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An examination of the influence of self-efficacy regarding anger management on psychological and physical dating aggression using an agentic perspective of individual functioning. The investigation applied both the individual perspective (Study 1) and the interactional perspective (Study 2). The sample comprised 470 Italian young adults (223 females) (mean age across genders = 19.10; ds = 1.30) in study 1, and 62 couples in study 2 (mean age for males = 22.34; ds = 2.59; mean age for females = 19.58; ds = 1.50). The first study found that individuals' efficacy regarding anger management affect dysfunctional behaviors toward the partner via couple conflict. The second study found that one partner's efficacy regarding anger management affected couple conflict, which in turn affected the other partner's psychological aggression. Results are discussed within an agentic framework of human development, where young adult partners are proactive agents of their own and their partners' behaviors, contributing actively to their intimate relationship adjustment rather than just re-acting to their partners' behaviors.

Studies on marital and dating relationships have long recognized the central role of negative affect in partner aggression (Cascardi and Vivian 1995; Ellis and Malamuth 2000; Follingstad et al. 1991; Hettrich and O'Leary 2007; Margolin, John, and Gleberman 1988; Mu oz-Rivas et al. 2007; Swan et al. 2005; Yelsma 1996; Wekerle and Wolfe 1999). Following to an agentic perspective of individual functioning (Bandura 1997), the present study focuses on the active role young adults may play in managing their own and their partners' aggression, in the sense of effectively exercising control over their anger affect and emotions through their beliefs. We will address direct and indirect effects of perceived self-efficacy in anger management on psychological and physical dating aggression in two studies, assuming an individual perspective in the first study and an interactional perspective in the second.

Efficacy beliefs constitute the most pervasive and central mechanism of personal agency: they influence individual standards of behavior, how much effort is invested in performing activities, how individuals persevere in the face of difficulties, and what types of choices they make (Bandura 1997). Within an agentic perspective, self-management of emotional life is closely tied to individual beliefs related to affect regulation. Self-efficacy beliefs affect the nature, frequency and strength of emotional experience through the exercise of control on cognitions, affect, and actions (Bandura 1997). A growing body of studies indicates the relevance of perceived self-regulatory efficacy in regulating the impact of negative affect on different outcomes, such as prosocial behavior, antisocial conduct, depression, and well-being (see Bandura et al. 2003).

The present study extended this line of research to the role of affective self-regulatory efficacy in conflict and aggression management in dating relationships. Considering the motivational role that negative affect plays in intimate aggression, we focus on self-efficacy regarding anger management, defined as "beliefs regarding one's capability to ameliorate negative emotional states once they are aroused in response to adversity or to frustrating events and to avoid being overcome by emotions such as anger, irritation" (Caprara et al. 2008, 230).

Negative affect characterizes everyday life and is particularly relevant in the context of intimate relationships. Situational difficulties, provocations, and stressors such as external pressure, loss of initial warmth or affection, jealousy, and infidelity can potentially elicit strong negative affect. Individuals who are not sufficiently capable of modulating their negative emotions may externalize negative behaviors through conflict escalation and hostile interactions that, in turn, can lead to aggression (Capaldi and Gorman-Smith 2003; Ellis and Malamuth 2000; Feld and Straus 1989; Foran and O'Leary 2008; Gelles and Straus 1979; Margolin, John, and Gleberman 1988; Riggs and O'Leary 1989; Yelsma 1996). Several studies documenting the impact of anger on intimate aggression have conceptualized negative affect as a personality trait, as an expression style, or as a mechanism responsible for anger control (Cascardi and Vivian 1995; Follingstad et al. 1991; Foran and O'Leary 2008; Hettrich and O'Leary 2007; Mu oz-Rivas et al. 2007; Riggs and O'Leary 1989; Swan et al. 2005; Wekerle and Wolfe 1999). Few of these studies directly compared the predictive role of anger on partner aggression in males and females, and the majority were conducted separately for one gender group or the other. Although we know that anger escalation is more severe in males (Gottman and Levenson 1992) and that men are encouraged to be more overt in expressing their anger, the literature also suggests that anger in relationship conflict is related to partner aggression perpetrated by both males and females (Ellis and Malamuth 2000); besides, there is evidence that in females anger and retaliation for emotional hurt are the most important motivations for perpetrating aggression toward the partner (Cascardi and Vivian 1995; Follingstad et al. 1991; Hettrich and O'Leary 2007; Mu oz-Rivas et al. 2007). For example, women reported using physical violence due to anger/jealousy more often than men did (Harned 2001), and they were also more likely to report wishing to show anger through physical aggression (Follingstad 1991). Anger is one of the most common reasons given for the physical aggression perpetrated by females in different types of samples – ranging from dating adolescents and college students to clinical samples (Cascardi and Vivian 1995; Hettrich and O'Leary 2007; Wolfe, Wekerle, and Scott 1997).

To our knowledge, no studies have yet analyzed the impact of affective self-regulatory efficacy on partner aggression management. Although several studies underlined the role of anger control conceptualized as a feedback control system aimed at error correction, the proactive contribution of self-efficacy regarding anger management emotions has not yet been evaluated. According to the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory, we propose that individuals who believe they can exercise control over their anger will be more successful in their self-regulatory efforts than individuals who believe that they have no control over their emotional states. Self-efficacy in anger management was expected to affect dating aggression through direct and indirect effects. For the indirect effect we will consider one of the main relational processes to explain partner aggression: relationship conflict.

1. Relationship Conflict

Moving from an individual to an interactional perspective, the literature on intimate aggression showed that a considerable proportion of physical aggression and other aggressive acts occur as a consequence of an argument or a communication conflict (Capaldi and Owen 2001; Cascardi and Vivian 1995; Hotaling 1980; O'Leary 1999; Pan, Neidig, and O'Leary 1994). Conflictual interactions between partners can provoke or reinforce aggressive behaviors within dyads: reciprocal aversive behaviors and conflict escalation lead to a coercive spiral that each partner contributes to and maintains. Several studies confirmed the reciprocal involvement of both partners in aggression (Capaldi and Crosby 1997; Johnson 1995; Hamby 2005; Gray and Foshee 1997; Menesini et al. 2011; Nocentini, Pastorelli, and Menesini 2010; Wekerle and Wolfe 1999), and this is especially true in adolescence where both male and female partners are frequently found to be involved as perpetrators and victims (see Menesini et al. 2011). Mutual aggression usually implies mild forms of aggression, however more severe forms can also be found occasionally (Johnson 1995; Olson 2002; Williams and Frieze 2005). All these data suggest that intimate aggression can be conceptualized and modelled as a property of the couple rather than of each partner. Within this theoretical framework no gender differences were found concerning the perception of conflict and the predictive role that conflict has within couple aggression (Connolly et al. 2010; Riggs, O'Leary, and Breslin 1990; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz

1980). Gender differences were found instead concerning the physiological reaction to couple conflict, where men are characterized by quicker and more severe reactions than women (Gottman and Levenson 1992).

Individual characteristics of both partners, such as irritability and impulsivity, criticism or rejection sensitivity, or low self-efficacy beliefs in conflict resolutions, facilitate these aggressive exchanges and their escalation. We hypothesize that the perceived capability to manage anger can have a relevant role in this process. Individuals who believe they can exercise control over their anger emotions will be less likely to respond to partner relational provocation with violence, thus avoiding conflict escalation.

Following to an interactional perspective that takes into account reciprocal influences between partners, our study aims to extend this model focused on individual processes to an interactional model where one partner's behavior and socio-cognitive processes can affect the other partner's behavioral outcome. Within reciprocal conflictual exchanges, each partner can act as "circuit actor" or "circuit breaker," thus contributing to escalation or de-escalation processes (Feld and Straus 1989; Fincham and Beach 2002). When one partner opts out of the reciprocal cycle of escalating aggression, the other should be less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors; therefore we expect that one partner's self-efficacy beliefs reduce dysfunctional personal and partner's behavior contributing to the positive functioning of the dyad.

2. Hypothesized Model

Consistent with previous research, we hypothesize that individuals who believe they can exercise control over their anger will be less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors toward the partner, directly and through the mediating effect of behavior in conflict situations. In particular we hypothesize that: (a) self-efficacy regarding anger management will be linked to the frequency and experience of relationship conflict, psychological dating aggression, and physical dating aggression; (b) conflict experiences and behavior will mediate the association between self-efficacy beliefs and psychological and physical dating aggression. In relation to gender differences, we hypothesize the same predictive path from couple conflict to dating aggression in both genders. Furthermore, given that literature suggests that anger during relationship conflict is related to partner aggression perpetrated by both males and females (Ellis and Malamuth 2000), we also hypothesize that self-efficacy regarding anger management affect dating aggression in both genders.

The hypothesized model was tested in two different studies. The first assumes an individual perspective: we evaluated whether the proposed processes affect individual perpetration of dating aggression. The second study assumes an interactional perspective: using reports from both partners, we hypothesized that one partner's self-efficacy regarding anger management affect the other partner's perpetration of dating aggression, directly and indirectly through behavior in conflict situations. In this case, predictors are the measures of Partner A's beliefs and behavior; the outcome is the aggressive behavior toward Partner A reported by Partner B.

3. Study 1: Individual Perpetration

3.1. Materials and Methods

3.1.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants in this study were drawn from an ongoing longitudinal study (LU.LO.SA) started in 2002 to evaluate different dimensions of psycho-social adjustment in participants who were still attending high school at the start of the study in Lucca, a city in Tuscany, Italy. Thirteen schools were selected using a self-selection inclusion in the study but also trying to balance sample composition in relation to school type. All participants agreed to take part in the study and received parental permission at the first data wave (T1). Trained staff administered questionnaires in class during the school day in two different sessions of about one hour each. Participants were assured of confidentiality. For the present study we consider the fourth wave (T4: 2006/2007). Participants were 470 late adolescents and young adults (247 males and 223 females): age ranged from 18 to 23 years, 90 percent were younger than 20 (mean age = 19.10; ds = 1.30). The majority of the participants were from Italian backgrounds (97 percent) and lived in two-parent families (84 percent). 76.6 percent of both parents reported graduation from high school, and

23.4 percent of at least one of the two parents reported a university degree or post university education. The mean length of dating relationship was 18.98 months (sd=16.07).

3.1.2. Measures

Psychological dating aggression: Five items with a five-point response scale from 0 (never) to 4 (daily) assessed psychological abuse defined as "coercive or aversive acts intended to produce emotional harm or threat of harm" (Murphy, Hoover, and Taft 1999). A short scale was composed from two different scales: the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (Murphy, Hoover, and Taft 1999) and the Abusive Behavior Inventory (Shepard and Campbell 1992). Three items assessed the construct of Hostile Withdrawal *("Refused to have any discussion of a problem"; "Intentionally avoided the other person during a conflict or disagreement"; "Gave angry stares or looks")* and two items assessed the construct of Restrictive Engulfment *("Tried to keep her/him from doing something she/he wanted to do [e.g. going out with friends]"; "Checked up on her/his activities [e.g.: listened to her/his phone calls, checked the mileage on her/his car]"* (the first two items come from the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse, the last three from the Abusive Behavior Inventory). In the present study we considered only the perpetration reports, which means the self-report of Partner A of his/her own behavior perpetrated on Partner B. The Cronbach's alphas were .70 for males and .71 for females. A mean frequency score for psychological dating aggression was computed by averaging responses across the five items.

Physical dating aggression: A revised version of the Conflict Tactic Scale was used to measure physical dating aggression (Nocentini et al. 2011). The scale consisted of nine items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (0 = never, 4 = always). The items *"Spitting"* and *"Choking, punching, or beating"* were deleted because of their low frequency (lower than 2 percent in females). We considered only the perpetration reports. The Cronbach's alphas were .90 for males and .86 for females. Again, a mean frequency score was computed by averaging across the nine items.

Self-efficacy regarding anger management: Perceived self-efficacy in managing anger emotions in response to adversity and frustrating events was assessed by the self-efficacy in anger management sub-scale from the Regulatory Emotional Self-Efficacy Scale (Caprara et al. 2008; Caprara, Di Giunta, Pastorelli, and Eisenberg, 2013). The sub-scale comprises four items (e.g. *How well can you …: " … manage negative feelings when reprimanded by others?"; " … avoid getting upset when others keep giving you a hard time"*) rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *not well at all;* 5 = *very well*). The Cronbach's alphas for males and females were .75 and .74 respectively. Mean scores were computed across the four items.

Couple Conflict: The Conflict Scale of the Network of Relationships Inventory was used (Furman and Buhrmester 1992). This scale consists of six items assessing the intensity of negative interaction and non-physical conflict within dating relationship on a five-point Likert scale (from 1=never true to 5=always true) (e.g. *"My boyfriend/girlfriend and I get on each other's nerves"; "My boyfriend/girlfriend and I hassle or nag one another"*). The Cronbach's alphas were respectively .76 for males and .81 for females. Responses were averaged across the six items to arrive at a measure of relationship conflict.

3.1.3. Data Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine the role of gender and age in relation to psychological dating aggression and physical dating aggression. Path analyses with multi-group approach across gender were used to test the proposed direct and indirect models. The models tested whether self-efficacy regarding anger management were linked to psychological and physical dating aggression through level of relationship conflict (Study 1) and whether one partner's self-efficacy regarding anger management and level of conflict affected the other partner's perpetration of dating aggression (Study 2). Alternative models were tested; in particular we examined an effect of couple conflict on psychological dating aggression and physical dating aggression through self-efficacy beliefs in anger management.

All the analyses were conducted via Mplus 4.0 (Muthen and Muthen 2006). Given that psychological and physical dating aggression mean scores presented high skewness

and kurtosis, the MLR robust estimator was used. To avoid bias due to missing data (15 percent of participants have some missing data), we estimated all models using the direct maximum likelihood procedure available in Mplus. Given that estimated models were saturated models with zero degrees of freedom, fit indices were not reported. All models estimated direct and indirect paths. The significance of the indirect paths was analyzed by the test of the indirect effect in Mplus (Muthen and Muthen 2006).

3.2. Results and Discussion

3.2.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

No significant effects of gender were found for conflict, or for psychological or physical dating aggression. Significant gender differences were found for self-efficacy in anger management ($F_{(2,444)}$ =32.964; p<.001; η^2=.07), with males reporting higher levels than females. Age does not significantly affect any variables. Table 1 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the variables.

Table 1: Correlations, means, and standard deviations of the measures for the full sample in Study 1

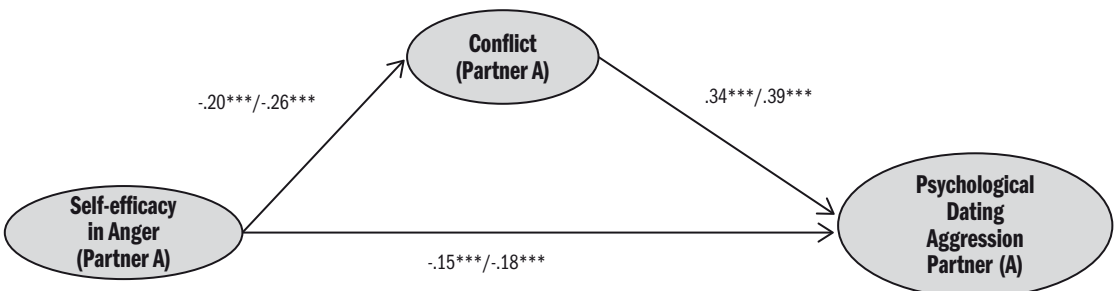
	1	2	3	4	Mean (SD)	
1. Physical dating aggression		.29	-.04	.27	.36	(1.00)
2. Psychological dating aggression	.23		-.22	.38	.60	(.60)
3. Self efficacy in anger	-.12	-.28		-.21	3.15	(.82)
4. Relationship conflict	.20	.44	-.26		2.08	(.65)
Means (SD)	.25 (.77)	.71 (.64)	2.75 (.71)	1.98 (.66)		

Note: Data for males appear above the diagonal and data for females appear below the diagonal.

3.2.2. Models with Psychological Dating Aggression and Physical Dating Aggression

For psychological dating aggression, the multi-group model showed a negative path from self-efficacy in anger management to couple conflict for both gender groups, which in turn was a positive predictor of psychological dating aggression. The direct path from self-efficacy in anger management to psychological dating aggression was also significant (see Figure 1). The indirect path was significant in both genders: self-efficacy in anger management affects psychological dating aggression via conflict. The model explains 16 percent (male) and 22 percent (female) of psychological dating aggression variance.

Figure 1: Path analyses of obtained relations among self-efficacy regarding anger management, conflict, and psychological dating aggression

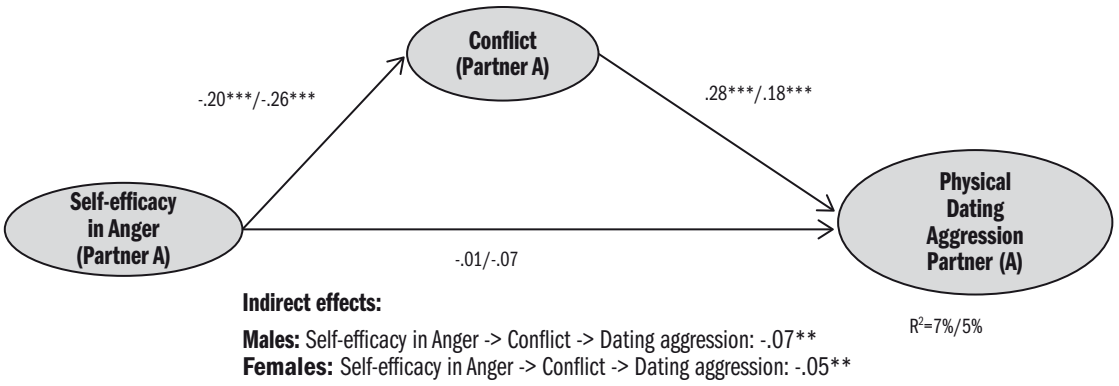


Note: The first path coefficient on each of the structural links is for males; the second coefficient is for females Estimates are standardized path coefficients.

For physical dating aggression, the multi-group model showed a negative path from self-efficacy regarding anger management to couple conflict for both genders, which in turn showed positive links with physical dating aggression. The direct path from self-efficacy in anger management to physical dating aggression was not significant (see Figure 1). The indirect path was significant in both genders: self-efficacy in anger management affected physical dating aggression via greater relationship conflict. The model explains 7 percent (male) and 5 percent (female) of physical dating aggression variance.

Overall, the indirect effect of self-efficacy in anger management on psychological and physical dating aggression through conflict was confirmed in both genders. However, self-efficacy in anger management plays a direct and relevant role in psychological dating aggression but not in physical dating aggression.

Figure 2: Path analyses of obtained relations among self-efficacy regarding anger management, conflict, and physical dating aggression



Note: The first path coefficient on each of the structural links is for males; the second coefficient is for females. Estimates are standardized path coefficients.

3.2.3 Alternative Models

The cross-sectional nature of our data did not permit a test of the assumed causal direction from self-efficacy to relationship conflict. To corroborate this directional hypothesis, alternative models were tested in which the order of self-efficacy and relationship conflict were reversed. For psychological dating aggression, the indirect paths in the alternative model (Conflict -> Self-efficacy in anger management -> Psychological dating aggression) were slightly weaker (males: $\beta = .03^*$; females: $\beta = .05^*$); likewise the percentage of total variance explained (males: 13 percent; females: 22 percent).

For physical dating aggression, the path from self-efficacy regarding anger management and physical dating aggression was non-significant in both genders: thus, no indirect path from relationship conflict to physical dating aggression via self-efficacy in anger management was found. Overall, considering all these results together, we conclude that our theoretical model provided a better fit to the empirical data than the alternative model.

4. Study 2: Interactional Perspective

As already mentioned, the second study assumes an interactional perspective: using both partners views, we hypothesize that one partner's self-efficacy beliefs in anger management affect the other partner's perpetration of dating aggression, directly and indirectly through behavior in conflict situations. In this case, predictors are the measures reported by Partner A of their own beliefs/behavior; the outcome is the aggressive behavior toward Partner A reported by Partner B.

4.1. Materials and Methods

4.1.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants in this study were 62 couples. The age range was 19 to 31 years for males (mean age=22.34; SD=2.59),

and 15 to 26 for females (mean age = 19.58; SD = 1.50). The mean length of dating relationship was 28.0 months (SD = 20.06). The couples were recruited during the fourth wave of data collection of the longitudinal study (individual data collection was presented in Study 1). The sample for Study 2 excluded participants in Study 1. For the couple study, if one of the two partners had participated in one of the three previous waves, they were asked to invite their partner to take part in the study. Data for this study were collected in 2006 and 2008. Participants were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study with their current partner, if they had one. Both partners received a small gift in return for participation. Both partners (Partner A and Partner B) filled in the same self-report questionnaire.

In order to evaluate possible differences on study variables between participants whose partners participated in the study versus the remaining participants in the longitudinal study who did not participate, we conducted several ANOVAs on the main variables. Results did not show any significant difference (psychological dating aggression: $F(1,425) = 3.714$, $p = .06$; conflict: $F(1,425) = .213$, $p = .64$; self-efficacy in anger: $F(1,425) = .026$, $p = .87$).

4.1.2. Measures and Data Analysis

Psychological dating aggression: The same scale used in Study 1 was employed. The Cronabch's alphas were .75 for male and .74 for female participants.

Self-efficacy in anger management: The same scale used in Study 1 was employed. The Cronbach's alphas for the male and female sample were.72 and .83 respectively.

Relationship conflict: The same scale used in Study 1 was employed. The Cronbach's alphas were .85 for male and .85 for female.

The same modeling strategy used for Study 1 was employed.

Since our model considers perspectives of both male and female partners, we assumed a non-independence of observations. Therefore, we computed standard errors and a chi-square test of model fit taking into account the non-independence of observations due to couple sampling. Using Mplus 4.1, this approach can be realized by specifying TYPE=complex in conjunction with the cluster command. We tested the model only for psychological dating aggression, given the very small number of participants who reported physically aggressive behaviors towards the partner (only one male and nine females). The model was tested as a multiple-group analysis for gender. To avoid bias due to the limited attrition in the sample, we estimated all models using the direct maximum likelihood procedure available in Mplus.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

A significant effect of gender on self-efficacy in anger management was found ($F_{(1,120)} = 4.324$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .04$), with males reporting higher levels of self-efficacy regarding anger management (see Table 2 for descriptive data). Age did not significantly affect any variables. Table 2 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the variables.

Table 2: Correlations, means, and standard deviations of the measures for the full sample in Study 2

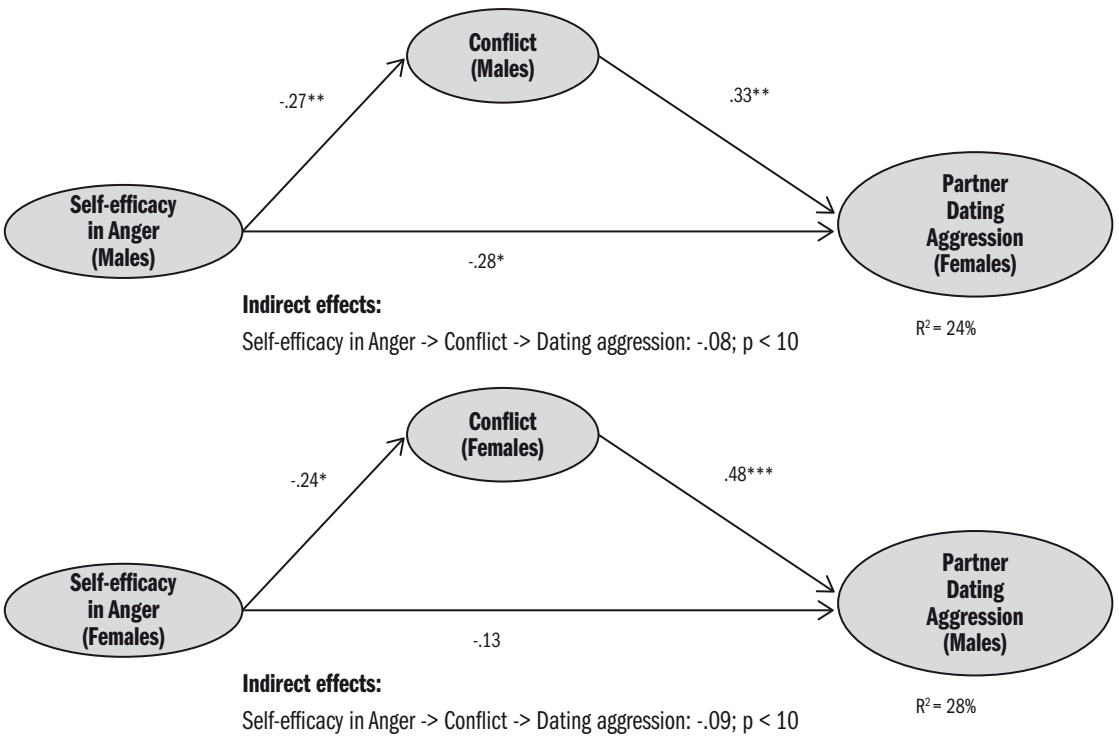
	1	2	3	Mean (SD)
1. Psychological dating aggression (Partner B)		-.37	.35	.70 (.65)
2.Self-efficacy in anger (Partner A)	-.24		-.27	3.08 (.74)
3.Relationship conflict (Partner A)	.48	-.20		2.07 (.76)
M (SD)	.51 (.59)	2.77 (.72)	2.00 (.77)	

Note: Predictors are the measures reported by Partner A referred to his/her own beliefs/behavior; outcome is the aggressive behavior toward Partner A reported by Partner B. Data for males appear above the diagonal and data for female appear below the diagonal.

4.2.2. Models with Partner Psychological Aggression

The multi-group model predicting partner-reported psychological dating aggression showed similar results for both genders, except for the direct path from self-efficacy in anger management to partner dating aggression (see Figure 3). In both genders, a negative path from self-efficacy in anger management to relationship conflict emerged, which in turn positively predicted psychological dating aggression as reported by the partner. Additionally, male self-efficacy regarding anger management significantly predicted partner-reported psychological dating aggression. The indirect paths were only marginally significant: self-efficacy in anger management affected partner-reported psychological dating aggression via relationship conflict. The model explains 24 percent (male) and 28 percent (female) of partner-reported psychological dating aggression variance. Overall, female psychological dating aggression was predicted by male self-efficacy in anger management directly, but by contrast, male psychological dating aggression was not directly predicted by female self-efficacy in anger management. The indirect path through relationship conflict was only marginally significant in both genders. The present study confirmed the relevance of self-efficacy in anger management for conflict escalation dynamics in both genders. By contrast, its direct role in dyadic processes seems to be confirmed only in explaining female psychological aggression toward the partner.

Figure 3: Path analyses of obtained relations among self-efficacy regarding anger management, conflict, and partner-reported psychological dating aggression



Note: Estimates are standardized path coefficients.

5. General Discussion

The current investigation examined the contribution of self-efficacy regarding anger management to handling psychological dating aggression and physical dating aggression within an individual and interactional perspective on mutual couple aggression. In the first study, individuals' efficacy regarding anger management predicted dysfunctional behaviors toward the partner via their effect on

relationship conflict. In the second study, one partner's efficacy regarding anger management affected the other partner's psychological aggression directly (in predicting female psychological aggression) and indirectly via couple conflict (in predicting both male and female psychological aggression).

Men and women who believe they can exercise some form of control over their negative emotional life are more successful in their self-regulatory efforts than others who believe they do not have such control. If people do not believe they can successfully manage anger in intimate relationships, they are unlikely to make efforts to reduce negative emotional states once they have been aroused. Therefore, they will be more likely to escalate their anger state into more severe and intense affective reactions, engaging in more hostile and conflictual interaction exchanges. Finally, they will be unlikely to engage in conflict resolution discussions and may then employ negative resolution styles including psychological and physical dating aggression. This individual process also has relevant effects on partner behavior. Male and female beliefs in the personal ability to effectively manage anger assume a relevant role in breaking the cycle of aggression, contributing to the de-escalation of conflict and in turn to the de-escalation of the other partner's aggression.

The role of couple conflict has been confirmed as very relevant within reciprocal partner aggression. This result stresses the conflictual nature of aggression in dating relationships where, at least in the context of nonclinical samples and mutual couple aggression, physical and psychological intimate aggression are likely to occur during conflict escalation and are perpetrated by both partners, male and female alike (Capaldi and Crosby 1997; Cascardi and Vivian 1995; Gray and Foshee 1997; Hamby 2005; Hotaling 1980; Johnson 1995; Nocentini, Menesini, and Pastorelli 2010; O'Leary 1999; Pan, Neidig, and O'Leary 1994; Wekerle and Wolfe 1999). The present study supports the mediating effect of relationship conflict in relation to the association between self-efficacy in anger management and aggressive behaviors. Individuals who believe they can exercise control over their anger will be likely to respond to relational provocation with constructive discussions and reasoning, avoiding escalation in conflictual exchanges.

In line with this focus on reciprocal effects between partners, the second study extended the model centered on individual processes to an interactional model where one partner's processes influence the other partner's aggressive behavioral outcome. According to a systemic view of dyadic processes, aggressive behaviors are affected not only by individual characteristics, but also by partners' characteristics and their interaction (Capaldi and Gorman-Smith 2003; Fincham and Beach, 2002; Robins, Caspi, and Moffitt 2002). Our results suggest that in the context of mutual couple aggression either partner can potentially diminish the level of psychological aggression in the dyad. The higher the individual is on anger self-efficacy, the less likely he or she is to perpetrate psychological aggression. However, the mechanism seems to be different for males and females: male self-efficacy in anger management affects directly female aggression toward the partner, but female self-efficacy only indirectly affects male aggression toward the partner, via conflict. Individual processes explained about 25 percent of variance in partner psychological aggression. These findings, together with the results on the comparable percentage of psychological aggression variance explained by individual processes in Study 1, suggest the relevance of these theoretical models in explaining dyadic aggression between partners. Future studies integrating both individual and partner processes in explaining one partner's behavior should evaluate the interactive role played by both partners. Although the prevalence of physical dating aggression in the present study was too low to produce useable findings, a similar mechanism can also be expected in the case of physical dating aggression. In relation to the role of gender in these processes, results supported a general model where anger self-efficacy and conflict predict psychological and physical dating aggression in both genders (Study 1). Study 2 also supported the hypothesis that both male and female beliefs in managing anger affect the perception of couple conflict, which in turn affects the other partner's psychological aggression. The only difference lay in the direct role that male self-efficacy in anger management had on female psychological dating aggression, which was not found for female self-efficacy. This finding needs further study but,

according to Gottman and Levenson (1992), we can hypothesize that in males low self-efficacy in anger management can elicit a quicker and more severe expression of anger, which is directly related to individual perpetration of aggression and in turn to partner-perpetrated aggression. This mechanism may not be so severe and quick in females; when females perceived low level of self-efficacy in anger management they can use more indirect strategies to express their anger, therefore raising the couple level of conflict and in turn the level of partner's dating aggression. However, this reasoning remains speculative and needs to be examined in future research.

The development of intimate and romantic relationships is an important psycho-social task for adolescents and young adults. With age, dating involves a series of new requests, decisions, expectations, and behaviors requiring increasing cognitive, emotional and social skills on the part of the adolescent. Perceived efficacy in managing these skills and particularly in managing negative emotional life plays a relevant role in intimate relationships. Within an agentic conceptual framework of human development, individuals are both producers and products of their social system (Bandura 1997). Accordingly, young adult partners are proactive agents of their individual behavior and of their partner's behavior contributing actively to their intimate relationships adjustment rather than just re-acting to their partner's behavior.

The present study extends the growing body of research on the contribution of self-efficacy regarding anger management to handling conflictual and aggressive interactions in dating relationships. Further studies are needed in order to clarify some issues that are not yet fully explained. First, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the testing of mediated effects over time. Longitudinal designs can also highlight the prospective role of self-efficacy regarding anger management on aggression between partners. Second, systematic research on the role of negative affectivity on intimate aggression in both genders may contribute theoretically and practically to designing intervention or prevention programs. Third, results from Study 2 need to be cross-validated given the small number of couples involved, and extended to physical dating aggression. Finally, studies in different cultural contexts would contribute to the generalizability of the results.

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