis et al., 2005). Although we found the predicted relationship in Study 2 for anger, it is possible we would have found other interesting relationships, such as interactive effects on other emotions, had we had more power.

5.2. Summary and conclusions

In sum, across three studies, we found that individuals who are higher in psychological entitlement are more likely to report feeling angry after experiencing, recalling, or imagining bad luck. Our research demonstrates that there are times when anger might arise even when there is nobody to blame—as in cases of impersonal bad luck. Much past research has focused on the downsides of entitlement both for the entitled individuals themselves and for the people who have to interface with them in organizations and other real-world contexts (e.g., Fisk & Neville, 2011; Harvey et al., 2014; Harvey & Martinko, 2009; Zitek & Krause, 2019; but see Brant & Castro, 2019, for a call to also study the positive side of entitlement). More entitled individuals' increased anger after bad luck may create additional problems due to anger's many negative consequences, such as worse health for the angry person and aggression toward others (e.g., Suls & Bunde, 2005; Tangney et al., 1996; Wyckoff, 2016). However, in certain circumstances, anger might have some benefits, such as increased optimism, improved task performance, and a tendency to take corrective action in a constructive way (e.g., Gibson et al., 2009; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Tangney et al., 1996; Zitek & Jordan, 2011). Thus, there could be a wide range of downstream consequences of more entitled individuals' anger after bad

luck. An important future direction is to examine these consequences of this anger—both the positive and the negative.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Emily M. Zitek: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Validation, Resources, Project administration, Writing - original draft. **Alexander H. Jordan:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing.

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