# Benefits and Drawbacks of Dual-Earner Couples' Work-Related Experiences During Leisure Time

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# Contents

## List of Tables



## List of Figures

## Summary

Dual-earner couples need to juggle the demands of both work and home so that it is particularly important that they use their leisure time to recover and replenish drained resources. While previous research has indicated that segmenting work and home is beneficial to employees' recovery and well-being, this dissertation points out benefits and drawbacks of high work-home integration by examining the well-being consequences of work-related experiences during leisure time for both partners in dual-earner couples. More specifically, in the three studies consequences of work-related spousal support, work reflection and sharing work events are assessed. By using a dyadic perspective in all three studies, this dissertation closes the gap that research on dual-earner couples' recovery and well-being has rarely included data of both partners for investigating work-related experiences during leisure time.

Study 1 focused on work-related support from the partner as work-home integration strategy to recover from work. Cross-sectional data from 130 dual-earner couples (260 individuals) was used to examine the associations between receiving (providing) work-related support from (to) the partner and recovery experiences (i.e., psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery). Moreover, couples' work-linkage (i.e., both partners working in the same organization and/or the same occupation) was investigated as a moderator. The actor-partner interdependence model was used to account for the dependent structure of dyadic data. Results of multiple group analyses comparing work-linked to non-work-linked couples showed that receiving work-related support from a partner was associated with increased relaxation and mastery experiences, at least among work-linked couples. Work-related support was not associated with employees' detachment. Providing work-related support was positively related to employees' mastery experiences in non-work-linked couples only

whereas it was unrelated to psychological detachment and relaxation both in couples with and without work-linkage.

In study 2, it was examined whether employees' positive and negative work reflection during off-job time are associated with their own and with their partners' work engagement and exhaustion. Furthermore, it was investigated whether (a) living with children and (b) being work-linked moderated these relations. To analyze dyadic data of 130 German heterosexual dual-earner couples (260 individuals), multilevel analyses using the actor–partner interdependence model were estimated. Positive associations between employees' positive work reflection and both their own and their partners' work engagement were found. Employees' positive work reflection was also associated with their decreased exhaustion. Employees' negative work reflection was negatively associated with their own work engagement and positively associated with their own exhaustion but unrelated to their partners' outcomes. Moderator analyses revealed that living with children weakened the link between employees' positive work reflection and their own work engagement and strengthened the link between their negative work reflection and exhaustion.

In study 3, daily consequences of sharing positive and negative work events with the partner at home both for employees' and their partners' affect and work-related self-esteem were investigated. Over the course of a work week, 73 heterosexual dual-earner couples (146 individuals) filled in online questionnaires after work and at bedtime. Dyadic multilevel analyses showed that regarding affect, sharing positive work events was positively associated with employees' positive affect but not with partners' positive affect. Sharing negative work events was both unrelated to employees' and partners' negative effect. Sharing positive work events was not associated with employees' self-esteem but negatively associated with partners' self-esteem. Sharing negative work events was negatively related to both employees' and partners' self-esteem.

Taken together, the three studies of this dissertation showed that work-related experiences during leisure time (i.e., providing and receiving work-related support, work reflection, sharing work events) have differential consequences for both employees' and their partners' well-being and that it is meaningful to distinguish between different work-related experiences (e.g., work-related thinking vs. interaction with the partners) and their valence (positive vs. negative). By combining research on recovery and well-being with research on crossover, this dissertation confirmed that for dual-earner couples, it adds value to analyze couple data (i.e., responses of both partners in a couple) and emphasizes that it is important to consider the potentially differential consequences for both partners' well-being.

# CHAPTER 1

## 1. General Introduction

Work-life balance and employee health are among the most current topics in I/O psychology (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2022). For dual-earner couples in particular, finding the right balance between work and private life is difficult as both partners need to juggle the demands of work and home at once and role responsibilities might be not clear (Brummelhuis et al., 2008; Wepfer et al., 2018). The occurrence of spillover (i.e. the transmission of work-related experiences to the home domain; Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) is a quite well-studied phenomenon (Amstad et al., 2011; Lapierre et al., 2018) which brings along certain benefits and drawbacks. Terms such as work-family enrichment which is defined as "the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role" (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; p. 72) describe that resources generated in role A (e.g. the work role) are more likely to spill over to another role B (e.g. the family/private role) and to promote high functioning and/or positive affect in this domain. In contrast, work-family conflict is the "transmission of demands and consequent strain from one area of life to another" (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 901) which impedes affect and functioning at home (Voydanoff, 2005). For a long time, research was mainly focused on the transmission of strain and negative states (cf. Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) and therefore, many studies postulated that a clear separation between work and home is beneficial for employees' well-being (i.e., work-home segmentation; e.g. Kubicek & Tement, 2016; Park et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). High segmentation prevents the spillover of negative work experiences into the private life and can help people to recover from work (Park et al., 2011; Sonnentag, Kuttler, & Fritz, 2010). However, since then evidence is accumulating that for instance, thinking about work after the end of the working day is helpful for other factors, such as personal initiative, creativity and organizational citizenship behavior (Binnewies et

al., 2009). Thus, it might depend on the valence of work-related experiences during leisure time whether they are beneficial or detrimental to employees' well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Partners in dual-earner couples might spend a significant amount of leisure time together, so that it seems crucial to consider not only one partner but both of them when examining the consequences of work-related experiences. This is in line with the views of other researchers who called for the investigation of contextual factors and resources influencing recovery and well-being of employees, such as supportive colleagues or the family environment (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Sonnentag et al., 2017; Steed et al., 2021). Therefore, in addition to spillover, crossover effects are likely to occur between intimate partners, i.e., the "dyadic, inter-individual transmission of well-being between closely related individuals" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2009; p. 220). In romantic couples, partners usually have a communal orientation (Le et al., 2018) and include the other's resources and emotions in their own self (Aron et al., 2013). Thus, employees' work experiences do not only affect their own private life but also their partners' via emotional contagion and interaction processes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). As research about dyadic crossover effects and the potential benefits of work-related experiences during leisure time is still scarce, this dissertation aims to extend knowledge of benefits and drawbacks of work-related experiences during leisure time for dual-earner couples' well-being and recovery.

## 1.1. The Role of Partners for Dual-Earner Couples' Well-Being and Recovery Processes

Recovery is a "period during which he/she [the individual] can return to a normal/pre-stressor level of functioning" (A. Craig & Cooper, 1992, p. 326) and represents the process opposite to strain (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Two theoretical models are particularly suitable to describe

the interplay between work and recovery. The effort recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) suggests that demanding work is followed by load reactions at physiological, behavioral or subjective levels. When an employee overcomes a strenuous work situation, for example at the end of the working day, load reactions diminish, the psychobiological systems can stabilize to their baseline levels and recovery occurs (Meijman & Mulder, 1998).

The second theoretical approach is conservation of resources (COR) model. Hobfoll (1989; Hobfoll, 2001) posits that people strive to protect, maintain and build up resources. In accordance with this model, stress reactions may occur when resources are threatened or lost or were invested but did not lead to the acquisition of further resources. Work-related tasks, for instance, can deplete resources (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). One possibility to compensate the resource loss is recovery (Westman et al., 2005). In leisure time, the resources employees applied during working time should not be used so that existing resources can replenish and new resources can be built up (Hobfoll, 2010). In recovery literature, several ways to recover are described (Sonnentag, 2018). Sonnentag and Fritz (2007), for instance, investigated four specific off-job experiences (psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control). Empirical evidence confirms that these recovery experiences contribute to employees' well-being (Bennett et al., 2018; Steed et al., 2021).

Recovery is essential for well-being and health: when an individual is permanently exposed to high job demands and cannot recover, stress reactions accumulate and may lead to short-term and long-term consequences for their well-being like psychosomatic health complaints, depression or sickness absence (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Well-being, in turn, is a broad concept which comprises a variety of aspects (Linton et al., 2016) such as cognitive and affective evaluations of one's own life (i.e., subjective well-being; Diener et al., 2011), and eudaimonic living (psychological well-being consisting of autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

As people spend a great amount of their leisure time with the intimate partners, it is crucial to investigate how partners influence each other's recovery and well-being. The spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) postulates that between intimate partners, transmission processes take place. According to the model, in a first step, employees' job demands and resources spill over to the home domain and lead either to work-family conflict or work-family enrichment (i.e., spillover). In a second step, work-family conflict and work-family enrichment influence the interaction between partners and may indirectly affect partner's well-being (i.e., crossover). There are two possible mechanisms how crossover can take place (Westman, 2001): first, crossover appears due to empathy. That is, as spouses have a close relationship and communal orientation (Le et al., 2018), they can feel their partners' strain (or joy) and are, in turn, affected by it so that their own strain (or positive emotions) increase. Hahn and Dormann (2013), for instance, found that employees' and their partners' psychological detachment were positively associated and contributed to their well-being. Similarly, exhaustion and life satisfaction crossed over from one partner to the other (Demerouti et al., 2005). Second, crossover can occur via an indirect interaction process. One partner's strain can result in impaired or limited communication or interaction (e.g. social undermining, lack of social support; Bakker et al., 2013) between the partners, which increases crossover of strain. Similarly, one partner's positive affect might result in more supportive, positively valenced interactions which are likely to affect the other partner's well-being (Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Tremmel et al., 2018).

Overall, the importance of partners for employees' well-being is well-documented (e.g. Bakker et al., 2008; Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Hahn et al., 2014; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Westman & Etzion, 1995) and social support, in particular, is a resource which facilitates the replenishment of other resources (Hobfoll, 2002). From recovery literature, it is known that receiving support from the partner is associated with increased recovery activities

(Haun et al., 2017; Park & Fritz, 2015), increased work engagement (Park & Haun, 2017) and increased life and family satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1992; Park & Fritz, 2015).

## 1.2. Work-Related Experiences During Leisure Time

As mentioned in the last section, to protect employees' well-being, leisure time can be used to recover from work and to rebuild drained resources. Empirical evidence distinguished between resource-providing and resource-depleting off-job activities and experiences (Sonnentag et al., 2017). In line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2010), activities and experiences are categorized as resource-providing when they help to rebuild lost resources and to gain additional resources and in turn, result in increased well-being, such as positive work reflection, relaxation, mastery experiences, low-effort, social and physical activities (Bakker et al., 2013; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005, 2006; Meier et al., 2016; Sonnentag, 2001). In contrast, resource-depleting activities or experiences consume existing resources as they pose additional demands on the employee and therefore hinder recovery processes (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006). These include negative work reflection, nonwork hassles and work-related activities (Bakker et al., 2013; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005, 2006; Sonnentag, 2001; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006).

The finding that work-related activities drain resources is in line with the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) as the same resources during the working day and the evening might be used. However, more recent research indicates that there are work-related activities during leisure time that can actually provide additional resources or help to replenish resources: problem-solving pondering (i.e., thinking about work with a problem-solving focus; Querstret & Cropley, 2012), positive work reflection (i.e., reflecting about the positive facets of one's job; Meier et al., 2016) and capitalizing on positive events (i.e., sharing good news with others; Gable et al., 2004) were found to be positively related to

indicators of well-being such as affect, mood, fatigue and job satisfaction (Gable et al., 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Ilies et al., 2011; Meier et al., 2016; Querstret & Cropley, 2012). Thus, depending on the content and affective valence of work-related experiences, being mentally connected with work might help to (re)appraise or cope with work-related problems, and, in turn, increase well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). In my research, I define work-related experiences during leisure time as activities and experiences that are related to work and include cognitive, affective and social components such as work-related support, work-related thoughts and work-related conversations.

When it comes to crossover processes of work-related experiences between partners, initial research showed that employees' work experiences affect their partners' well-being (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker et al., 2008). For instance, employees' work engagement affected partner's happiness (through employees' happiness; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2014). Taken together, these studies paved the way for the perspective that work–home integration in the form of work-related experiences may, in addition to depleting resources, provide resources that promote the replenishment of further resources in both partners of dual-earner couples, such as recovery experiences or well-being (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and form the base for my dissertation.

### 1.3. Research Gaps

In the following, I will elaborate on the research gaps I identified in the current literature with regards to work-related experiences during leisure time and their association with dual-earner couples' recovery and well-being processes.

First, even though there is initial evidence that work-related experiences during leisure time can be beneficial to employees' well-being (Ferguson et al., 2016; Meier et al., 2016; Tremmel et al., 2018), further research on specific work-related experiences and their

contributions to recovery and well-being was lacking. It seems crucial, though, to examine specific work-related experiences to understand which of them are helpful (or detrimental) to employees' well-being and to derive more targeted recommendations how dual-earner couples can increase (or prevent to decrease) their well-being. Related to that, previous research has mainly focused on purely affective or well-being related outcomes such as affect, life satisfaction or relationship well-being (Gable et al., 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Tremmel et al., 2018) but has not considered motivational or evaluative components of well-being. Examining further consequences, for instance for employees' personal resources (e.g., self-esteem) or their motivation would provide a broader view on the benefits of work-related experiences during leisure time. Furthermore, previous studies on work-related experiences focused on either sharing positive or negative events in general (i.e., not necessarily work-related; Hicks & Diamond, 2008) or sharing work events with someone (i.e., not necessarily the partner; Tremmel et al., 2018). In addition, former studies have not yet examined work-related partner support specifically but rather general partner support (Haun et al., 2017) or partner recovery support (Park & Haun, 2017). Therefore, a comprehensive overview which covers a range of work events of both positive and negative valence is needed to holistically understand the associations with dual-earner couples' well-being.

Second, although crossover processes and partners' mutual influence are well-known phenomena, research on employees' recovery and well-being including both partners of a dual-earner couple is still limited (see for exceptions Hahn et al., 2012; Hahn et al., 2014; Haun et al., 2017; Park & Fritz, 2015; Park & Haun, 2017). In addition, to account for interdependencies and a more extensive view on dual-earner couples' recovery and well-being processes, it is worthwhile to consider the effects on both partners' roles in work-related interactions (e.g. receiving versus providing support; telling about versus listening to

work-related experiences) which was hardly done in the past (Haun et al., 2017; Hicks & Diamond, 2008). More specifically, a work-related conversation between partners could result in different effects for the partner who tells about work and the partner who listens to (Hicks & Diamond, 2008). Furthermore, there is evidence that effects of providing support differ from the effect of receiving support (e.g., Brown et al., 2003).

Third, studies on specific mechanisms and activities (i.e., what specifically do employees do to affect their partners' well-being?) are rare. One exception is the study of Hahn et al. (2012) which showed that absorption in joint activities with the partner was related to increased detachment, relaxation and mastery as well as positive affective states. Although other studies speculated about the influence of talking with one's partner as crossover mechanism, they did not measure these specific behaviors (Bakker et al., 2005; Neff et al., 2012). Moreover, previous studies on the link between providing support to the employed partner and well-being used a rather broad, conceptual level of support (e.g. social support; Haun et al., 2017) which makes it difficult to derive specific recommendations from. To overcome these limitations, in one of my studies (study 1) I use a very specific type of support (i.e., work-related spousal support) and in another study (study 3) I assess the behaviors of work-related interaction between partners in terms of social sharing.

Fourth, for a more comprehensive view, findings on boundary conditions that moderate the effects of employees' work-related experiences during leisure time on both partners' well-being are lacking. One determining factor in the life of dual-earner couples could be the presence of children in the household as this might imply that less time can be spent on work-related experiences, preventing both the positive and negative sides to spill over to employees' well-being (Barnet-Verzat et al., 2011; Campos et al., 2009; L. Craig & Bittman, 2008; Elliott, 2003). There is initial evidence that children play a role for dual-earner couples' well-being and recovery (Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn & Dormann, 2013) but

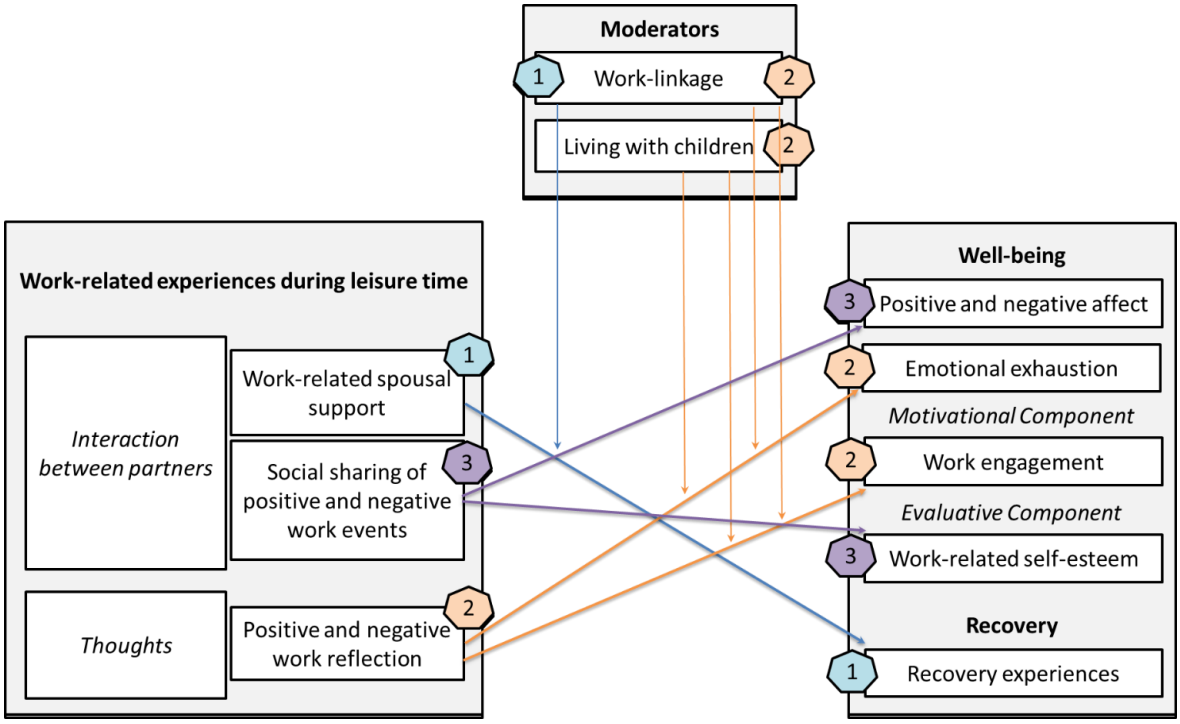
little is known about further work-related moderators. In addition to living with children, I added couples' work-linkage (i.e., partners working in the same company and/or having the same occupation) as moderator in my dissertation to gather insights about a particular work context. Studies on this specific group of dual-earner couples proved that work-linked couples show high work–family role integration (Halbesleben et al., 2010) and positive work-to-family spillover (Moen & Sweet, 2002), which can provide unique resources.

### 1.4. Research Goals and Dissertation Outline

The aim of this dissertation is to understand how work-related experiences during leisure time, carried out either on one's own or with the partner, are related to both the own and the partner's recovery and well-being. Further, the role of two moderating variables (living with children and a couple's work-linkage) will be examined (see Figure 1 for an integrated overview).

**Figure 1**

*Integrated Overview of Concepts and Variables of this Dissertation*




*Note.* 1 = Study 1. 2 = Study 2. 3 = Study 3. The arrows in different colors represent hypothesized associations between variables in the three different studies (blue = Study 1, orange = Study 2, lilac = Study 3). Bold lines represent main effects and thin lines represent moderator effects.

As research on the impact of specific work-related mechanisms and activities on dual-earner couples' well-being and recovery is lacking, I capture work-related experiences during leisure time in several ways by studying dual-earner couples' work-related support (study 1), their work-related thoughts (study 2) and their work-related conversations (study 3). From a content perspective, I combine a rather general type of partner interaction (i.e., support; study 1) with a more detailed view on the content of dual-earner couples' work-related conversations (i.e., sharing of work events; study 3). Further, study 2 clarifies more broadly

whether work-related experiences of one's partner which do not necessarily imply partner interaction (i.e., work reflection) affect the other partner's well-being. Then, study 3 helps to explain the crossover effect (i.e., sharing work events as potential mechanism). Furthermore, I include work-related experiences of both positive and negative valence (studies 2 and 3) to better understand the diverging implications on well-being. In order to cover several facets and indicators of well-being, I assess recovery experiences (study 1) and different concepts of well-being (studies 2 and 3), including both a motivational (work engagement; study 2) and an evaluative component (work-related self-esteem; study 3). In addition, I include work-linkage (study 1 and 2) and living with children (study 2) as moderators to extend knowledge about boundary conditions for dual-earner couples' well-being.

The dyadic design of all three studies allows to reveal effects on both partners' recovery and well-being and to consider both partners' roles in work-related interactions (study 1 and study 3). From a methodological standpoint, the cross-sectional design of study 1 serves as a starting point to better understand the implications of two rather under-studied variables – a specific type of support (i.e., work-related spousal support) and the role of work-linkage in dual-earner couples. Study 2 complements the findings by providing insights into the consequences of dual-earner couples' work-related thoughts (i.e., work reflection) on well-being and the boundary conditions of two moderating variables (with reference to the work domain, i.e., work-linkage and to the home domain, i.e., presence of children). Study 3, as a diary study, is adding to that by considering within-person and between-person differences regarding the associations between work-related experiences and dual-earner couples' well-being.

In the following, the outline and structure of my dissertation will be described in more detail. Study 1 (chapter 2) examines if and when integrating work and home by receiving support from one's partner fosters recovery experiences. Based on boundary theory (Ashforth

et al., 2000) and conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), my co-author and I suggest that receiving work-related support from the partner is positively associated with psychological detachment, relaxation and mastery experiences. Moreover, we propose that these positive associations are stronger for couples with work-linkages (i.e., both partners working in the same organization and/or the same occupation). In addition, we consider the potential consequences of providing work-related support for the supporting partner. In our dyadic study, 130 dual-earner couples completed online questionnaires. We use the actor-partner interdependence model and multiple group analyses to test our hypotheses and research questions.

In Study 2 (chapter 3) my co-author and I investigate in what way reflecting about work is associated with one's own and the partner's well-being and motivation. Referring to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), we suggest that employees' positive work reflection is positively associated with both employees' and partners' work engagement and negatively associated with both employees' and partners' emotional exhaustion. In contrast, we suppose that negative work reflection is negatively associated with both employees' and partners' work engagement and positively associated with both employees' and partners' emotional exhaustion. Additionally, we study the presence of children and couples' work-linkage as moderators on the supposed associations. We use dyadic data of 130 dual-earner couples from the data collection of Study 1 and estimate multilevel analyses within the framework of the actor–partner interdependence model.

In Study 3 (chapter 4) we (my co-author and I) examine the relationships between work-related conversations with the partner and both partners' affect and work-related self-esteem. Drawing on social sharing theory (Rimé, 2009), we suggest that employees' daily sharing of positive work events is positively related to both employees' and partners' daily

positive affect and daily self-esteem at bedtime. For employees' daily sharing of negative work events, we propose that it is positively related to both employees' and partners' daily negative affect at bedtime and negatively related to both employees' and partners' daily self-esteem at bedtime. For this study, 73 heterosexual dual-earner couples (146 individuals) filled in online questionnaires after work and at bedtime over the course of a work week. We use dyadic multilevel analyses to test our hypotheses.

Chapter 5 will conclude the dissertation with summarizing, discussing and integrating the results of the three studies. Suggestions for future research and practical implications will be provided and a general conclusion will be drawn.

## 1.5. Contributions

Taken together, this dissertation makes important contributions to the current state of research. First and most importantly, for my research I combine two lines of literature – literature on crossover processes, and recovery literature – by choosing couples as subject of interest and by examining their work-related experiences and well-being. With the dyadic design of all three studies, important insights into the recovery and well-being processes of dual-earner couples are provided. In line with the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), the dissertation extends knowledge about dyadic crossover processes, including crossover of resources as a rather new focus (Hobfoll et al., 2018) in the area of research. By suggesting work-related experiences during leisure time as helpful strategies to recover from work demands, to build resources and to increase well-being, I challenge the perspective that completely separating the work and home domains (e.g. by mentally detaching; Kinnunen et al., 2016; Wepfer et al., 2018) is necessary to facilitate employees' well-being. Thereby, this dissertation complements previous research on predictors of recovery and well-being in dual-earner couples (e.g. Hahn et al., 2012; Haun et al., 2017;

Park & Haun, 2017) and extends knowledge regarding contextual predictors of recovery experiences in the home domain (Steed et al., 2021). Assessing specific work-related cognitions or conversations can help to clarify the consequences of staying connected with work during leisure time. As I capture both positive and negative work reflection and sharing of both positive and negative work events with the partner, a more comprehensive picture is provided and the effects of positive and negative work-related experiences on employees' well-being can be disentangled. My studies also shed light on the interaction processes and specific behaviors that might be needed for crossover in dual-earner couples to happen (e.g. sharing of work events), thereby increasing insights into crossover mechanisms (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Second, the couple data allows to study consequences of work-related experiences for both partners at the same time and to consider the different roles partners may have. For instance, even though providing support is correlated with receiving support (Bowling et al., 2005), they might provoke different reactions (Haun et al., 2017). Partners in an intimate relationship empathize, in particular, with each other (Pinkus et al., 2008) so that investigating outcomes of work-related experiences during leisure time for both partners contributes to a broader understanding of dyadic recovery processes beyond the individual level (Sonnentag et al., 2017).

Third, this dissertation adds to previous research on work-related experiences during leisure time which was mainly focused on purely affective or well-being related outcomes such as affect, life satisfaction or relationship well-being (Gable et al., 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Tremmel et al., 2018) by examining further outcomes such as work-related self-esteem (evaluative component) and work engagement (motivational component).

Fourth, my dissertation extends the limited knowledge about interindividual differences in recovery processes (Sonnentag et al., 2017). In order to cover both the home

and work domain, I investigate the moderating effects of living with children and couples' work-linkages (i.e., both partners working in the same company and/or having the same profession). As many employees are living with children (Federal Statistical Office, 2018), examining children's impact on dual-earner couples' recovery processes helps to refine recovery theory. In addition, being connected via the work domain (i.e., being work-linked) implies a greater integration of work and home (Halbesleben et al., 2010) so that work-related experiences during leisure time are more likely to be beneficial for this special group of dual-earner couples. Therefore, this dissertation also provides insights about the understudied population of work-linked couples (Fritz et al., 2019) and investigates to what extent work-linked and non-work-linked couples differ from each other in their recovery prerequisites and needs. Likewise, I contribute to research on boundary management strategies as my studies demonstrate for whom work–home integration may be particularly helpful. As a result, more targeted recommendations and interventions can be deducted.

# CHAPTER 2

# 2. Study 1: Work-Related Spousal Support and Recovery Experiences Among Dual-Earner Couples - Work-Linkage as Moderator[1]

## 2.1. Abstract

While previous research has indicated that segmenting work and home is beneficial to employees' recovery, this study, which includes 130 dual-earner couples, investigates if and when integrating work and home by receiving work-related support from one's partner fosters employees' recovery experiences (i.e., psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery). Moreover, we examine couples' work-linkage (i.e., both partners working in the same organization and/or the same occupation) as moderator. Additionally, we consider the consequences of offering work-related support for the supporting partner's recovery experiences. We used the actor-partner interdependence model to account for the dependent structure of dyadic data. Results of multiple group analyses comparing work-linked with non-work-linked couples showed that receiving work-related support from a partner was associated with increased relaxation and mastery experiences, at least among work-linked couples. Work-related support was not associated with employees' detachment. Providing work-related support was positively related to employees' mastery experiences in non-work-linked couples only, whereas it was unrelated to psychological detachment and relaxation both in couples with and without work-linkage. Drawing on conservation of resources theory and on boundary theory, the findings of this study shed light on work-related spousal support

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as an enabler of recovery experiences in work-linked couples, extending the limited view that segmenting work and home is the only beneficial approach for recovery during leisure time.

## 2.2. Introduction

Recovery from work during off-job time is crucial for keeping employees healthy and productive (Sonnentag et al., 2017). For example, employees' recovery experiences (e.g., psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery) are associated with increased psychological and psychosomatic well-being (Bennett et al., 2018; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Steed et al., 2021). However, when employees are exposed to high levels of job stress, they may find it particularly difficult to unwind and replenish their resources during their off-job time, as their job stressors may spill over into their private lives and hinder their recovery processes (Sonnentag, 2018; Steed et al., 2021). Hence, building on the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) and the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), scholars have argued that segmenting work and non-work domains should enable better recovery, as impermeable boundaries ensure that job demands do not enter the home domain and hinder employees' recovery processes (Kinnunen et al., 2016; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Empirical research has provided initial support for this view (Derks, van Mierlo, & Schmitz, 2014; Park et al., 2011; Sonnentag, Kuttler, & Fritz, 2010; Wepfer et al., 2018). For instance, Kinnunen et al. (2016) found that employees who kept their work and private lives separate reported higher detachment, relaxation, and control during leisure time.

However, this view is limited, as it neglects to consider that segmenting work and private life may result in blocking resources that may aid employees' recovery processes from entering the home domain. For example, when employees separate their work and home lives, they do not share and discuss work-related experiences (e.g., work problems and successes) with their partners. In other words, refraining from discussing work-related

problems with one's partner might lead to missing out on one important source of support. Within the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), partner support is viewed as an important resource that helps in dealing with job stress and facilitates the replenishment of further resources. Initial research has shown that work-related support from a spouse or partner as a specific form of social support is associated with better work–family balance and subsequent family and job satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 2016). However, it is unclear whether work-related spousal support (WRSS) as a form of *integration* of work and home also contributes to employees' recovery processes, given that previous research has predominantly focused on *segmentation* as facilitator of recovery (Kinnunen et al., 2016; Park et al., 2011).

In this study, we draw on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) to address this gap in the literature. Specifically, we examine whether receiving and providing WRSS are associated with increased recovery experiences (i.e., psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery) in a sample of dual-earner couples. The number of dual-earner couples has been steadily increasing (OECD, 2011, 2017), and it is important to understand how these couples successfully recover from job stress, given that both partners face the challenge of juggling work and family demands (Brummelhuis et al., 2010). The dyadic design of our study not only allows us to investigate the potential benefits of *receiving* WRSS, but also the potential consequences of *providing* WRSS. Moreover, we investigate whether the relationships between WRSS and recovery experiences are stronger among couples who share a workplace and/or a job (i.e., work-linked couples). As work-linked couples have more integrated work and home lives (Halbesleben et al., 2010), resource transfer between work and home and between partners should be facilitated (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). Hence, work-linked partners may particularly benefit from their spouses' work-related support.

Our study makes several contributions to the literature. First, we add to boundary management literature (Kreiner et al., 2009) as we extend previous research that predominantly focused on work–home *segmentation* as facilitator of recovery (Hahn & Dormann, 2013; Kinnunen et al., 2016; Park et al., 2011; Wepfer et al., 2018). While this line of research rests on the underlying assumption that segmentation prevents stressors from entering the home domain, we advance the perspective that work–home *integration* may provide resources that promote the replenishment of further resources—that is, employees' recovery processes. Second, we add to recovery literature by extending the limited knowledge regarding contextual predictors of recovery experiences in the home domain (Steed et al., 2021). While previous research has shown that partners may help employees to recover by supporting engagement in recovery activities (Park & Fritz, 2015) and *distracting* them from their work-related problems through absorption in joint activities (Hahn et al., 2012), we examine whether *addressing* work-related problems also presents an effective strategy for helping employees to recover. Thereby, we complement previous research on predictors of recovery in dual-earner couples (Hahn et al., 2012; Haun et al., 2017; Park & Haun, 2017) and help to identify potential points of intervention to promote dual-earner couples' recovery. Third, this study extends the knowledge about the understudied population of work-linked couples (Fritz et al., 2019). As this special type of couple is characterized by high work-family integration, work-linked couples have a deeper understanding of each other's work situation and are therefore able to provide unique resources, tailored to the requirements of their partner (Halbesleben et al., 2010; Halbesleben et al., 2012). By examining couples' work-linkage as moderator, we clarify how work-linked and non-work-linked couples differ from each other in their recovery prerequisites and needs. Thereby, we answer calls to examine interindividual differences in employees' recovery processes (Sonnentag et al., 2017) and help to refine recovery theory. Increased knowledge about

boundary conditions will help in the development of more targeted practical recommendations for employees in both work-linked and non-work-linked relationships. Finally, the dyadic design of our study allows us to consider consequences of receiving and providing WRSS at the same time, and thereby contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of WRSS.

## 2.3. Theoretical Background

### Dual-Earner Couples' Recovery Experiences

Recovery is conceptualized as a process opposite to the stress process, as cognitive, emotional, and physical systems that were activated during work are halted and return to their baseline levels (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Two complementary theories—the effort-recovery model and COR theory—have been used as predominant frameworks to explain employee recovery. According to the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), recovery can occur when no further demands are put on the individual. According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), recovery can occur when resources are replenished. The basic tenet of COR theory is that people "strive to obtain, retain, foster, and protect those things they centrally value," i.e., resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018; p. 104). Generally speaking, resources can be anything that is valued in its own right or that drives goal achievement (Halbesleben et al., 2014). COR theory posits that through resource investment, people protect themselves against resource loss and gain additional resources. Therefore, people are motivated to create and to protect resources (Hobfoll, 2002). More specifically, having resources available enables the acquisition of new resources, so that resource caravans develop (Hobfoll, 2011). In addition, individuals who have greater resources are less likely to lose resources and more capable of gaining resources.

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) proposed specific off-job experiences that enable employees to get a break from job demands and replenish drained resources. These recovery experiences include psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control during leisure time. In line with previous research (Hahn et al., 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2008), we focused on the first three recovery experiences mentioned above. Psychological detachment refers to "the individual's sense of being away from the work situation" (Etzion et al., 1998; p. 579). It does not relate primarily to an individual's physical absence, but to the psychological component of distance such as mental disengagement from work-related issues. Therefore, detachment is a cognitive-emotional state that occurs during specific experiences in leisure time (Fritz et al., 2010). Relaxation refers to mental experiences that are associated with low activation (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), such as lower blood pressure (Friedman et al., 1996), decreased heart rate or muscle tension (J. C. Smith, 2005), feelings of serenity, and reduced perception of external stimuli (Stetter, 1998). Mastery experiences comprise leisure activities that are challenging but not overtaxing. Typical examples include learning something new in non-work domains or participating in sports (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Mastery experiences contribute to recovery because new internal resources like abilities, skills, or self-efficacy can be built up (Hobfoll, 1998). Where detachment and relaxation are effective recovery strategies because they do not demand the functional systems that were taxed during work, mastery experiences help with recovery by building up new resources (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

According to Newman et al. (2014), recovery experiences represent psychological mechanisms that help employees cope with stressful situations and thus enable subjective well-being. Furthermore, previous research has shown that recovery experiences are important predictors of employees' health and well-being (Bennett et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2014; Park & Fritz, 2015; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Sonnentag & Natter, 2004; Steed et

al., 2021). As recovery experiences, over and above work characteristics, substantially contribute to employees' well-being (Bennett et al., 2018), it is crucial to learn more about their antecedents and how they can be enhanced.

**Work–Home Boundaries and Recovery**

Given that employees' recovery processes during leisure time can be impaired by job stressors (Sonnentag, 2018; Steed et al., 2021), scholars have proposed segmentation of work and home lives as one approach to prevent job stressors from harming employees' recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Boundary theory explains how people create, maintain, or change boundaries between life domains like work and home, assuming that people have different roles in life domains (Ashforth et al., 2000). Nippert-Eng (1996) proposes that the roles of two different life domains can be highly segmented or highly integrated, depending on the person's individual preference. Employees vary in the extent to which they desire to integrate or to segment work and private life (Rothbard et al., 2005). In this context, segmentation is defined as "the degree to which aspects of each domain (such as thoughts, concerns, physical markers) are kept separate from one another – cognitively, physically, or behaviorally" (Kreiner, 2006; p. 485). This means that for employees who prefer to separate their work and home roles, it is more difficult to cross temporal, physical, and social boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000) at the end of the working day. In contrast, highly integrated roles overlap, are characterized by similarity, and "are not tied to specific places and times" (Ashforth et al., 2000; p. 479). Both high segmentation and high integration of work and home roles can be beneficial or detrimental for employees (Wepfer et al., 2018). On the one hand, high integration makes role transitions easier. For instance, positive mood because of success at work can spill over to the home domain (Halbesleben et al., 2010), which may lead to positive outcomes like work–family enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). On the other

hand, with high integration it is possible for role demands to overlap and role blurring to occur (Ashforth et al., 2000) .

Previous research investigating the role of work–home boundaries on employee recovery predominantly employed the perspective that high segmentation prevents the spillover of negative work experiences into private life and can help people to recover from work (Park et al., 2011; Sonnentag, Kuttler, & Fritz, 2010). This perspective is based on the assumptions of the effort-recovery model, which holds that recovery can occur when employees are no longer exposed to job demands (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). However, this perspective does not embrace the possibility that resources that stem from the work domain or the integration of the work–home domain may help employees to recover as well—resources may promote the acquisition and replenishment of further resources, as put forward by COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001). In this study, we will address this gap in the literature by examining providing and receiving of WRSS as a work–home integration strategy and its effects on the recovery experiences of employees and their partners.

**WRSS as Work–Home Integration Strategy**

According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), social support is an important resource that can help to preserve existing resources and to gain new resources, which in turn prevents stress reactions. WRSS constitutes a specific form of social support, defined as "the emotional and instrumental support provided by one spouse to the other regarding work related activities" (Ferguson et al., 2016; p.38)[2]. Generally, providing and receiving WRSS refers to sharing and discussing work-related matters with one's partner, which implies integrating work into the home domain. More specifically, WRSS comprises four subdimensions, each of which describes a specific work-related feature as beneficial for supporting and understanding one's

[2] Following Ferguson et al. (2016), we use the term and definition of work-related spousal support. However, we included both married and unmarried couples who were in a stable relationship.

partner (Janning, 2006). First, *shared network* refers to knowing the partner's colleagues, which provides the partner with a better understanding when the employee talks about work issues and mentions the people involved. Second, *sensitive companion* refers to knowing the partner's work environment. This may be the case, for example, when a physician's partner understands that during particular time periods, the physician is on call or may have to return to work in case of an emergency. Third, *understanding of subject matter* denotes understanding the content of the partner's job. When partners have job-related field knowledge, they can be more supportive when talking about work issues. Finally, *logistics/time together* refers to the possibility of seeing one's spouse during working hours, for example, during a coffee break or in a common area. Together, these subdimensions represent the encompassing level of support from the partner to the employee, made up of both instrumental and emotional forms of support (Ferguson et al., 2016).

It is important to note that knowing and understanding the content of a partner's job and organizational and social work environment do not require employees to work in the same organization or to have the same job, as work-linked couples do. Sharing work experiences with one's partner and discussing work-related issues with that partner gives them insight into critical aspects of one's job and enables employees to understand their partners' work environment and job without being part of it. Admittedly, it may be easier for work-linked couples to provide WRSS; however, previous research has revealed that the differences in WRSS between work-linked and non-work-linked couples were not substantial (Ferguson et al., 2016), which indicates that all partners—with and without a work-link—can provide WRSS. However, as the subdimension logistics/time together is probably predominantly available to work-linked couples, we decided to focus on the first three subdimensions (shared network, sensitive companion, and understanding of subject matter), in order to be able to separate the effects of WRSS and a couple's work-linkage.

**Work-Related Support and Recovery Experiences**

Drawing from COR theory, we propose that WRSS facilitates employees' recovery because it provides an important resource that helps individuals to preserve and produce other valued resources (Hobfoll, 2002). Specifically, we suggest that receiving WRSS should promote psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences. WRSS may support employees' recovery experiences through different pathways, as it may require different preconditions to occur.

First, receiving WRSS should help employees to distance themselves from work and unwind from job stress. Empirical research suggests that employees have difficulties in recovering when they face problems at work, such as conflicts or unfinished tasks (Volmer et al., 2012; Weigelt & Syrek, 2017). Unfinished tasks or work problems keep the mind preoccupied with work (Martin & Tesser, 1996). Thus, working on a solution to finish the tasks cognitively should help employees attain peace of mind (Weigelt & Syrek, 2017). Therefore, we propose that partners' work-related support should help employees to detach from work. By providing the employee with emotional and instrumental support, their partner can help to resolve work problems that hinder effective recovery. Partners who know the employees' colleagues and understand their work environments and job contents can be supportive by helping to resolve work problems together. At first glance, addressing work issues in order to mentally disengage from work sounds contradictory. Discussing work-related issues with a partner may indeed lower psychological detachment in the short term; however, addressing problems may help to solve these problems and facilitate detachment in the long run, thus enabling higher overall levels of detachment. Moreover, the feeling that one is able to reach out for support if needed (Bolger et al., 2000; Wethington & Kessler, 1986) can be a relief in itself and might facilitate detachment from work. COR supports this

view by positing that the effects of resources are rather long-term across time and different circumstances (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Second, when employees are still occupied with work issues at the end of the working day, they have more trouble relaxing (Cropley & Millward Purvis, 2009). Having a supportive partner who understands the employee's work situation can help the employee to calm down and to reduce physiological activation. Empirical research provides first support for these hypotheses. Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) found emotional social support to be associated with increased psychological detachment and relaxation. In a recent study, Haun et al. (2017) found partners' general social support to be associated with increased detachment.

Third, we propose that receiving WRSS is associated with increased mastery experiences. As mastery experiences refer to challenging activities such as sports or learning a new hobby, they require the investment of resources. Receiving WRSS should help employees to accumulate the resources necessary for investment in mastery experiences. COR theory emphasizes the process of resource accumulation (Hobfoll, 2011). The more resources individuals already possess, the more capable they are of acquiring additional resources, which results in the accumulation of resources, or so-called resource caravans (Hobfoll, 2011). Having a partner who tries to understand work-related issues and assists in solving work problems should lead to resource gains. For example, resolving work-related issues with the help of a partner makes the employee feel competent and self-confident as s/he finds ways to cope with difficult situations. Hence, employees may feel more motivated to engage in challenging activities. Furthermore, successful work-related support can be energy-providing, which results in employees who are inspired to use their acquired resources during leisure time. Hence, they are more likely to engage in challenging leisure activities that facilitate mastery experiences. Previous research supports the idea that resolving problems promotes mastery experiences as Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) found active

coping as a problem-focused strategy is positively associated with mastery experiences. Further, research by Park and Fritz (2015) suggests that having a supportive spouse facilitates employees' mastery experiences. Taken together, we propose the following:

*H1: WRSS is positively associated with a) psychological detachment, b) relaxation, and c) mastery experiences.*

**The Moderating Role of Couples' Work-Linkage**

With the growing number of two-income households, it is becoming more likely for couples to work at the same company or have the same profession. For example, Hyatt (2015), who investigated microdata from the US Census 2000, indicated that 11 to 13% of dual-earner couples in the US work for the same employer. In Germany, 29% of dual-earner academic couples are employed in the same occupational sector (Rusconi & Solga, 2007). According to Halbesleben et al. (2010), "work-linked couples can be linked by their work in one of three ways: sharing only an occupation (e.g., both are nurses but at different hospitals), sharing only a workplace (e.g., both work at the same hospital, but one as a nurse and one as a sonographer), or sharing both an occupation and a workplace (e.g., both are nurses at the same hospital)" (p. 372).

The special situation of work-linked couples can be described by boundary theory (Janning, 2006). As already mentioned, work and home roles vary from highly segmented to highly integrated depending on the individual (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Work-linked couples are likely to have highly integrated work and home roles because their work and home roles are more similar: they are accompanied by the same person in both roles (either physically, when partners have the same workplace, or mentally, when they have the same occupation), creating closeness between the partners (Janning, 2006). Empirical evidence has confirmed that work-linked couples are characterized by higher work–family role integration

(Halbesleben et al., 2010) and positive work-to-family spillover (Moen & Sweet, 2002), which can provide unique resources.

We propose that couples' work-links strengthen the relationship between WRSS and recovery experiences, as work-linked partners should be able to provide more efficient WRSS. According to COR theory, the most effective resources are those that are highly relevant to one's specific situation and needs (Hobfoll, 2001). As work-linked couples know each other's work and family/home situations and have a deeper understanding of each other's work and/or organizational situations (Halbesleben et al., 2012), they are able to tailor their support provision to the unique requirements of their partner. Furthermore, in line with boundary theory, work-linked couples' work and home roles are blurred (Janning, 2006), which can mean that resource movement across the two roles and domains requires less effort. More specifically, the support-providing partner can reinvest his/her work resources more easily and the support-receiving partner is more likely to benefit from the support (Ferguson et al., 2016). Spouses working in the same company or having the same occupation have a better understanding of their partners' working conditions (Janning, 2006). Thus, work-linked partners may be more sensitive to their partners' needs and be more willing to support their partner during stressful times than non-work-linked partners. For instance, work-linked partners should be more likely to assist in solving their partner's work issues, thereby facilitating recovery. When partners work together, they do not have to explain their current work situation to their spouse because s/he is already aware of it. Likewise, when partners have the same occupation, they can share work-related perspectives and opinions and can rely on their own experiences when supporting their spouse. As a result, due to their work-related similarity, work-linked couples could give advice that is more helpful so that work problems are discussed in a more satisfactory and faster way, which should enable employees to recover from work-related stress. Empirical research supports the

idea that work-related support is more efficient when provided by a work-linked partner. For example, Halbesleben et al. (2010) showed that for couples with work-linkage, spousal instrumental support is related to decreased emotional exhaustion, while for couples without work-linkage this was not the case. Ferguson et al. (2016) found that WRSS was associated with increased family and job satisfaction in work-linked couples only.

*H2: A couple's work-link moderates the associations between WRSS and a) detachment, b) relaxation, and c) mastery experiences, such that the positive associations are stronger for work-linked couples compared with non-work-linked couples.*

**Potential Consequences of WRSS for the Supporting Partner**

While we argue that *receiving* WRSS should be beneficial for employees' recovery experiences, it is unclear if *providing* WRSS is associated with consequences for the support provider's own recovery experiences and whether these consequences are positive or negative. On the one hand, providing WRSS to the partner may distract a person from their own work-related thoughts and thus enable psychological detachment. Similarly, providing support may mean spending time with one's partner and becoming absorbed in joint activities. Absorption in joint activities with one's partner facilitates relaxation (Hahn et al., 2012). Furthermore, providing support to their partners may make employees feel competent and needed (Williamson & Clark, 1989), which might constitute a mastery experience in itself and may motivate employees to engage in further mastery activities.

On the other hand, providing WRSS involves talking about the partners' work in order to give advice. Talking about work may stimulate thoughts about one's own work, and thus, hinder psychological detachment (cf. Hahn & Dormann, 2013). Likewise, providing support may require refraining from relaxing activities and taking over some of the partner's

obligations. In addition, providing WRSS may deplete resources that are necessary for engagement in mastery activities. Hence, providing support may decrease mastery experiences. Therefore, since there are competing arguments for positive and negative associations between providing WRSS and recovery experiences, we do not present specific hypotheses, but rather, formulate open research questions regarding the relationship between providing WRSS and recovery experiences.

*Research question 1: Is providing WRSS associated with employees' recovery experiences?*

*Research question 2: Are the relationships between providing WRSS and employees' recovery experiences stronger among work-linked couples?*

## 2.4. Method

### Sample and Procedure

We collected data from German dual-earner couples living in a heterosexual relationship in which both partners worked at least 10 hours per week. We recruited participants via online advertisements in social media community groups (i.e., groups for dual-earner-couples, (trainee) teachers, research associates, and working mothers) and via information leaflets about our study distributed in local facilities in several German cities (i.e., in cafés, shops, dance schools, and childcare facilities). According to local regulations, no formal research ethics scrutiny was undertaken. All participants received detailed information about the study before they registered for participation. Participation was voluntary. When registering for participation, all participants provided their informed consent to take part in the study. Data provided by the participants was handled in a way to ensure anonymity. Once the data was collected, participants received a report on the outcomes of the study, as well as

recommendations for managing work stress as a couple. In addition, all participants were eligible to take part in a lottery drawing of online gift cards.

A total of 465 participants filled in a web-based survey individually (i.e., independent of their partners) and were asked to invite their partners to fill in the same web-based survey. In addition, we sent participants' partners an invitation to participate in the study. We matched individual surveys by a code created by each couple consisting of both partners' birth dates. We could not match the data for 205 of the individuals because their partners did not participate in the study, which resulted in a final sample of 130 heterosexual dual-earner couples ($N$ = 260 individuals). We tested whether the individuals in the final sample of couples differed from those individuals whose partners did not participate. We did not find any significant differences across these groups regarding the study variables and couple characteristics (years in relationship, children, age).

The majority of the couples (83.8 %) lived together,[3] and 25.4 % of the couples had at least one child living in their household. The average relationship length was 8.01 years ($SD$ = 7.51). On average, the male partners were 34.64 years old ($SD$ = 8.55) and worked 40.43 ($SD$ = 10.40) hours per week. The female partners were 31.98 years old ($SD$ = 8.13) and worked 36.46 ($SD$ = 12.80) hours per week. Our participants were quite well-educated, with 69.9 % holding an academic degree.

**Measures**

In our web-based survey, all participants provided demographic and work-related information (age, gender, education, children living in the household, duration of relationship, working hours).

[3] As some couples did not live together, we checked whether couples' cohabitating status affected our results. Therefore, we conducted additional analyses that included only couples who were living together. Excluding non-cohabiting couples did not change the pattern of our results.

**Work-Related Spousal Support.** We used nine items from three subdimensions of the recently developed work-related spousal support scale (Ferguson et al., 2016).[4] Participants indicated on a five-point Likert scale the extent to which they agreed with the following examples: "It is easy to discuss work issues with my spouse because s/he understands the people involved" (shared network), "My spouse is sensitive to the unique environment I work in and can help me manage my many demands" (sensitive companion), and "When I run into a problem at work my spouse can help me solve it because s/he knows the subject matter" (understanding of subject matter; 1 = *I do not agree at all* to 5 = *I fully agree*). Cronbach's alpha was .93 for male and .94 for female participants. Consistent with Ferguson et al. (2016), we used an overall WRSS score in our analyses.

**Recovery Experiences.** To assess recovery experiences, we used nine items of Sonnentag and Fritz's (2007) Recovery Experience Questionnaire. Participants indicated, on a five-point Likert scale, the extent to which they agreed with the following examples: "During leisure time, I forget about work" (detachment), "During leisure time, I use the time to relax" (relaxation), and "During leisure time, I do things that challenge me" (mastery experiences; 1 = *I do not agree at all* to 5 = *I fully agree*). Cronbach's alpha of the subscale detachment was .83 among men and .85 among women. Cronbach's alpha of the subscale relaxation was .80 among men and .81 among women. Cronbach's alpha of the subscale mastery experiences was .87 among men and .77 among women.

**Work-Linkage.** Similar to Halbesleben et al. (2010), we asked participants to answer the following two statements: "Your partner works in the same occupation as you," and "Your partner works in the same company as you" (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). Following previous research (Ferguson et al., 2016; Halbesleben et al., 2012), we created a variable by dummy-coding those who answered "yes" to one or both of the questions as 1 and those who replied

[4] The original scale includes three more items stemming from the subdimension logistics/time together. As explained earlier, we did not include this subdimension as it might be predominantly available for work-linked couples only.

no as 0. In our sample, 37.7 % of the couples ($n$ = 49) were work-linked. More specifically, 10 % ($n$ = 13) worked only in the same occupation, 11.5 % ($n$ = 15) worked only at the same company and 16.2 % ($n$ = 21) worked both in the same occupation and at the same company.

### Data Analysis

Responses from individuals in a couple are interdependent, due to shared experiences (Kenny et al., 2006). To account for this nonindependence and mutual influence between partners, we used the actor-partner interdependence-model (Kenny et al., 2006). In the APIM, the dyad is the unit of analysis, and both the actor effects (an employee's dependent variable is regressed on their own independent variable), as well as the partner effects (an employee's dependent variable is regressed on their partner's independent variable) are estimated simultaneously. In the APIM, there are two types of correlations: 1) the exogenous predictor variables, and 2) the error terms of the outcome variables.

We tested our hypotheses in Mplus Version 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). Our model consisted of two exogenous predictor variables (Partner A's and Partner B's WRSS, respectively) and six endogenous outcome variables (Partner A's and Partner B's recovery experiences, respectively). We used full information maximum likelihood estimation.

## 2.5. Results

In Table 1, the mean scores, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the study variables are shown. Women's and men's WRSS were highly positively related while women's recovery experiences were unrelated to men's recovery experiences.

**Preliminary Analyses**

Although men and women differ on a conceptual level, Kenny et al. (2006) recommended to test for empirical distinguishability, that is, whether the conceptual distinguishability actually matters in terms of differences in means, variances, and covariances in the study variables (WRSS and recovery experiences) for the dyad members (Kenny et al., 2006). Constraining parameters to be equal simplifies the model, and thus complies with the parsimony principle in structural equation modeling (Kline, 2016). Therefore, we performed an omnibus test of distinguishability: we compared the fit of a model in which means, variances, and covariances of the study variables were constrained to be equal across both partners in dyads against another model in which they were free to vary (Ackerman et al., 2011). As men and women did not differ ($\chi^2(20) = 25.00$, $p = .20$), we treated men and women as indistinguishable, that is, we constrained means, variances, and covariances, as well as actor and partner effects, to be equal across men and women.

**Table 1**

*Correlations Between Study Variables (N = 130 dyads, 260 individuals)*

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Work-Linkage[a] | 0.38 | 0.49 | | | | | | | | |
| Women | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. WRSS | 3.35 | 1.08 | .63*** | | | | | | | |
| 3. Relaxation | 3.63 | 0.67 | .02 | .13 | | | | | | |
| 4. Detachment | 3.20 | 0.85 | -.17 | -.17 | .22* | | | | | |
| 5. Mastery | 3.13 | 0.68 | .03 | .10 | .35*** | .14 | | | | |
| Men | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. WRSS | 3.25 | 1.05 | .66*** | .55*** | .10 | -.13 | .03 | | | |
| 7. Relaxation | 3.44 | 0.73 | .02 | -.02 | .09 | -.06 | -.13 | .11 | | |
| 8. Detachment | 3.26 | 0.89 | -.11 | -.11 | -.03 | .09 | -.08 | -.05 | .37** | |
| 9. Mastery | 3.24 | 0.77 | .07 | .17 | .05 | -.03 | .02 | .11 | .20* | .14 |

*Note.* WRSS = work-related spousal support.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

[a] 0 = non-work-linked, 1 = work-linked.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Our gender-equated model fit the data well ($\chi^2(20) = 25.00$, $p = .20$, $CFI = 0.90$, $RMSEA = 0.04$). The effect estimates are presented in Table 2. Hypotheses 1 (a through c) stated that WRSS is positively associated with detachment, relaxation, and mastery, respectively. The data did not support Hypothesis 1a, as there was no significant association between WRSS and detachment. We found a significant main effect of WRSS on relaxation, which supported Hypothesis 1b. The results also showed that WRSS was not significantly related to mastery experiences, failing to support Hypothesis 1c.

**Table 2**

*Main Effect Estimates in our APIM*

| Effect type | Estimate | *SE* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Work-related spousal support → Detachment | | | |
| Actor effect [Hypothesis 1a] | -0.050 | 0.060 | .405 |
| Partner Effect [Research question 1] | -0.059 | 0.058 | .308 |
| Work-related spousal support → Relaxation | | | |
| Actor effect [Hypothesis 1b] | 0.115 | 0.046 | .013 |
| Partner effect [Research question 1] | -0.034 | 0.047 | .466 |
| Work-related spousal support → Mastery experiences | | | |
| Actor effect [Hypothesis 1c] | 0.044 | 0.063 | .487 |
| Partner effect [Research question 1] | 0.051 | 0.061 | .400 |

*Note*. Unstandardized coefficients are displayed. *SE* = standard error. Results of women and men are not shown separately because with indistinguishable dyads, path coeffiencients are equal among both dyad members.

Hypotheses 2a through 2c stated that the associations between WRSS and recovery experiences are moderated by a couple's work-link. Table 3 displays the relationships between WRSS and recovery experiences for couples with and without a work-link. Through multiple group analyses, we compared work-linked couples with non-work-linked couples. In order to test for significant differences between the two groups, we compared two models: first, a model in which the regression coefficient between the two relevant variables is constrained to be equal across work-linked and non-work-linked couples; and second, a model in which the regression coefficient between the two relevant variables is free to vary across the two groups. Regarding the association between WRSS and detachment, the equality constraints did not change model fit significantly ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.001$, $p = .975$), showing that the association between WRSS and detachment for work-linked couples did not differ significantly from the association of non-work-linked couples. Thus, our data did not support Hypothesis 2a. Setting equality constraints regarding the association between WRSS and relaxation (Hypothesis 2b) decreased model fit significantly ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.779$, $p = .029$). Thus, the two groups differed significantly, showing that among work-linked couples, WRSS was positively associated with relaxation ($B = 0.322$, $p = .006$), whereas among non-work-linked couples there was no significant association ($B = 0.050$, $p = .323$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was supported. Regarding the association between WRSS and mastery experiences, the equality constraints decreased model fit significantly ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.355$, $p = .037$), showing a significant moderation effect. Among work-linked couples, there was a positive association between WRSS and mastery experiences ($B = 0.259$, $p = .049$), whereas this association was not significant among non-work-linked couples ($B = -0.019$, $p = .784$). Thus, Hypothesis 2c was supported.

To answer our open research questions, we inspected the partner effects of WRSS on recovery experiences, since the partner effects of receiving WRSS indicate the effects of providing WRSS. For research question 1, the associations between providing WRSS and

employees' detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences, respectively, were non-significant (see Table 2). To test research question 2, the potential moderator effect of work-linkage, we compared couples with and without work-linkage (see Table 3). We found no significant associations between providing WRSS and employees' detachment and relaxation, respectively, among work-linked and non-work-linked couples. There was a positive association between providing WRSS and employees' mastery experiences for non-work-linked couples only. As outlined above, we set equality constraints regarding the association between providing WRSS and employees' mastery experiences in order to check for differences between couples with and without work-linkage. This decreased model fit significantly ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.227$, $p = .040$), showing that only for non-work-linked couples, providing WRSS was positively related to employees' mastery experiences.

**Table 3**

*Moderation Effect Estimates in our APIM*

| Effect type | Estimate | *SE* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Actor effects** | | | |
| Work-related spousal support → Detachment [Hypothesis 2a] | | | |
| Work-linked couples | -0.011 | 0.152 | .942 |
| Non-work-linked couples | -0.005 | 0.084 | .957 |
| Work-related spousal support → Relaxation [Hypothesis 2b] | | | |
| Work-linked couples | 0.322 | 0.117 | .006 |
| Non-work-linked couples | 0.050 | 0.051 | .323 |
| Work-related spousal support → Mastery [Hypothesis 2c] | | | |
| Work-linked couples | 0.259 | 0.132 | .049 |
| Non-work-linked couples | -0.019 | 0.069 | .784 |
| **Partner effects** | | | |
| Work-related spousal support → Detachment [Research question 2] | | | |
| Work-linked couples | 0.056 | 0.150 | .710 |
| Non-work-linked couples | -0.059 | 0.083 | .477 |
| Work-related spousal support → Relaxation [Research question 2] | | | |
| Work-linked couples | -0.081 | 0.103 | .433 |
| Non-work-linked couples | 0.018 | 0.059 | .764 |
| Work-related spousal support → Mastery [Research question 2] | | | |
| Work-linked couples | -0.107 | 0.144 | .461 |
| Non-work-linked couples | 0.175 | 0.069 | .012 |

*Note*. Unstandardized coefficients are displayed. *SE* = standard error. Mastery = Mastery experiences. Results of women and men are not shown separately because with indistinguishable dyads, path coeffiencients are equal among both dyad members.

**Additional Analyses**

To further explore the relationships between WRSS and recovery experiences, we investigated the associations of the three WRSS subfacets—shared network, sensitive companion, and understanding of subject matter—with recovery experiences, by including the three subscales as predictors of both employees' and their partners' recovery experiences.[5] Overall, we found one significant actor effect: the sensitive companion subscale was positively related to employees' relaxation ($B$ = 0.138, $p$ = .029). The remaining associations between employees' WRSS subscales and employees' recovery experiences were non-significant. Regarding partner effects (i.e., employees' WRSS as predictors of partners' recovery experiences), the shared network subscale was negatively associated with partners' relaxation ($B$ = -0.105, $p$ = .013), whereas the remaining associations between employees' WRSS subscales and partners' recovery experiences were non-significant.

Regarding the moderating role of a couple's work-link, we found that the relationship between sensitive companion and relaxation differed among work-linked and non-work-linked couples. The sensitive companion subscale was associated with employees' increased relaxation in work-linked couples ($B$ = 0.271, $p$ = .014), but not in non-work-linked couples ($B$ = 0.089, $p$ = .303). Furthermore, the relationship between the understanding of subject matter subscale and mastery also differed between work-linked couples ($B$ = 0.259, $p$ = .009) and non-work-linked couples ($B$ = -0.081, $p$ = .258). There was only one significant difference in the partner effects of the WRSS subscales: the relationship between employees' understanding of subject matter and their partners' mastery was non-significant among work-linked couples ($B$ = -0.178, $p$ = .168) and significant among non-work-linked couples ($B$ = 0.246, $p$ = .003).

[5] The complete results of the additional analyses are available upon request from the first author.

## 2.6. Discussion

The aim of this study of dual-earner couples was to investigate whether WRSS as a strategy to integrate work and home is beneficial to employees' recovery experiences. Further, we examined whether the hypothesized relationships differed among couples with and without a work-link. We found that WRSS was positively associated with relaxation and mastery experiences in work-linked couples, but not in couples without work-link. WRSS was unrelated to psychological detachment both in couples with and without work-linkage. In addition, we examined the consequences of providing WRSS on recovery experiences. We found that providing WRSS was positively related to employees' mastery experiences in non-work-linked couples only. Providing WRSS was not related to psychological detachment or relaxation, both in couples with and without work-linkage.

### WRSS and Recovery Experiences in Couples with and Without Work-Link

Regarding the link between WRSS and recovery experiences, we found that receiving WRSS is beneficial to work-linked couples only. As work-linked couples are connected via their work, they are more likely to benefit from their partners' work-related help in terms of increased relaxation. Furthermore, due to their greater similarity with their partners, work-linked couples seem to be able to reinvest the resources they gained by receiving social support into challenging activities during leisure time (mastery experiences). Adding to recent findings on the link between types of partners' support and employees' recovery (Haun et al., 2017; Park & Fritz, 2015; Park & Haun, 2017), we showed that for work-linked couples, receiving WRSS is effective in promoting relaxation and mastery experiences. Thus, our results support COR theory (Hobfoll, 2002) by showing that partner support is an important resource that facilitates employees' recovery processes. In contrast to previous research that found that work–home integration hinders employee recovery (Kinnunen et al., 2016; Wepfer et al., 2018), our findings suggest that not all forms of work–home integration are detrimental

to employees' recovery. Our results show that, at least for work-linked dual-earner couples, integrating work and home by receiving work-related support from a partner during leisure time is useful. However, for non-work-linked couples, receiving WRSS was not a significant predictor of recovery experiences. Partners without work-linkage may not be able to provide efficient WRSS, as they lack field knowledge regarding employees' work tasks and contexts. Therefore, discussing work-related problems with a non-work-linked partner may simply be a reminder of work rather than a helpful resource, and it does not contribute to their recovery. Hence, our findings suggest that couples without work-linkages do not benefit from high work–home integration (in terms of high WRSS), but may be more likely to profit from other types of spousal support for their recovery, such as general or recovery-specific support (Haun et al., 2017; Park & Fritz, 2015; Park & Haun, 2017). A couple's work-link seems to be the precondition under which receiving WRSS is beneficial to recovery in dual-earner couples. This finding highlights the importance of investigating interindividual differences in recovery (Sonnentag et al., 2017) and contributes to boundary management literature (Kreiner et al., 2009) by extending the limited view that segmenting work and home is the only way to help employees recover. As previous studies mainly focused on technology use at home being a detrimental work–home integration strategy (Derks, Brummelhuis, et al., 2014; Park et al., 2011), we advanced boundary management research by using another type of integration, namely WRSS. Our findings suggest that high work–home integration can be beneficial when it entails having more resources available that can eventually contribute to recovery. However, this applies only to a special type of couples – the subsample of work-linked couples.

Results of our additional analyses suggest that different facets of WRSS may be particularly relevant for different recovery experiences of work-linked couples. On the subscale level, the sensitive companion subdimension was associated with increased relaxation, whereas the understanding of subject matter subdimension was associated with

increased mastery experiences. These findings suggest that for employees to relax during off-job time, having a partner who understands the special demands of one's work (i.e., sensitive companion) seems more important than having a partner who knows the people at work (i.e., shared network) or the job contents (i.e., understanding of subject matter). In contrast, for employees to have mastery experiences, having a work-linked partner who understands the subject matter seems to be the most relevant dimension of WRSS.

Contrary to our expectations, WRSS was not associated with employees' detachment, neither among work-linked nor among non-work-linked couples. We supposed that WRSS would help employees to find solutions for work-related problems that keep them from switching off mentally during off-job time. Successfully solving work problems with the partner, then, should facilitate detachment from work during leisure time. In addition, we suggested that knowing that support is available (Bolger et al., 2000; Wethington & Kessler, 1986) may be a relief in and of itself, and therefore may facilitate detachment. However, WRSS require that at first, employees must deal with work-related thoughts and discussions so that work demands are cognitively activated, and therefore, detachment is impeded. Given our cross-sectional data, we cannot unravel these possible temporal sequences of WRSS and detachment, which could explain the non-existing association between WRSS and detachment in our study. Another explanation for the non-significant results regarding detachment might be that employees may have perceived their partners' work-related support as threat to their self-esteem rather than as a helpful resource. According to the threat-to-self-esteem model (Nadler & Jeffrey, 1986), receiving support may evoke feelings of dependency, indebtedness, and incompetence (Gleason et al., 2003). When employees are focused on why they were not able to solve their difficulties on their own, the feeling of detachment cannot occur.

Although the consequences of *receiving* WRSS for employees' recovery experiences were the focus of this study, the dyadic design of this study allowed us to investigate the consequences of *providing* WRSS. Given that previous theoretical and empirical research did

not allow clear conclusions, we examined the consequences of providing support in a more exploratory way. Overall, providing support (i.e., partner effects of receiving work-related support) was not associated with recovery experiences. However, among couples without work-linkage, providing WRSS was associated with increased mastery, whereas this was not the case among couples with work-linkage. This finding suggests that providing support is an energy-providing experience for non-work-linked partners, making them more likely to experience mastery. Supporting others evokes feelings of competence and being needed (Williamson & Clark, 1989), which may already constitute a mastery experience in itself, and which may stimulate employees to engage in further mastery activities. Being able to support one's partner in work-related issues may be particularly beneficial for non-work-linked partners as they might not necessarily expect that they can be of help given that they may have only limited insights into their significant other's work-related problems. Hence, providing work-related support may make them feel particularly competent, thereby stimulating the experience of mastery and the engagement in further mastery activities. The results of our additional analyses seem to support this notion, as understanding of subject matter was the most relevant subfacet driving the positive relationship between providing work-related support and one's own mastery experiences among non-work-linked couples. Being able to understand a partner's job content, and thereby be of help to one's partner, should boost the employees' feelings of competence, which can, in turn, trigger mastery experiences.

As we investigated couples' work-linkage as a boundary condition, our study also extends current knowledge regarding the understudied population of work-linked couples (Fritz et al., 2019). We showed that for work-linked couples, high work–home integration is especially conducive to their recovery. With this finding, we supplement empirical evidence on work-linked couples pertaining to the benefits of having work as common ground (Ferguson et al., 2016; Halbesleben et al., 2010). In addition to positive associations between

WRSS and work–family balance (Ferguson et al., 2016), we found WRSS was positively related to two different recovery experiences (relaxation and mastery experiences). Thus, our results underline the distinctiveness of work-linked couples.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

When interpreting our results, the study's limitations should be considered. By using dyadic data, we considered the existing non-independence in couples and were able to separate the influence of each individual's own predictors from their partner's. However, the cross-sectional design of our study does not allow causal inferences. While we proposed that receiving WRSS should aid employees' recovery experiences, it might also be the case that employees who enjoy better recovery experiences are more likely to provide support to their partners. Longitudinal or experimental (intervention) studies are needed to clarify causal relationships and to test for reverse causation. For example, in an intervention study, employees could receive training on how to provide work-related support to their partners. Increases in partners' recovery experiences after training would provide support for the causal link between WRSS and recovery experiences.

We found no effect of WRSS on employees' detachment. The one-time measurement of our study variables does not allow the investigation of the temporal dynamics of recovery processes. First, it is possible that in the beginning, WRSS hinders detachment, but when successfully completed, it facilitates detachment. That is, in a first step, when employees start talking about work with their partners, work-related thoughts will arise and impede detachment, but after resolving their work problems through discussions with their partners, employees may be more likely to detach. Second, when WRSS is given may be of importance. Receiving WRSS early during after-work hours may facilitate recovery experiences, whereas receiving WRSS at the end of the evening (shortly before going to bed) may be too late to increase employees' recovery experiences. Future studies should use diary

designs with multiple measurement points during the evening to reveal the dynamics of recovery processes (Sonnentag et al., 2017).

Based on previous empirical findings and theoretical considerations, we argued that providing and receiving WRSS should affect employees' recovery experiences and we suggested several underlying mechanisms (e.g., by solving work-related problems, boosting feelings of competence). However, as we did not measure these mechanisms, we cannot explicitly test whether the WRSS effects are indeed explained by these presumed mechanisms. As our study is the first to investigate the link between receiving and providing WRSS and recovery experiences, it can stimulate future research to explore the mediating mechanisms in the link between WRSS and recovery experiences.

In our study, we focused on three recovery experiences: psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences (Hahn et al., 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2008); but we did not assess control during leisure time, another recovery experience proposed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007). Previous research has shown that segmenting work and home is associated with increased control during leisure time (Kinnunen et al., 2016; Rexroth et al., 2016). However, receiving WRSS and solving work-related problems with one's partner may also increase an employee's feeling of control during leisure time, and thus, enable recovery. Therefore, future research should include control during leisure time when investigating the impact of WRSS on recovery experiences.

As we were interested in the consequences of work–home integration for employees' recovery, we chose WRSS as the specific type of support for our research. However, to identify the relative importance of a particular type of support, multiple types of social support (e.g., work-related support, recovery-related support, home-based instrumental support) could be compared. Different types of support address different needs (Cutrona, 1990), depending on the situation. For instance, an employee that has an urgent work problem to solve may prefer work-related support, whereas an employee that has recently worked a lot

of overtime may prefer recovery-related support. Future studies should examine which kind of support is appropriate in different situations and whether different types of support may compensate each other in order to determine the relative importance of different types of support in predicting recovery.

Moreover, having a partner who knows and understands an employee's work network, working conditions, and job content may also be relevant when the employee has positive experiences at work and can share them with their partner. Gable et al. (2004), for instance, found that having a partner who gives enthusiastic support (e.g., active-constructive responses) increases relationship well-being. Tremmel et al. (2018) showed that positive work-related conversations during after-work hours were positively related to positive affect the next morning. Hence, to provide a more complete view of the predictors and outcomes of WRSS, future studies should consider employees' positive and negative work experiences as antecedents of WRSS.

**Practical Implications**

Our findings suggest the importance of partners for work-linked couples' recovery. Thus, we recommend couples with work-linkages use each other as a resource for their recovery. As we found that discussing work-related issues with a partner is beneficial, we encourage work-linked couples to spend time talking about work with their partners. For non-work-linked couples, receiving WRSS had neither a positive nor a negative consequence regarding recovery experiences. Thus, for now, we recommend couples without work-linkages use other types of partner support, such as general social support or recovery support, which have been proven to be beneficial to dual-earner couples' recovery in previous studies (Haun et al., 2017; Park & Fritz, 2015; Park & Haun, 2017).

From an organizational perspective, most organizations are aware that healthy, well-recovered employees are crucial for an organization's success. As we found WRSS to be

helpful for work-linked dual-earner couples, we would recommend organizations remain sensitive to the special requirements of these couples and attempt to involve their work-linked employees' partners to a larger extent, so that their partners can improve their understanding of the job and the working environment. For instance, organizations may arrange open day events or company parties with employees' families so that partners can get to know the employees' colleagues and their work environments.

In addition, findings from this study could be used to design more effective interventions to promote employees' recovery. On the one hand, recovery interventions (Hahn et al., 2011) might highlight the role of the partner in employee recovery, and on the other hand, boundary management interventions (Rexroth et al., 2016) might be complemented with information regarding instances in which some degree of integration (in the form of WRSS), rather than segmentation, is conducive to employee recovery.

## Conclusion

Where previous research highlighted the importance of segmenting work and home for ensuring recovery during leisure time, our study investigated whether integrating work and home by receiving work-related support from one's spouse facilitated employees' recovery processes in dual-earner couples. Our study confirmed spousal work-related support as a possible enabler of recovery experiences, at least among work-linked couples, challenging the predominant view that work–home segmentation is preferable for employee recovery. Hence, our findings contribute to a more nuanced view of the relationship between work–home boundaries and recovery and will hopefully serve as springboard for future research on the beneficial and harmful effects of work–home integration and segmentation for recovery.

# CHAPTER 3

# 3. Study 2: Positive and Negative Work Reflection, Engagement and Exhaustion in Dual-Earner Couples: Exploring Living with Children and Work-Linkage as Moderators[6]

## 3.1. Abstract

Many employees think about their work during off-job time. Scholars have suggested that whether work-related thoughts during off-job time have detrimental or beneficial effects on employees' well-being and performance depends on the nature of these thoughts. In this study with dual-earner couples we examined whether employees' positive and negative work reflection during off-job time are associated with their own and with their partners' work engagement and exhaustion. Furthermore, we investigated whether a) living with children and b) being work-linked (i.e., working in the same organization and/or working in the same profession) moderated these relations. Both partners of 130 German heterosexual dual-earner couples responded to online questionnaires. We estimated multilevel analyses using the actor–partner interdependence model to analyze our dyadic data. We found positive associations between employees' positive work reflection and both their own and their partners' work engagement. Employees' positive work reflection was also associated with their decreased exhaustion. Employees' negative work reflection was negatively associated with their own work engagement and positively associated with their own exhaustion but unrelated to their partners' outcomes. Moderator analyses revealed that living with children weakened the link between employees' positive work reflection and their own work

[6] This chapter has been published as research article in the German Journal of Human Resource Management. This chapter is a postreview prepublication version of the research article.
Walter, J., & Haun, V. C. (2020). Positive and negative work reflection, engagement and exhaustion in dual-earner couples: Exploring living with children and work-linkage as moderators. *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung, 35*(2), 249-273. https://doi.org/10.1177/2397002220964930

engagement and strengthened the link between their negative work reflection and exhaustion. The presence of couples' work-linkage did not moderate any of these relations. This study builds on previous research by showing that employees' positive work-related thinking is not only beneficial to themselves but also to their partners. Furthermore, the results suggest that living with children constitutes an additional demand that reduces the motivational effects of positive work reflection and amplifies the detrimental effects of employees' negative work reflection.

## 3.2. Introduction

Many employees continue to think about their work after they have finished working (Eurofound, 2017; Pronova BKK, 2018). Research has shown that mentally disconnecting oneself from work during nonwork time (i.e., psychological detachment) is crucial to lessening job stress (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2016). However, scholars have proposed that work-related thoughts during off-job time can have a detrimental or beneficial effect on employees' well-being and performance depending on the nature of employees' thoughts (e.g., Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015). Research suggests that thinking about work in a positive way may have beneficial consequences for employees' health and work-related behaviors, while reflecting on the negative aspects of one's job may have harmful effects (Binnewies et al., 2009; Casper et al., 2019; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Meier et al., 2016).

Initial studies indicate that in dual-earner couples, employees' psychological detachment from work is not only associated with their own well-being but also with their partners' well-being (Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn and Dormann, 2013). However, there are still significant gaps in the literature. First, it is unclear whether different types of work-related thinking (i.e., positive and negative work reflection) uniformly affect partners' well-being,

given that previous research has only focused on psychological detachment, that is, the absence of work-related thinking. Second, as previous research has focused on well-being outcomes such as affect or life satisfaction (Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn & Dormann, 2013), it is unknown whether work-related thinking is related to work-related outcomes such as work engagement. Third, little is known about the boundary conditions that moderate the effect of employees' work-related thinking on both their own and their partners' well-being and work-related behaviors. While there is initial evidence that the presence of children in a household is a moderating factor (Hahn et al., 2014), little is known about further work-related moderators. As many employees are currently in dual-earner relationships, extending the knowledge about the dyadic consequences of employees' work-related thinking is relevant for a large group of employees. For example, in Germany, in 75% of all couples aged 25-49 both partners are working, at least part-time (U.N.E.C.E., 2017).

In this study with dual-earner couples, we address these gaps in the literature by examining how employees' positive and negative work reflection during off-job time are associated not only with their own but also with their partners' work engagement and exhaustion. Furthermore, to identify potential boundary conditions of these associations, we examine whether a) living with children and b) being work-linked (i.e., working in the same organization and/or working in the same profession) moderate these relations.

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, we contribute to recovery literature by disentangling the effects of positive and negative work reflection on important outcomes (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015). Given that previous research on the relation between psychological detachment and work engagement revealed ambiguous findings (Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2016), focusing on specific work-related cognitions can help clarify the (work-related) consequences of staying connected or distancing oneself from work during leisure time. Second, our study broadens the scope of recovery research beyond

the individual level (Sonnentag et al., 2017). By using a dyadic perspective, we take into account that many employees live in romantic relationships and that both partners' experiences affect each other (Park & Haun, 2017; Song et al., 2008), thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of work reflection and the beneficial and detrimental consequences for both employees and their partners. Third, our study extends the limited knowledge about interindividual differences in employees' recovery processes (Sonnentag et al., 2017) by investigating the moderating effects of living with children and work-linkages on the relationships between work reflection and both work engagement and exhaustion. As many employees are living with children, children's impact on employees' recovery processes needs to be further examined. Moreover, by using work-linkage as moderator, we contribute to emerging literature on work-linked couples (Ferguson et al., 2016; Fritz et al., 2019). Thus, our research can help to develop more targeted recommendations for employees and to identify who benefits most from potential interventions to increase positive and to decrease negative work reflection.

## 3.3. Theoretical Background

### Employees' Recovery Processes: Replenishing Depleted Resources

Dealing with job demands draws on employees' resources and leads to strain reactions that can reduce their health and work motivation (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Impaired health (e.g., high exhaustion) and work motivation (e.g., low work engagement) are indicators of a lack of individual resources. Leisure time provides an opportunity for employees to regenerate depleted resources (Sonnentag, 2001). According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory, people "strive to obtain, retain, foster, and protect those things they centrally value", namely their resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018; p. 104). A resource can be anything that is either valued in its own right or helps to reach valued goals (Hobfoll, 2002). Stress occurs

when an individual's resources are threatened or lost or cannot be regained after resource investment. Job demands, for instance, draw constantly on employees' resources and when people engage too heavily in work-related tasks, their resources are eventually depleted. When resource loss is high, it is particularly important to gain further resources. Resource investment helps people to protect against resource loss and to acquire additional resources. In the same vein, individuals who possess greater resources are less likely to lose resources and are more capable to create new resources, which results in the accumulation of resources, or so-called resource caravans (Hobfoll, 2011). In contrast, an initial resource loss makes further resource loss more likely, resulting in loss spirals.

In this paper, we focus on exhaustion and (lack of) work engagement as indicators of employees' resource depletion. Exhaustion, as a core dimension of burnout, is defined as 'a consequence of intensive physical, affective and cognitive strain' (Demerouti et al., 2010) originating from high job demands (Maslach et al., 2001). Exhaustion is associated with important outcomes such as reduced organizational commitment, job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions (Alarcon, 2011; Demerouti et al., 2000).

Work engagement is 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind' (Bakker et al., 2005), consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy. Dedication describes the state of being inspired, enthusiastic, proud and challenged by work. Absorption refers to being fully concentrated and immersed in work activities (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Resources are assumed to be associated with work engagement, as they either foster employees' growth and development or drive the achievement of work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). As work engagement substantially contributes to positive organizational outcomes, such as job performance and financial returns (Christian et al., 2011), it is crucial to understand how it can be enhanced.

**Positive and Negative Work Reflection During Off-Job Time**

One way to replenish resources that were depleted due to job demands is to mentally distance oneself from one's work, that is, to psychologically detach from work (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015). Whereas previous research supports the notion that refraining from work-related thoughts is beneficial for replenishing one's resources (Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2016), Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) proposed that the valence of employees' work-related thoughts determines whether work-related thinking is detrimental or beneficial for employees' well-being and work behaviors. Past empirical research revealed mixed findings regarding the effects of detachment on employee work engagement. Whereas detachment was positively associated with work engagement in some studies (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016), other studies found no association or even a negative one (Shimazu et al., 2012; Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2010). By fully refraining from work-related thoughts, employees are not able to take advantage of positive work experiences. Hence, examining the nature of work-related thoughts in detail may help resolve these inconsistent results on the role of detachment. Following Sonnentag and Fritz's (2015) proposition, we argue that the way employees think about their work during off-job time significantly affects their exhaustion and work engagement, and, thus, distinguish between positive and negative work reflection.

**Positive Work Reflection as a Resource-Providing Experience**

Positive work reflection denotes thinking about the positive aspects of one's job, such as accomplishing tasks or supportive relationships, and is assumed to be a resource-providing experience that benefits employees' well-being and performance (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006; Meier et al., 2016). Applying COR theory, positive work reflection is a resource that people invest in to build up lost resources and gain more resources. First, positive work reflection

offers a way of reexperiencing positive events from the workday during leisure time, which also amplifies and prolongs the feelings that were associated with the positive event (Bryant, 2003). Thinking about one's successfully fulfilled tasks and pleasant work events may generate resources such as a sense of competence or positive affect (Fredrickson, 2001), resulting in increased well-being and performance (Bono et al., 2013). Furthermore, as positive work reflection implies a positive reappraisal of work experiences, it may counter the negative consequences of work-related stress (Lazarus, 2006). Exhaustion occurs when employees' energy and resources are depleted (Maslach et al., 2001). In contrast, the positive emotions people experience when positively reflecting about one's job can mitigate any load reactions from work efforts, restore energy and help employees recover (Oerlemans et al., 2014). The existing research on work reflection supports the notion that positive work reflection during leisure time is a resource-generating leisure experience that is beneficial to employee well-being and work-related behaviors (Binnewies et al., 2009; Casper et al., 2019; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Meier et al., 2016). Consequently, positive work reflection is hypothesized to be positively associated with work engagement and negatively associated with exhaustion.

*H1: Positive work reflection is a) positively associated with employees' work engagement and b) negatively associated with employees' exhaustion.*

**Negative Work Reflection as a Resource-Consuming Experience**

Negative work reflection involves thinking about the negative aspects of one's job such as failures or conflicts with colleagues and is a resource-consuming experience (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006; Ott et al., 2019). According to COR theory, the consumption of resources or the threat of resource loss may lead to stress, which in turn hinders recovery and reduces well-being (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Due to resource investment, fewer resources will be

available to use for subsequent tasks. Negative work reflection depletes employees' resources because demands are put on the employee and job stressors remain mentally present during leisure time, resulting in a prolonged activation of negative thoughts and affect (Brosschot et al., 2005). Depletion of resources is associated with reduced motivation, task focus, well-being and health (Hobfoll, 2010). Moreover, repetitive negative thoughts are a negative experience in their own and are related to further resource loss such as reduced feelings of control and self-evaluation as well as increased helplessness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2003). Therefore, negative work reflection is expected to be negatively associated with employees' work engagement and positively associated with their exhaustion. Empirical evidence confirms that negative work reflection is a resource-consuming leisure experience that is detrimental to employee well-being (Binnewies et al., 2009; Casper et al., 2019; Flaxman et al., 2018; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Meier et al., 2016; Ott et al., 2019).

*H2: Negative work reflection is a) negatively associated with employees' work engagement and b) positively associated with employees' exhaustion.*

**Dyadic Effects of Positive and Negative Work Reflection**

As well as the hypothesized effects of employees' work reflection on their own work engagement and exhaustion, we propose that work-related thinking crosses over to the partner and similarly affects partners' well-being and work-related behaviors. In dual-earner couples, both partners face the challenge of balancing their job and home demands, and work and home experiences may cross over from one partner to another (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker et al., 2008; Park & Haun, 2017). While previous research has shown that employees' psychological detachment from work is associated with their partners' life satisfaction (Hahn and Dormann, 2013), our study examines in detail the nature of work-related thoughts and their consequences for partners' work engagement and exhaustion, that is to say, the

crossover effects. Crossover refers to ‘a dyadic, interindividual transmission of psychological states and experiences’ (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and is not only restricted to negative experiences but also includes positive ones (Westman, 2001). In the context of COR theory, crossover signifies a resource exchange within dyads (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Crossover occurs through several mechanisms. First, direct crossover may occur via empathy. That is, employees in an intimate relationship feel their partners’ strain and resources, and, in turn, their own affective states and their motivation are affected. Second, crossover can occur via an indirect interaction process. One partner’s strain can result in a lack of communication or negative interactions with the other partner, which increases crossover of strain. Similarly, when one partner uses their resources and positive emotions to have positive, supportive interactions with the partner, the affective experiences of the other partner may increase (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and resource gains may be enabled. Therefore, we argue that employees’ positive and negative work-related thinking during leisure time are not only associated with their own work engagement and exhaustion, but also with their partners’.

Employees’ positive work reflection can be a resource-providing experience for their partners. For example, the sharing of successes and accomplishments and the associated self-efficacy and self-esteem may cross over from one partner to another (Neff et al., 2013; Neff et al., 2015). Furthermore, as positive work reflection creates resources in the employee, the employee is more likely to engage in positive behaviors towards the partner, that is, transferring resources to the other. Positive behaviors may not only include pleasant conversations but also joint leisure activities that generate resources (Hahn et al., 2012; Sonnentag, 2001). In turn, the partner is better equipped with resources and may feel enthusiastic about their own work (Bakker et al., 2005). In addition, an employee who is in a positive state may be more willing to take care of responsibilities at home, giving the partner

the opportunity to preserve their own resources and to build up additional resources such as new energy and work-related motivation.

*H3: Employees' positive work reflection is a) positively associated with partners' work engagement and b) negatively associated with partners' exhaustion.*

Conversely, employees' negative work reflection can be a resource-consuming experience for their partners. An employee who thinks negatively about their work may be less available for pleasant joint activities (e.g., doing sports, going out together) that may help them recover drained resources. Furthermore, they may also be less available to provide instrumental or emotional support to their partners and to help them unwind from job stress, as they are preoccupied with their own work-related thoughts. Employees' negative states may either directly cross over to the partner via empathy (Germeys & Verbruggen, 2018) or indirectly via less constructive, negatively valenced conversations (Bakker et al., 2008; Danner-Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2013). Empirical research has provided initial evidence for the crossover of negative work reflection among dual-earner couples. Fritz et al. (2019) found that negative work-related thoughts impaired the partner's sleep, at least in work-linked couples. Furthermore, direct crossover effects of work engagement and burnout were found (Bakker et al., 2005). Based on COR theory and related crossover research, we propose

*H4: Employees' negative work reflection is a) negatively associated with partners' work engagement and b) positively associated with partners' exhaustion.*

**Exploring Potential Moderators**

We hypothesize that positive work reflection is beneficial and negative reflection is harmful to employees' well-being and work engagement (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Meier et al., 2016; Ott et al., 2019). However, not all people might be affected equally by work-related thinking.

As Sonnentag et al. (2017) suggested, boundary conditions might influence the occurrence and magnitude of the effects of work reflection on work engagement and exhaustion. This study focuses on the boundary conditions of living with children and work-linkage as couple-level moderators.

**Living with Children.** In Germany, 27.5% (11.4 million) of households are families living with at least one child (Federal Statistical Office, 2018). Living with children strongly impacts employees' nonwork experiences and couple dynamics (Elliott, 2003; Kurdek, 1999). We thus explore living with children as moderator of the relations between employees' work-related thinking on their own exhaustion and engagement and on their partners' exhaustion and engagement.

On the one hand, children may distract employees from their work-related thoughts, thus dampening both the beneficial and harmful effects. For example, employees may forget about both their positive and negative work-related thoughts when they become absorbed in joint activities with their children such as playing or doing sports together (Hahn et al., 2012). As a result, these thoughts become less impactful. On the other hand, living with children may pose additional demands on an employee, depleting their resources (Hahn et al., 2012). For instance, children may need support with their homework or need to be taken to sports clubs or their friends' houses. Therefore, employees with children may be more vulnerable in the face of resource loss due to negative work-related thinking and may benefit less from positive work-related thinking.

Similarly, living with children may moderate the effects of employees' positive and negative work reflection on their partners' outcomes. On the one hand, crossover effects may be diminished for the following reasons: First, living with children implies having multiple roles and responsibilities (Wierda-Boer et al., 2009); therefore, partners pay less attention to each other as they are more distracted by their children (Hahn et al., 2014). Second,

employees with children spend less leisure time together with their partners and are more likely to be engaged in different domestic tasks (Barnet-Verzat et al., 2011). Third, employees may try to avoid discussing negative topics such as work-related issues when children are present to prevent the children from feeling distress in the family and related anxiety and aggression (Cummings et al., 2004; Erath & Bierman, 2006). Therefore, in couples with children, an employee has fewer opportunities to notice their partner's work-related thoughts due to distractions, spending less time together and avoiding negative moods. In turn, they may be affected less by their partner's positive or negative work-related thoughts, resulting in less crossover of the employee's positive and negative experiences. Previous research showed that living with children weakens the effects of employees' psychological detachment on their partners' well-being (Hahn et al., 2014) and that a weaker crossover of negative affect takes place when children are present (Song et al., 2008). On the other hand, living with children might exacerbate the effects of employees' work-related thinking on their partners. As childcare drains employees' resources (Brummelhuis et al., 2010), employees may be less able to control their negative feelings when interacting with their partners, leading to increased exhaustion and reduced work engagement in the partner.

Given these contradictory predictions, we do not formulate specific hypotheses, but investigate the potential moderating role of living with children on the relationships between employees' work-related thinking and both their own and their partners' outcomes as open research questions.

*Research Question 1: Does living with children moderate the associations between employees' positive and negative work reflection and their a) work engagement and b) exhaustion?*

*Research Question 2: Does living with children moderate the associations between employees' positive and negative work reflection and partners' a) work engagement and b) exhaustion?*

**Work-Linkage.** With the growing number of two-income households, couples may be increasingly likely to work in the same company (e.g., work in the same hospital but have different roles), have the same profession (e.g., teachers at different schools) or both (e.g., work as teachers in the same school). In the USA, 11% to 13% of dual-earner couples work for the same employer (Hyatt, 2019), and German data show that 29% of dual-earner academic couples are employed in the same occupational sector (Rusconi & Solga, 2007). This work-linkage implies a greater integration of work and home domains (Halbesleben et al., 2010), hence off-job experiences in the home domain should be associated more strongly with work experiences.

We propose that couples' work-linkage strengthens the relationship between employees' positive and negative work reflection and their partners' work engagement and exhaustion. Due to the higher work-family integration of a work-linked couple, partners can more easily identify and empathize with each other's work-related thinking. Thus, work-linked partners may be better at utilizing or reinvesting resources for each other across the work and family domains (Halbesleben et al., 2010; Halbesleben et al., 2012). For instance, an employee with positive work-related thoughts may be more likely to have positive conversations about work with their partner (Hicks & Diamond, 2008), transferring their enthusiasm to the partner. Additionally, an employee in a positive mood will be more willing to engage in joint leisure activities, thereby supporting the creation of resources and facilitating the partner's recovery from work (Hahn et al., 2012). Research by Park and Haun (2017) showed that employees' feelings of recovery were associated with their partners' work

engagement in work-linked couples but not in couples without work-linkage. Moreover, work-linked couples have a greater understanding of partners' work-related issues and spend more time together (Janning, 2006), thereby increasing the chances of crossover.

In contrast, a work-linked couple's greater work-home integration may also imply that negative states cross over more easily to the partner, threatening their resources. An employee thinking negatively about work may express their negative mood in more negatively valenced communication and interactional behaviors with the partner (Rimé, 2009), so that the partner's resources are threatened by loss instead of being enhanced and their motivation for work is likely to be reduced. Fritz et al. (2019) showed that for couples with work-linkage, experienced workplace incivility of one employee was positively associated with the partner's insomnia symptoms through the employee's work rumination at home, underlining the detrimental effect of employees' negative thinking on the partner. Therefore, we propose the following:

*H5: Couples' work-link moderates the associations between employees' positive work reflection and their partners' a) work engagement and b) exhaustion, such that the associations are stronger for work-linked couples compared to non-work-linked couples.*

*H6: Couples' work-link moderates the associations between employees' negative work reflection and their partners' a) work engagement and b) exhaustion, such that the associations are stronger for work-linked couples compared to non-work-linked couples.*

## 3.4. Method

### Sample and Procedure

This study is part of a larger research project on work-related stress, recovery and well-being among dual-earner couples in Germany. German-speaking heterosexual dual-earner couples working at least 10 hours per week were chosen for the study. For recruitment, social media community groups were used (e.g., groups for dual-earner couples, (trainee) teachers, research associates and working mothers) and information leaflets about the study were distributed in local facilities (e.g., in cafés, shops, dancing schools and childcare facilities). Detailed information about the study was given before registration and the participants provided informed consent. As incentive for participation, participants received a summary of study results and recommendations for managing work stress as a couple. In addition, all participants could take part in a lottery drawing of online gift cards. In total, 465 individuals filled in an online questionnaire and were requested to invite their partners to fill in the same questionnaire. Invitations were also sent to participants' partners with the request to participate in the study. Each couple created a distinct code consisting of both partners' birth dates so that individual surveys could be matched. Of the 465 individuals, we could not consider the data of 205 persons, as their partners did not fill in the web-based surveys. Therefore, our final sample consisted of 260 individuals, matched into 130 heterosexual dual-earner couples. To control for selection effects, we tested whether there are differences between the final sample of couples and the individuals whose partners did not participate. There were no significant differences across these groups regarding the study variables and demographic characteristics (e.g., children, age) except of exhaustion: Individuals whose partners did not participate scored significantly higher ($M$ = 2.42, $SD$ = 0.59) on exhaustion than the final sample of couples ($M$ = 2.28, $SD$ = 0.52). The average relationship length was 8.01 years ($SD$ = 7.51). Among the couples, 27% lived with children in their households:

12.3% of the couples with one child, 12.3% with two children and 0.8% lived with three children. Most of the couples (83.3 %) lived together. On average, men were 34.64 years old (*SD* = 8.55) and worked 40.43 (*SD* = 10.40) hours per week. Among men, 9 (6.9 %) worked less than 20 hours per week, 8 (6.2 %) worked between 20 and 34 hours per week, and 112 (86.2 %) worked more than 34 hours per week. Women were 31.98 years old (*SD* = 8.13) and worked 36.46 (*SD* = 12.80) hours per week. Among women, 14 (10.8 %) worked less than 20 hours per week, 31 (23.8 %) worked between 20 and 34 hours per week, and 85 (65.4 %) worked more than 34 hours per week. In our sample, 54 participants (20.8 %) had a leadership role. Among our participants, a large variety of occupations and industrial sectors were represented, such as education, scientific and public sector, social sector, IT, engineering, health sector, retail, army, and sales. Most of our participants graduated from high school/secondary school (77.7 %) and held an academic degree (69.9%).

**Measures**

**Positive and Negative Work Reflection.** We used the work reflection scales developed by Fritz and Sonnentag (2006) to measure positive and negative work reflection with three items for each (e.g., 'During leisure time, I think about the positive points of my job'; 'During leisure time, I realize what I do not like about my job'; 1 = *I do not agree at all* to 5 = *I fully agree*). For positive work reflection, Cronbach's alpha was .91 for men and for women. For negative work reflection, Cronbach's alpha was .90 for men and for women.

**Exhaustion.** Exhaustion was assessed using eight items of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti et al., 2003). Participants rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *I do not agree at all* to 4 = *I fully agree*) to what extent they agree with the following example: 'During my work, I often feel emotionally drained'. Cronbach's alpha was .84 for men and .85 for women.

**Work Engagement.** Work engagement was measured with the short form of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006) that consists of the subscales of vigor (three items; 'At my work, I feel bursting with energy'), dedication (three items; 'I am enthusiastic about my job'), and absorption (three items; 'I am immersed in my work'; 1 = *never* to 7 = *always*). Cronbach's alpha was .95 among men and women.

**Living with Children.** We assessed living with children with the following question: 'How many children are living in your household?'. This was coded with 1 if there was at least one child and with 0 if there was no child in the household.

**Work-Linkage.** Participants answered the following two statements: 'Your partner works in the same occupation as you' and 'Your partner works in the same company as you' (0 = no, 1 = yes). In the sample, 10% ($n$ = 13) worked only in the same occupation, 11.5% ($n$ = 15) worked only in the same company and 16.2% ($n$ = 21) worked both in the same occupation and in the same company. In line with previous research (Ferguson et al., 2016; Halbesleben et al., 2012), a dummy variable was created in which value 0 denoted when both statements were answered with 'no' and 1 denoted when at least one statement was answered with 'yes'. In total, 37.7% of the couples in our sample ($n$ = 49) were work-linked.

## Data Analysis

As people in intimate relationships influence each other due to shared experiences, responses from members of a couple are not independent (Kenny et al., 2006). We used the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) to consider the nonindependence and mutual influence between partners (Kenny et al., 2006). In the APIM, actor and partner effects are estimated simultaneously. More specifically, an actor effect describes an effect of an employee's predictors on an employee's outcomes. A partner effect refers to the effect of an employee's predictors on their partner's outcomes. As we focus on dual-earner couples in this

study, each person takes both the role of an employee and a partner. Beside the actor and partner effects, there are two correlations in the APIM: the correlation between the two partners' predictors and the correlation between the two partners' error terms of the dependent variables.

In dyadic data, the person-level (Level 1) is nested within the dyad-level (Level 2). We used hierarchical linear modeling in the program HLM (Campbell & Kashy, 2002; Raudenbush et al., 2019) for our analyses. For a detailed description on data set structure in HLM, we refer the reader to Campbell and Kashy (2002). Work reflection, work engagement and exhaustion are person-level variables (i.e., partners' scores within dyads are different), whereas living with children and work-linkage are dyad-level (i.e., the partners' scores within a dyad are the same) data moderators. Following the recommendations of Kenny et al. (2006), the predictor variables positive and negative work reflection were centered at the grand mean to make zero a meaningful value for the predictor variables.

## 3.5. Results

Table 4 presents the mean scores, standard deviations and correlations of the individual- and dyad-level of the study variables.

### Preliminary Analysis

First, we examined whether work engagement and exhaustion differed between dyads by partitioning the total variance into within- and between-dyad variance. Of the total variance, 26.1% and 25.0% were at the between-level for work engagement and exhaustion, respectively.

Second, although men and women differ on a conceptual level, it is recommended to test whether they are empirically distinguishable (Kenny et al., 2006). Empirical

distinguishability exists when means, variances and covariances of the study variables differ between dyad members. We used structural equation modelling in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017) for model fit comparisons. We performed omnibus tests of distinguishability: we compared the fit of a model in which means, variances, and covariances of the study variables were constrained to be equal across men and women, against another model in which they were free to vary (Ackerman et al., 2011). We performed two omnibus tests: one including work engagement and positive and negative work reflection and another one including exhaustion and positive and negative work reflection. In both tests, women and men did not differ ($\chi^2(12) = 10.32$, $p = .59$; $\chi^2(12) = 15.03$, $p = .24$, respectively), signifying that gender does not make a meaningful difference for these variables (Kenny et al., 2006). Therefore, dyad members were treated as indistinguishable in the analyses by constraining means, variances, covariances, actor and partner effects to be equal across men and women. In other words, the effects of an employee's predictors on their partner's outcomes (e.g., a husband's negative work reflection on his wife's exhaustion) are the same as the effects of the partner's predictors on the employee's outcomes (e.g., a wife's negative work reflection on her husband's exhaustion).

**Table 4**

*Correlations Between Study Variables (N = 130 dyads, 260 individuals)*

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dyad-level | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Living with children[a] | 0.27 | 0.44 | | - .01 | .03 | - .22** | .12 | - .13* | | | |
| 2. Work-linkage[a] | 0.38 | 0.49 | - .01 | | - .03 | .04 | - .03 | .02 | | | |
| Actor | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. PWR | 2.38 | 0.84 | .02 | - .02 | | .12 | .50*** | - .17** | | | |
| 4. NWR | 2.40 | 0.89 | - .17** | .03 | .09 | | - .31*** | .36*** | | | |
| 5. Work engagement | 4.25 | 1.25 | .09 | - .02 | .39** | - .32*** | | - .49*** | | | |
| 6. Exhaustion | 2.29 | 0.53 | - .10 | .02 | - .15** | .37** | - .42*** | | | | |
| Partner | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. PWR | 2.38 | 0.84 | .02 | - .02 | .15* | .04 | .21** | - .05 | | | |
| 8. NWR | 2.40 | 0.89 | - .17** | .03 | .04 | .14* | - .05 | .05 | .09 | | |
| 9. Work engagement | 4.25 | 1.25 | .09 | - .02 | .21** | - .05 | .26*** | - .20** | .39*** | - .33*** | |
| 10. Exhaustion | 2.29 | 0.53 | - .10 | .02 | - .05 | .05 | - .20** | .24*** | - .15* | .37*** | - .42*** |

*Note.* Dyad-level correlations are displayed above the diagonal *(N* = 130). Individual-level correlations are displayed below the diagonal (*N* = 260).

[a] 0 = no, 1 = yes. PWR = Positive Work Reflection. NWR = Negative Work Reflection.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

**Hypothesis Testing**

For testing our hypotheses, we ran two series of nested models, one for work engagement and one for exhaustion as outcome: Model 0 was an unconstrained null model including only the intercept; in Model 1, the actor and partner effects of work reflection on the outcomes and the dyad-level predictors living with children and work-linkage were added; Model 2 additionally included the cross-level interactions between work reflection and living with children; and Model 3 included the cross-level interactions between work reflection and couples' work-linkage. As model fit indices, the deviance statistic that can be used to compare model fit of two subsequent models was analyzed.

As suggested by Hypothesis 1a, we found positive associations between employees' positive work reflection and their own work engagement. Employees' positive work reflection was also associated with employees' decreased exhaustion (Hypothesis 1b). Therefore, Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. The multilevel estimates predicting work engagement are displayed in Table 5. Employees' negative work reflection was negatively associated with their own work engagement and positively associated with their own exhaustion, supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Table 6 presents the model estimates for exhaustion as outcome. Regarding partner effects, Hypotheses 3a and 3b stated that positive work reflection is associated with partners' outcomes. Please note that in our analyses, we estimated the effects of partners' positive work reflection on employees' outcomes which are conceptually and empirically the same as the effects of employees' positive work reflection on partners' outcomes in our sample of dual-earner couples. We found positive associations between employees' positive work reflection and their partners' work engagement, but positive work reflection was unrelated to partners' exhaustion. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was supported whereas Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b suggested that negative work reflection is associated with partners' outcomes. Employees' negative work reflection was not significantly associated with both work engagement and exhaustion, so that Hypotheses 4a and 4b were not supported[7].

To test the moderator variables – living with children and work-linkage – models with cross-level interactions between work reflection and the dichotomous moderators were examined. Model 2 included the moderator of living with children (0 = not living with children; 1 = living with children), and Model 3 included the moderator of work-linkage (0 = no work-linkage; 1 = work-linkage). Regarding Research Question 1 – the potential moderator effect of living with children on the relationship between employees' work reflection and their own a) work engagement and b) exhaustion we found that living with children weakened the link between employees' positive work reflection and their work engagement (see Figure 1) but did not affect the association between positive work reflection and employees' exhaustion.

[7] To check whether the number of work hours affected our results, we controlled for employees' and partners' work hours in our analyses. The pattern of results did not change.

**Table 5**

*Multilevel Estimates for Models Predicting Work Engagement*

| | Model 0 | | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Estimate | *SE* | *t* | Estimate | *SE* | *t* | Estimate | *SE* | *t* | Estimate | *SE* | *t* |
| Intercept | 4.24*** | 0.09 | 48.69 | 4.23*** | 0.10 | 43.90 | 4.23*** | 0.10 | 44.67 | 4.23*** | 0.10 | 44.18 |
| **Dyad-level predictors** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Living with children[a] | | | | 0.04 | 0.15 | 0.28 | 0.06 | 0.16 | 0.39 | 0.04 | 0.16 | 0.23 |
| Work-linkage (WL)[a] | | | | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.04 | -0.00 | 0.14 | -0.04 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.02 |
| **Person-level predictors** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| $PWR_{Actor}$ | | | | 0.60*** | 0.08 | 7.73 | 0.72*** | 0.09 | 7.85 | 0.51*** | 0.11 | 4.73 |
| $PWR_{Partner}$ | | | | 0.24** | 0.08 | 3.15 | 0.32** | 0.09 | 3.51 | 0.24* | 0.11 | 2.26 |
| $NWR_{Actor}$ | | | | -0.51*** | 0.07 | -6.91 | -0.50*** | 0.08 | -6.01 | -0.58*** | 0.10 | -5.97 |
| $NWR_{Partner}$ | | | | -0.04 | 0.07 | -0.57 | -0.03 | 0.08 | -0.40 | -0.02 | 0.10 | -0.23 |
| **Cross-level interaction** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| $PWR_{Actor}$ x Children | | | | | | | -0.38* | 0.17 | -2.26 | | | |
| $PWR_{Partner}$ x Children | | | | | | | -0.22 | 0.17 | -1.34 | | | |
| $NWR_{Actor}$ x Children | | | | | | | 0.02 | 0.18 | 0.11 | | | |
| $NWR_{Partner}$ x Children | | | | | | | -0.00 | 0.18 | -0.02 | | | |
| $PWR_{Actor}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | 0.20 | 0.15 | 1.29 |
| $PWR_{Partner}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | 0.02 | 0.15 | 0.10 |
| $NWR_{Actor}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | 0.19 | 0.15 | 1.25 |
| $NWR_{Partner}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | -0.01 | 0.15 | -0.05 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| -2 x log (lh) | 845.52 | | | 755.87 | | | 748.36 | | | 752.36 | | |
| Diff -2 x log (lh) | | | | 89.66*** | | | 7.50 | | | 3.50 | | |
| Df | | | | 6 | | | 4 | | | 4 | | |
| Within-dyad variance | 1.16 | 0.14 | | 0.94 | 0.12 | | 0.94 | 0.12 | | 0.93 | 0.12 | |
| Between-dyad variance | 0.41 | 0.14 | | 0.13 | 0.10 | | 0.10 | 0.09 | | 0.13 | 0.09 | |

*Note*. [a] 0 = no, 1 = yes. PWR = Positive Work Reflection. NWR = Negative Work Reflection.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

**Table 6**

*Multilevel Estimates for Models Predicting Exhaustion*

| | Model 0 | | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Estimate | *SE* | *t* | Estimate | *SE* | *t* | Estimate | *SE* | *t* | Estimate | *SE* | *t* |
| Intercept | 2.28*** | 0.04 | 62.88 | 2.29*** | 0.05 | 49.21 | 2.30*** | 0.05 | 49.12 | 2.30*** | 0.05 | 49.28 |
| **Dyad-level predictors** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Living with children[a] | | | | -0.04 | 0.07 | -0.52 | -0.01 | 0.08 | -0.11 | -0.04 | 0.07 | -0.52 |
| Work-linkage (WL)[a] | | | | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.04 | -0.01 | 0.07 | -0.18 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.04 |
| **Person-level predictors** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| $PWR_{Actor}$ | | | | -0.11** | 0.04 | -3.16 | -0.12** | 0.04 | -2.81 | -0.07 | 0.05 | -1.38 |
| $PWR_{Partner}$ | | | | -0.02 | 0.04 | -0.71 | -0.01 | 0.04 | -0.15 | -0.04 | 0.05 | -0.73 |
| $NWR_{Actor}$ | | | | 0.23*** | 0.03 | 6.67 | 0.19*** | 0.04 | 4.97 | 0.23*** | 0.04 | 5.38 |
| $NWR_{Partner}$ | | | | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.12 | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.43 | -0.00 | 0.04 | -0.05 |
| **Cross-level interaction** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| $PWR_{Actor}$ x Children | | | | | | | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.02 | | | |
| $PWR_{Partner}$ x Children | | | | | | | -0.06 | 0.08 | -0.84 | | | |
| $NWR_{Actor}$ x Children | | | | | | | 0.17* | 0.08 | 2.05 | | | |
| $NWR_{Partner}$ x Children | | | | | | | -0.01 | 0.08 | -0.17 | | | |
| $PWR_{Actor}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | -0.09 | 0.07 | -1.33 |
| $PWR_{Partner}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | 0.02 | 0.07 | 0.30 |
| $NWR_{Actor}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | -0.04 | 0.07 | -0.53 |
| $NWR_{Partner}$ x WL | | | | | | | | | | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.03 |
| -2 x log (lh) | 395.77 | | | 346.23 | | | 340.56 | | | 343.83 | | |
| Diff -2 x log (lh) | | | | 49.55*** | | | 5.66 | | | 2.40 | | |
| Df | | | | 6 | | | 4 | | | 4 | | |
| Within-dyad variance | 0.21 | 0.03 | | 0.17 | 0.02 | | 0.17 | 0.02 | | 0.17 | 0.02 | |
| Between-dyad variance | 0.07 | 0.02 | | 0.05 | 0.02 | | 0.06 | 0.02 | | 0.05 | 0.02 | |

*Note*. [a] 0 = no, 1 = yes. PWR = Positive Work Reflection. NWR = Negative Work Reflection.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

To gain insight into the pattern of the interaction, we conducted simple slopes analyses using the online tool provided by Preacher et al. (2006). Our simple slopes analysis showed that for both couples with and without children, positive work reflection was significantly associated with work engagement. However, the association was weaker for couples with children ($b$ = 0.34, $t$ = 2.42, $p$ = .02) compared to couples without children ($b$ = 0.72, $t$ = 7.85, $p$ < .001). Furthermore, living with children was not a significant moderator for the relationship between employees' negative work reflection and work engagement but strengthened the positive link between employees' negative work reflection and their exhaustion (see Figure 2). Simple slopes analysis revealed that for couples without children, negative work reflection was significantly associated with exhaustion, $b$ = 0.19, $t$ = 4.97, $p$ < .001. For couples without children, the positive association was stronger, $b$ = 0.36, $t$ = 4.76, $p$ < .001. Regarding Research Question 2 – the potential moderating effect of living with children on the associations between the employee's work reflection and their partner's a) work engagement and b) exhaustion, no significant cross-level interactions were found. Regarding the moderating effect of work-linkage on the associations between employees' work reflection and partners' a) work engagement and b) exhaustion, there was no significant moderation effect. Thus, Hypotheses 5a, 5b, 6a and 6b were not supported.

**Figure 2**

*Interaction Effect Between Living with Children and Employees' Positive Work Reflection (PWR) Predicting Employees' Work Engagement.*

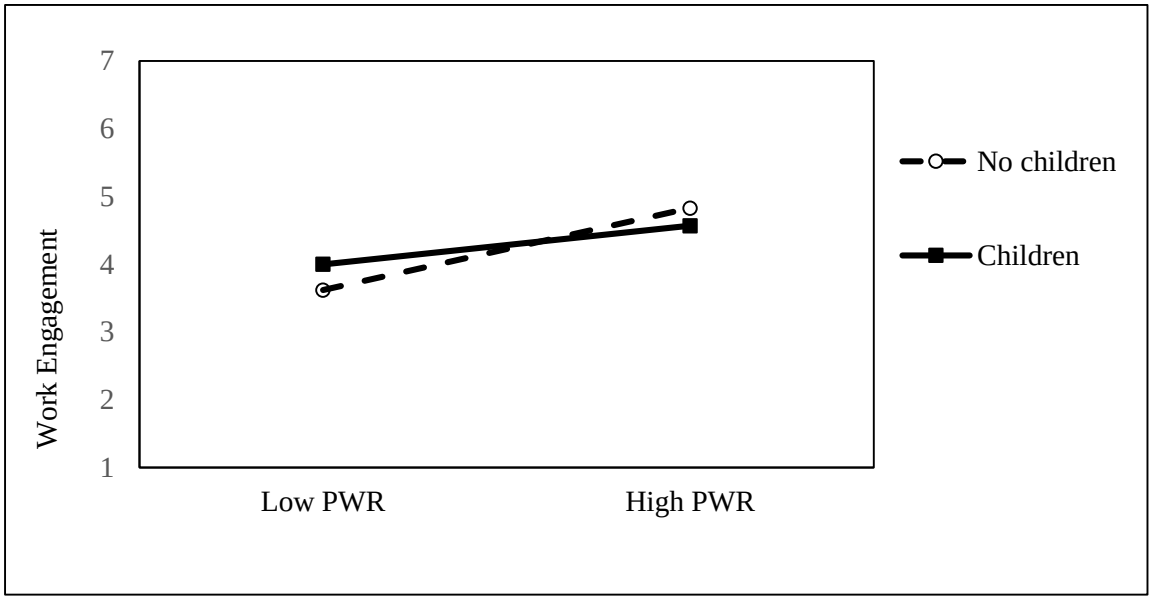
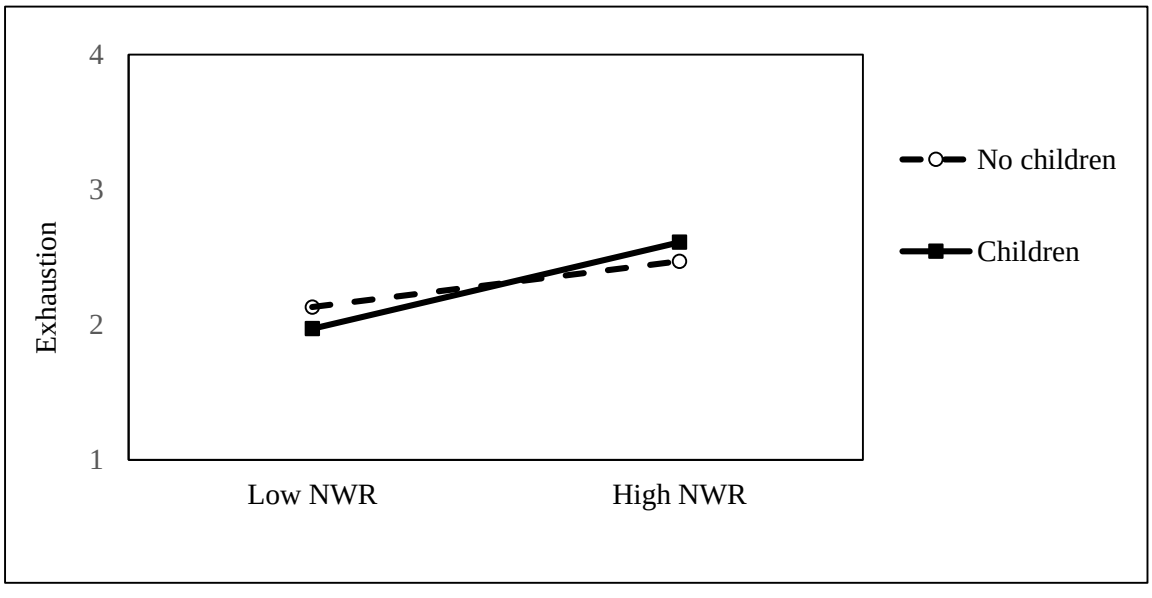



**Figure 3**

*Interaction Effect Between Living with Children and Employees' Negative Work Reflection (NWR) Predicting Employees' Exhaustion.*



## 3.6. Discussion

The aim of this multi-source study of dual-earner couples was to investigate whether employees' positive and negative work reflection during off-job time are associated with their own and with their partners' work engagement and exhaustion. Furthermore, the moderating effects of living with children and work-links of the couple were also examined. We found positive associations between employees' positive work reflection and both their own and their partners' work engagement. Employees' positive work reflection was also associated with their decreased exhaustion. Employees' negative work reflection was negatively associated with their own work engagement and positively associated with their own exhaustion, but unrelated to their partners' outcomes. Moderator analyses revealed that living with children weakened the link between employees' positive work reflection and their own work engagement and strengthened the link between employees' negative work reflection and their exhaustion. The couple's work-linkage did not moderate any of these relations.

### Theoretical Contributions

In line with COR theory and previous research (Casper et al., 2019; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Jiang & Johnson, 2018; Meier et al., 2016; Ott et al., 2019), positive work reflection as resource-providing and negative work reflection as resource-depleting non-work experiences were related to employees' exhaustion and work engagement. Our finding that both positive and negative work reflection contribute to employees' work engagement highlights the need to consider the valence of employees' work-related thoughts rather than the mere absence of any work-related thinking (i.e., psychological detachment). Previous research that focused on the relation between psychological detachment and work engagement showed mixed results (Shimazu et al., 2012; Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2010; Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). Our findings suggest that considering the nature of work-related thoughts may help to resolve

these inconsistent findings. By fully refraining from all work-related thoughts, employees are not taking advantage of positive work experiences. More precisely, thinking about the positive sides of one's job can be even more beneficial than forgetting about work (Meier et al., 2016) and might increase the motivation to continue work with dedication and absorption, thereby showing high work engagement.

By extending previous research on the individual consequences of employees' work reflection and contributing to crossover research (Casper et al., 2019; Flaxman et al., 2018), we showed that in our sample, employees' positive work reflection was not only associated with their own work engagement, but also with their partners' work engagement. In line with the assumption of direct (empathy) and indirect (positive interactions) crossover processes, our results suggest that the effects of employees' positive work reflection as a resource-providing experience were transferred to the partner and enabled resource investments resulting in partners' increased work engagement. Hence, our findings indicate that employees' positive work-related thinking seems to be not only beneficial for themselves, but also for their partners. We did not find the hypothesized effect of employees' positive work reflection on partners' exhaustion. Our results point to the notion that employees' positive experiences do not transmit as easily to partners' well-being as they are transferred to work engagement as a motivational component.

In contrast to our expectations, negative work reflection was not associated with partners' outcomes. Similar to the findings of Ott et al. (2019), it might be that the effect of negative work reflection depends on further moderating variables. More precisely, it is possible that employees are less likely to share negative work-related thoughts with their partners so that the effects of negative work reflection do not cross over to the partner. Another explanation might be that partners react differently to positive versus negative work-

related thinking, paying more attention to positive thoughts (Gable et al., 2004) than to negative thoughts.

Our moderator analyses revealed that living with children detracts from the positive effects of positive work reflection and strengthens the detrimental effects of negative work reflection. Hence, our results suggest that living with children constitutes an additional demand that reduces the motivational effects of positive work reflection and amplifies the negative effects of negative work reflection on the employee. In contrast to the findings of Hahn et al. (2014), living with children did not moderate the effect of work reflection on partners' work engagement or exhaustion. Based on previous empirical findings and theoretical considerations (Barnet-Verzat et al., 2011; Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn & Dormann, 2013; Song et al., 2008), we argued that living with children implies having less time together as a couple, avoiding negative moods in the presence of children and being more distracted, which results in having fewer opportunities to notice partners' work-related thoughts and lessens crossover effects. However, as underlying mechanisms were not measured, it remains unclear whether the non-significant moderation effect could be explained by further variables.

In contrast to our expectations and recent empirical findings (Fritz et al., 2019), work-linked and non-work-linked couples did not differ in the effects of work-related thinking. For both couples with and without work-linkage, employees' positive and negative work reflection were equally beneficial or harmful, respectively. Our findings suggest that the higher work-home integration of a work-linked couple neither increases the transfer of resources nor the transfer of strain to the partner. As Fritz et al. (2019) found that employees' rumination is positively associated with their partners' insomnia in work-linked couples only, further moderating mechanisms should be taken into account. For instance, the moderating effect of a couple's work-linkage may depend on whether and to what extent employees share

work-related thinking and experiences with their partners (Hicks & Diamond, 2008). Furthermore, differences in the composition of the samples in our study and in the study of Fritz et al. (2019) might also hint to potential moderators. Participants in the study of Fritz et al. (2019), were on average older than participants in our study which is possibly associated with different living situations (e.g., having older children who demand fewer childcare, stronger focus on other life domains such as work) that might affect the relations. Moreover, as the study of Fritz et al. (2019) was conducted in the USA while our study was conducted in Germany, cultural differences might play a role.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Our study is not without limitations. Even though the influence of the individual's predictors was separated from their partner's predictors by analyzing our dyadic data with the APIM, the cross-sectional design of our study does not allow to draw causal inferences. While we hypothesized that work reflection predicts employees' and partners' work engagement and exhaustion, it is also possible that highly engaged people tend to have more positive and less negative work-related thoughts (Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014). Similarly, exhausted employees may tend to think more negatively about work (Sonnentag et al., 2014); that is, reverse effects may exist. Therefore, longitudinal or intervention research is needed to clarify the causal relations between work reflection and exhaustion and work engagement.

Another limitation may concern the sample of participants. Individuals whose partners did not participate in our study and thus were not included scored higher on exhaustion than the couples in the final sample. Hence, the sample might be biased towards couples with lower exhaustion values, which might lead to an underestimation of the effects of work reflection on well-being and work behavior. Furthermore, our sample was quite well-educated implying that our findings might be most applicable to academics. In our study, the

participants were also relatively young with an average age of 33.32 years. As a couple's young age might imply that their children are relatively young needing more attention and care than older children, the moderating role of living with children might be stronger in younger couples with children. Furthermore, in couples with higher ages, care of elderly parents might become an issue that affects the hypothesized relations. Future research should include couples with a great age range to be able to investigate participants' age and associated living conditions (e.g., living with small children, caring of elderly parents) as additional boundary conditions that might influence the effects of work reflection on work engagement and exhaustion.

Based on previous research and crossover effects (Bakker & Demerouti, 2009; Fritz et al., 2019; Hahn et al., 2012), we argued that employees' work reflection should affect their partners' exhaustion and work engagement through mediating interaction processes (e.g., work-related conversations), but did not explicitly test these interactions processes. Future research should explore the underlying mechanisms of the associations between work reflection and partners' exhaustion and engagement. More specifically, sharing positive and negative work-related thoughts with the partner may initiate crossover processes. When sharing positive thoughts (e.g., about successes), the partner might benefit from an employee's success by basking in their glory and being infected by their positive mood leading to greater work engagement and reduced feelings of exhaustion. Similarly, sharing of negative thoughts (e.g., about problems or failures) might discourage the partner by feelings of empathy and compassion, resulting in increased exhaustion and diminished work engagement.

In a recent study using latent profile analysis, Casper et al. (2019) showed that positive and negative work reflection occur in different configurations within employees. These different configurations or profiles relate differently to well-being. Future research

may extend the notion of work reflection profiles to couples and investigate how the interplay of matching (e.g., two positive reflectors) or conflicting profiles (e.g., high reflector vs. non-reflector) affects both partners' well-being and work outcomes.

Our study focused on the presence or absence of children in a household as a boundary condition for the effects of work reflection on well-being and work behavior. However, the mediating mechanisms – that is, in what way the presence of children in a joint household affects an employee's nonwork experiences – remain unclear. The moderating effect of the presence of children might depend on the children's ages and on the specific activities and experiences with the children. For instance, spending time together with children in absorbing pleasant activities might serve as a distraction from work and might help employees forget about work. Future research should focus on employees' interactions and experiences with their children to shed more light on the influence of children.

**Practical Implications and Conclusion**

As our results show that work reflection is associated with employees' well-being, interventions to increase positive work reflection and decrease negative work-related thinking (Bono et al., 2013; Querstret et al., 2016) might be useful to foster employees' and their partners' work engagement and reduce exhaustion, particularly for employees without children. For instance, the 'three good things' method, an intervention that encourages participants to write about three good things that happened during the day, resulted in better psychological well-being (Bono et al., 2013). In contrast, it might not be helpful to instruct people not to think about their negative experiences. Therefore, interventions regarding negative work reflection should rather target coping strategies that help dealing with negative thoughts, not only by positive reappraisal (Lazarus, 2006) but also by a solution-focused approach that drives problem resolution (Weigelt & Syrek, 2017) and fosters well-being in

the long run. Casper et al. (2019), for instance, found that additional positive work reflection can, to some extent, lessen the detrimental effect of negative work reflection on well-being. Thus, employees who mostly tend to think negatively about their jobs should be encouraged to think about the positive sides of their jobs as well.

Furthermore, organizations can also contribute to employees' well-being by implementing a work design that allows employees to forget about work during leisure time and help them to recover (e.g., company policies that support a strict separation of work and home; health programs and fitness-related benefits) or that provides resources that buffer the impact of negative work reflection. For example, Ott et al. (2019) found that negative work reflection was directly associated with reduced self-efficacy and indirectly associated with work engagement only when the participants perceived low organizational support.

As living with children constitutes an additional demand that reduces the motivational effects of positive work reflection and amplifies the negative effects of employees' negative work reflection, especially dual-earner couples with children should take care of their well-being and increase efforts to recover from work-related stress. By using the partner as a resource, dual-earner couples can benefit from partners' social support or recovery-related support to facilitate recovery (Haun et al., 2017; Park & Haun, 2017).

Taken together, our findings support our proposition that it is crucial to investigate different types of work-related thinking as thinking about the positive sides of one's job is not only beneficial to employees' own work engagement and exhaustion but also to their partners' work engagement. Our study sheds light on the role of partners and children in employees' recovery processes, underlining that it is important to consider employees' social environment to fully understand in what way work reflection affects both employees' and partners' well-being and work-related behavior.

# CHAPTER 4

# 4. Study 3: “Darling, You Won't Believe What Happened at Work Today": A Diary Study on Sharing Work Events Among Dual-Earner Couples[8]

## 4.1. Abstract

After work, employees often share their work experiences with their partners. Yet, little is known about consequences of these work-related conversations. In this study with dual-earner couples, we investigate daily consequences of sharing positive and negative work events with the partner both for employees’ and their partners’ affect and work-related self-esteem. Over the course of a workweek, 73 heterosexual dual-earner couples filled in questionnaires after-work and at bedtime. Dyadic multilevel analyses showed that sharing positive work events was positively associated with employees’ positive affect but not with partners’ positive affect. Sharing negative work events was both unrelated to employees’ and partners’ negative effect. Sharing positive work events was not associated with employees’ self-esteem but negatively associated with partners’ self-esteem. Sharing negative work events was negatively related to both employees’ and partners’ self-esteem. Our study extends previous research about consequences of work-related conversations by considering self-esteem as an outcome and by adding a dyadic perspective.

[8] This chapter is based on a manuscript that has been submitted for publication.
Walter, J., & Haun, V. C. (under review). “Darling, you won’t believe what happened at work today”: A diary study on sharing work events among dual-earner couples. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*.

## 4.2. Introduction

Many employees share the good and bad things that happened to them during the workday such as positive customer feedback or having a conflict with their significant others (i.e., social sharing; Rimé, 2009). Even though work-related conversations with the intimate partner are common (Gable et al., 2006), few studies investigated their content and whether sharing positive and negative work events has beneficial or detrimental consequences for both partners in dual-earner relationships.

By sharing work events, employees keep their work actively in mind, reliving the work events again (Rimé, 2009). Depending on the valence of work events, the reactivation by sharing them may serve as either a driver or an inhibitor of employees' well-being and resources (Baranik et al., 2017; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Tremmel et al., 2018). Although being told about an emotionally valanced event is an emotion-eliciting situation itself (Christophe & Rimé, 1997), previous research has rarely considered consequences of social sharing for the listener's well-being (for an exception see Hicks & Diamond, 2008)

This study aims to answer the question how sharing positive and negative work events with the partner are related to both the own and partners' affect and self-esteem. By drawing on social sharing theory (Rimé, 2009), our study makes several contributions to the literature. First, our study extends research on work events and their consequences for well-being. Whereas previous studies on sharing emotional events did not focus on *work-related* events in particular (Hicks & Diamond, 2008) or exclusively on sharing with the partner (Tremmel et al., 2018), our study provides a comprehensive view on work-related conversations. By examining self-esteem as additional, more evaluative outcome, we broaden the perspective of consequences of social sharing which have been largely limited to affective and well-being related outcomes (Gable et al., 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Tremmel et al., 2018). Work-related self-esteem is an important predictor of employees' work-related motivation, attitudes

and behavior (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Second, adopting a dyadic perspective allows to investigate the differential consequences of work-related conversations for both partners in a couple and enhances our understanding of crossover processes in couples (Hobfoll et al., 2018). We add to existing literature (Gable et al., 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Neff et al., 2012; Tremmel et al., 2018) by examining how talking about work-related successes and problems does not only impact the employees' but also their partners' self-esteem and affect. Third, we contribute to the growing literature on dyadic recovery processes. Past research examined several strategies how dual-earner couples cope with and recover from work in leisure time (Hahn et al., 2012; Hahn et al., 2014; Park & Fritz, 2015; Park & Haun, 2017; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2018; Walter & Haun, 2020a, 2020b). Although previous studies speculated about the influence of talking with one's partner, they did not measure these specific behaviors (Neff et al., 2012; Walter & Haun, 2020b). Engaging in work-related conversations with the partner is a proactive and intentional behavior to deal with work issues during leisure time. In our study, we shed light on how employees' sharing of positive and negative work events affect their own and their partners' recovery processes after work.

## 4.3. Theoretical Background

### Experiencing and Sharing Affective Work Events

Affective events theory describes affective events as events to which "people often react emotionally" (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996, p. 11). The emotional reaction is based on cognitive appraisal processes (Lazarus, 1991) which categorize the event in terms of valence, intensity and perceived coping potential. According to the social sharing of emotion theory (Rimé, 2009), after emotional experiences people have a strong need to share them with other people. Social sharing is a way to express, clarify, name, and organize emotions (Rimé,

2009). By sharing affective events, people aim to experience clarification and meaning, venting, and support (Gable et al., 2004; Rimé, 2009).

In this paper, we focus on state self-esteem and positive and negative affect as indicators of employees' personal resources and well-being. Self-esteem describes a person's self-evaluation of their value (Rosenberg et al., 1995) As self-esteem can vary from day to day as a function of daily experiences (Nezlek & Plesko, 2001), we investigated state self-esteem. Day-level self-esteem was found to be associated with increased work engagement and decreased psychological detachment (Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Affect describes a person's mood that can be subdivided into the highly distinctive dimensions of positive and negative affect (i.e., experiencing positive and negative moods; Watson et al., 1988).

**Employees' Affect and Self-Esteem as Consequence of Sharing Work Events**

Experiencing affective events is associated with employees' affective states and self-esteem (Nezlek & Plesko, 2001; Ohly & Schmitt, 2015). Subsequently, when employees share work events with their partners, they relive and re-experience these affective events so that they remain cognitively active, more salient and more accessible in memory (Rimé, 2009). In turn, the reliving of events by social sharing should be associated with employees' affect and self-esteem.

Capitalization theory (Langston, 1994) posits that people can take advantage of positive events by sharing them with someone else. Capitalization is the interpersonal interaction of retelling good news that offers benefits "over and above the original value of the positive event" (B. J. Peters et al., 2018; p. 2). Thus, social sharing of positive events sustains, prolongs or augments positive thoughts and feelings (Rimé, 2007), resulting in increased positive affect (Gable et al., 2004). Empirical evidence showed that discussing

positive work events influenced life satisfaction, affect and work-family balance (Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Ilies et al., 2015; Ilies et al., 2017; Tremmel et al., 2018).

Similar to rumination (Cropley et al., 2006), by social sharing, the individual relives the negative event, negative thoughts and feelings are reactivated and rehearsed (Rimé, 2009). Research showed that sharing negative work experiences was related to increased negative affect, exhaustion, burnout, and work-to-family-conflict (Baranik et al., 2017; Haggard et al., 2011; Tremmel et al., 2018; Zellars & Perrewé, 2001).

Depending on the experience of positive and negative events, self-esteem can change (Nezlek & Plesko, 2001). For instance, work experiences which make the employee feel competent lead to more positive images of oneself whereas experiencing failure leads to decreased self-esteem (Brockner, 1989). When sharing success (or failure) with the partner, the employee relives the affective work event and the associated emotions are more salient (Rimé, 2009), resulting in increased (decreased) self-esteem. We propose the following hypotheses[9]:

*H1: Employees' daily sharing of positive work events is positively related to a) employees' positive affect and b) employees' self-esteem at bedtime.*

*H2: Employees' daily sharing of negative work events is a) positively related to employees' negative affect and b) negatively related to employees' self-esteem at bedtime.*

**Partners' Affect and Self-Esteem as Consequence of Sharing Work Events**

We propose that social sharing initiated by an employee in a relationship will not only have implications for their own, but also for their partner's affect and self-esteem. According to

[9] As in past research, symmetric relationships (i.e. negative factors predict negative affect, positive factors predict positive affect) were more consistently pronounced for well-being outcomes (for an overview see Sonnentag, 2015), we expect sharing positive work events relates to positive affect and sharing negative work events relates to negative affect.

social sharing theory (Rimé, 2009) being told about an emotionally valenced event is an emotion-eliciting situation itself. Two theoretical models explain why social sharing is relevant to partners' resources and well-being.

First, the extended self-evaluation model (Beach & Tesser, 1995) predicts that in intimate relationships, the partner becomes part of the own identity. As relationship partners empathize with each other to a large extent (Pinkus et al., 2008), partner's success or failure is experienced as one's own (McFarland et al., 2001). When an employee shares negative (positive) work events, the partner's self-evaluation and affective well-being should suffer (benefit), too. McFarland et al. (2001) showed that study participants experienced positive affect after success of their partners and tended to have increased self-evaluations (which are part of a person's self-esteem; Rosenberg et al., 1995).

Second, the self-expansion model (Aron et al., 2013) proposes that in intimate relationships, the partner's resources, perspectives, and identities are included in the self. When the employee shares positive or negative work events, the partner experiences this positivity/negativity to some extent as their own feelings. For instance, being told about one's partner's most positive event was associated with positive affect (Hicks & Diamond, 2008). Neff et al. (2013) found that employees' job-related self-efficacy was positively related to their partners' self-efficacy, mediated by vicarious experience (using other people as model for one's own self-evaluation; Bandura, 1997). We propose the following hypotheses:

*H3: Employees' daily sharing of positive work events is positively related to a) partners' positive affect and b) partners' self-esteem at bedtime.*

*H4: Employees' daily sharing of negative work events is a) positively related to partners' negative affect and b) negatively related to partners' self-esteem at bedtime.*

### Control Variables

As mentioned earlier, the triggers or antecedents of social sharing are affective experiences (Rimé, 2009). Experiencing affective work events is known to be related to affect and self-esteem (Eatough et al., 2016; Tremmel et al., 2018). Social sharing theory proposes that sharing has effects over and above the mere experience as it offers an opportunity to relive the positive or negative work events (Rimé, 2009). Therefore, in our analyses we control for experiencing work events to ensure that the hypothesized effects were uniquely due to sharing and not experiencing work events.

## 4.4. Method

### Sample and Procedure

To recruit participants, we advertised our study in social media community groups and distributed information leaflets in local facilities and mailboxes of private households. Participants had to be in a hetero-sexual relationship with both partners working at least three days per week. Couples who filled in the survey on at least three days received a 10 € gift card for an online store and were offered to receive a summary of their results. A total of 231 persons completed the general survey. After that, we invited participants' partners to complete the general survey. We matched data of 182 individuals into 91 couples who agreed to participate in the study. Data of the remaining 49 individuals could not be matched because their partners did not complete the general survey. Participants responded to three questionnaires per day (in the morning, after-work, and at bedtime) over the course of a workweek. In this study, we use data of the after-work and bedtime surveys only. As 18 couples did not respond to a single questionnaire during the workweek and thus had to be excluded, our final sample comprised 73 couples (146 individuals). Participants completed 665 (out of 730 possible) daily after-work surveys and 629 (out of 730 possible) daily

bedtime surveys. We matched the individual daily surveys to a pairwise daily data file consisting of 298 (out of 365 possible) days. On 140 days we had data from one partner of the couple only. Most of the couples (86.3 %) lived together and 15.1 % of the couples had at least one child living in their household. On average, couples were in a relationship for 7.21 years (*SD* = 7.63). The mean age of male partners was 34.67 years (*SD* = 9.25) and they worked 41.32 (*SD* = 9.19) hours per week. The female partners were 32.42 years old (*SD* = 9.39) and worked 35.54 (*SD* = 12.27) hours per week. Most participants (72.6 %) held an academic degree. The most frequently mentioned occupations were research assistant, engineer, teacher, and psychologist.

**Measures**

In the after-work questionnaire, participants reported the experience of work events throughout their workday. Sharing work events, state work-related self-esteem and affect were assessed in the evening before going to bed.

**Experiencing Work Events.** We used the work event checklist of Ohly and Schmitt (2015). Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale to what extent different positive and negative work events are applicable to their workday (1 = *Not applicable* to 5 = *Fully applicable*). One example of the five positive work events items was: “To what extent did you solve any work-related problem, complete a work task, or did you succeed in a certain work-related task today? “. One example of the six negative work events items was: “To what extent did you experience time pressure, excessive demands, or did you recognize mistakes which resulted in difficulties to fulfil your work tasks today?”.

**Sharing Work Events.** To assess if employees shared work events, we adapted the eleven work events of the checklist by Ohly and Schmitt (2015). Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale to what extent the statements were applicable to the respective

evening: “I told my partner today that I received praise, positive feedback or thanks from others at work (e.g., supervisor, colleagues or costumers)”, and “I told my partner today that I experienced conflicts or communication problems with colleagues” (1 = *Not applicable* to 5 = *Fully applicable*).

**State Work-Related Self-Esteem at Bedtime.** We used the adapted and shortened form of Heatherton and Polivy’s (1991) performance subscale (see e.g., Neff et al., 2012). Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale to what extent they agree with the following example: “I feel that I have less professional ability than others” (1 = *I do not agree at all* to 5 = *I fully agree*). Cronbach’s alpha ranged between .74 and .83 (women) and between .75 and .85 (men).

**Positive and Negative Affect at Bedtime.** We used ten items of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson et al., 1988). Participants rated on a five-point Likert scale their affective state “now, before going to bed” (1 = *not at all to* 5 = *very much*). Positive affect was measured with four items (e.g., “interested”, “inspired”). Negative affect was measured with the six-item short version of the negative affect scale (cf. Sonnentag & Binnewies, 2013 ; e.g., “distressed”, “nervous”). Cronbach’s alpha for negative affect ranged between .73 and .88 (women) and between .77 and .87 (men). Cronbach’s alpha for positive affect ranged between .75 and .81 (women) and .68 and .81 (men).

## Data Analysis

In diary data from members of a couple, there are two sources of nonindependence. First, partners living in a relationship share experiences and are more similar to each other than people not in a couple (Kenny et al., 2006). Second, the daily surveys within each individual are nonindependent so that we considered the dependent structure of our data by estimating a multilevel model for dyadic diary data in which daily observations of both dyad members are

nested within the dyad (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2012). This model includes attributes of the Actor-Partner Interdependence-Model and frames bidirectional influence in terms of individual outcomes and both actor effects (employee's dependent variable is regressed on their own independent variable), as well as partner effects (employee's dependent variable is regressed on their partner's independent variable) are estimated simultaneously. We tested our hypotheses in Mplus Version 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). In diary data, two types of effects can be distinguished. First, within-person associations fluctuate from day to day around an average level. Second, between-person effects vary from person to person. To decompose these effects, we partitioned the variance of the manifest day-level measures into latent within and between person variance components (Preacher et al., 2010). This approach ensures that path coefficients on the within-person level describe day-level relationships only whereas path coefficients on the between-person level show pure person-level relationships. As we hypothesized within-person relations, we will focus on the within-person relations, but report the between-person relations for completeness. We used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors to deal with missing values.

### 4.5. Results

In Table 7, the mean scores and standard deviations at the within- and between-person level, intraclass correlations (ICCs) and intercorrelations between the study variables are shown.

**Table 7**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Standardized Correlations Between Study Variables at the Person Level (N = 73 dyads, 146 individuals)*

| | Variable | M (SD) | ICC | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Women | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Positive WE | 2.87 (0.47) | 0.32 | | -.11 | .85*** | .37* | .44** | -.26 | .23 | .31 | -.01 | .47** | .25 | .03 | -.06 | -.05 |
| 2 | Negative WE | 1.80 (0.43) | 0.44 | .007 | | -.04 | .40* | -.23 | .91*** | -.44** | -.05 | .50*** | -.07 | .22 | -.12 | .49** | -.05 |
| 3 | Sharing positive WE | 2.44 (0.91) | 0.47 | .34*** | .14 | | .79*** | .49*** | -.30 | .23 | .31* | -.04 | .60*** | .41** | .16 | .02 | -.22 |
| 4 | Sharing negative WE | 2.08 (0.70) | 0.40 | -.02 | .38*** | .34*** | | .19 | .13 | -.03 | .14 | .33* | .43* | .77*** | .02 | .32 | -.34* |
| 5 | Positive affect | 2.08 (0.59) | 0.62 | .29*** | -.15* | .02 | -.08 | | -.04 | .30* | .05 | -.07 | .18 | .19 | .05 | -.02 | .08 |
| 6 | Negative affect | 1.41 (0.35) | 0.45 | -.19** | .25*** | -.002 | .03 | -.07 | | -.43*** | .09 | .41** | -.28 | -.09 | -.25 | .43** | -.07 |
| 7 | Self-esteem | 4.09 (0.60) | 0.77 | .28*** | -.06 | .10 | -.05 | .10 | -.25*** | | .04 | -.27 | -.01 | .12 | .05 | -.31* | .22 |
| Men | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Positive WE | 2.92 (0.48) | 0.44 | .04 | .13 | .07 | .10 | -.05 | .01 | -.06 | | .05 | .54*** | .12 | .15 | -.17 | .30* |
| 9 | Negative WE | 1.85 (0.51) | 0.51 | -.01 | .01 | .23** | .03 | -.15* | .10 | .03 | -.06 | | .05 | .53*** | -.30* | .52** | -.40** |
| 10 | Sharing positive WE | 2.43 (0.75) | 0.42 | .02 | .16* | .11 | .07 | -.09 | .13 | -.10 | .48*** | .08 | | .75*** | .27 | -.14 | -.02 |
| 11 | Sharing negative WE | 1.93 (0.72) | 0.45 | -.06 | .14 | .16 | -.004 | -.11 | .20** | -.18* | -.08 | .51*** | .27*** | | -.01 | .18 | -.21 |
| 12 | Positive affect | 2.33 (0.53) | 0.59 | .19** | .00 | .14 | .07 | .04 | -.04 | .12 | .08 | .03 | .28*** | -.02 | | -.15 | .21 |
| 13 | Negative affect | 1.32 (0.32) | 0.49 | -.001 | -.01 | -.04 | -.06 | -.11 | .12 | .11 | -.14 | .19* | -.13 | .03 | -.23** | | -.65*** |
| 14 | Self-esteem | 4.31 (0.56) | 0.82 | -.14 | -.09 | -.32*** | -.13 | -.01 | -.09 | .06 | .01 | -.08 | -.06 | -.21** | .04 | .15* | |

*Note.* * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. WE = work events. Within-person correlations are displayed below the diagonal. Between-person correlations are displayed above the diagonal. ICC = variance between couples / (variance between couples + variance within couples).

**Preliminary Analyses**

First, we examined whether positive affect, negative affect and self-esteem differed between couples by partitioning the total variance into within- and between-couple variance. The ICCs (e.g., the proportion of between-couple variance of the total variance) can be found in Table *7*.

Second, for dyadic data, it is recommended to test whether dyad members (men and women) are empirically distinguishable, i.e., means, variances, and covariances of the study variables differ between dyad members (Kenny et al., 2006). Therefore, we performed omnibus tests of distinguishability. We compared model fit of a gender-equated model, i.e., means, variances, and covariances are constrained to be equal across men and women, against a model in which they were free to vary (Ackerman et al., 2011). In line with our hypotheses, we estimated four models[10]. Model 1 estimated the association between sharing positive work events on positive affect, controlling for experiencing positive work events. Model 2 estimated the association between sharing positive work events on self-esteem, controlling for experiencing positive work events. Model 3 estimated the association between sharing negative work events on negative affect, controlling for experiencing negative work events. Model 4 estimated the association between sharing negative work events on self-esteem, controlling for experiencing negative work events. Accordingly, we performed four model fit comparisons (Model 1 to Model 4). For none of the models significant differences were found (see Table 8). Therefore, men and women were treated as indistinguishable in the following analyses.

[10] We estimated four separate models as the sample size on the couple level did not allow for testing more comprehensive models.

**Table 8**

*Omnibus Tests of Distinguishability: Results of Model Fit Comparisons*

| Model | $\Delta \chi^2$ | $\Delta df$ | $p$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1: experiencing and sharing positive work events, positive affect | 14.86 | 12 | .25 |
| Model 2: experiencing and sharing positive work events, self-esteem | 20.19 | 12 | .06 |
| Model 3: experiencing and sharing negative work events, negative affect | 13.41 | 12 | .34 |
| Model 4: experiencing and sharing negative work events, self-esteem | 15.16 | 12 | .23 |

*Note.* $\Delta \chi^2$ = change in chi-square; $\Delta df$ = change in degrees of freedom.

**Hypothesis Testing**

As described in the previous paragraph, we estimated four models. Our initial models are saturated as we modelled paths from all predictor variables to all outcome variables. Accordingly, these models have perfect fit. We hypothesized that employees' sharing of positive work events is positively associated with their own (H1a) and their partners' (H3a) positive affect. Model 1, that estimated the association between sharing daily positive work events and positive affect, fit the data well ($\chi^2(12) = 16.46$, $p = .17$, *CFI* =0.97, *RMSEA* = 0.04). Employees' sharing of positive work events was positively associated with their own positive affect, but not with their partners'. Therefore, H1a was supported, whereas H3a was not supported. The between-couple effects are similar and in the same direction as the within-person effects. The effect estimates of Model 1 are shown in Table 9.

In Model 2, we tested the hypotheses that employees' sharing of positive work events is positively related to employees' (H1b) and their partners' (H3b) self-esteem. The model fit the data well, ($\chi^2(12) = 15.75$, $p = .20$, *CFI* =0.98, *RMSEA* = 0.03). Employees' sharing of

positive work events was unrelated to employees' self-esteem at bedtime so that H1b was not supported (see Table 9). Contrary to our assumption, employees' sharing of positive work events was negatively (and not positively) related to partners' self-esteem. Therefore, H3b was not supported. The effects on between-couple level show the same patterns.

We postulated that employees' sharing of negative work events is positively related to employees' (H2a) and partners' (H4a) negative affect. Model 3, the association between sharing negative work events and negative affect, fit the data well ($\chi^2(12) = 16.86$, $p = .16$, $CFI = 0.97$, $RMSEA = 0.04$). Employees' sharing of negative work events was neither significantly associated with employees' negative affect nor with their partners'. Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 4a were not supported. Similarly, on the between-couple level, the effects are not significant. The effect estimates of Model 3 are presented in Table 10.

Hypotheses 2b and 4b stated that employees' sharing of negative work events is negatively related to employees' (H2b) and their partners' (H4b) self-esteem. Model 4 tested the association between sharing negative work events and self-esteem and fit the data well, ($\chi^2(12) = 18.15$, $p = .11$, $CFI = 0.96$, $RMSEA = 0.04$. In line with Hypotheses 2b and 4b, employees' sharing of negative work events was negatively related both to employees' and partners' self-esteem at bedtime (see Table 10). On the between-couple level, the associations were not significant.

**Table 9**

*Within-Couple and Between-Couple Effect Estimates of Sharing Positive Work Events on Positive Affect and Self-Esteem (Model 1 and Model 2)*

| | Model 1: Positive affect | | | Model 2: Self-esteem | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Effect type | Estimate | *SE* | *p* | Estimate | *SE* | *p* |
| Within-couple effects | | | | | | |
| Actor effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing positive work events [H1] | 0.079 | 0.029 | .006 | -0.008 | 0.018 | .664 |
| Experiencing positive work events | -0.018 | 0.041 | .666 | 0.073 | 0.027 | .007 |
| Partner effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing positive work events [H3] | 0.007 | 0.029 | .795 | -0.068 | 0.018 | < .001 |
| Experiencing positive work events | -0.026 | 0.042 | .543 | -0.011 | 0.026 | .670 |
| Between-couple effects | | | | | | |
| Actor effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing positive work events | 0.278 | 0.122 | .023 | 0.017 | 0.118 | .888 |
| Experiencing positive work events | -0.017 | 0.191 | .928 | 0.495 | 0.184 | .007 |
| Partner effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing positive work events | -0.063 | 0.125 | .613 | -0.255 | 0.118 | .030 |
| Experiencing positive work events | 0.081 | 0.201 | .688 | 0.088 | 0.201 | .660 |

*Note*. Unstandardized coefficients are displayed. *SE* = standard error.

**Table 10**

*Within-Couple and Between-Couple Effect Estimates of Sharing Negative Work Events on Negative Affect and Self-Esteem (Model 3 and Model 4)*

| | Model 3: Negative affect | | | Model 4: Self-esteem | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Effect type | Estimate | *SE* | *p* | Estimate | *SE* | *p* |
| Within-couple effects | | | | | | |
| Actor effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing negative work events [H2] | -0.009 | 0.024 | .696 | -0.042 | 0.021 | .042 |
| Experiencing negative work events | 0.086 | 0.042 | .042 | -0.003 | 0.034 | .924 |
| Partner effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing negative work events [H4] | 0.017 | 0.024 | .457 | -0.057 | 0.020 | .005 |
| Experiencing negative work events | 0.024 | 0.040 | .558 | 0.030 | 0.034 | .380 |
| Between-couple effects | | | | | | |
| Actor effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing negative work events | - 0.093 | 0.134 | .491 | 0.107 | 0.287 | .710 |
| Experiencing negative work events | 0.452 | 0.108 | < .001 | -0.569 | 0.204 | .005 |
| Partner effects | | | | | | |
| Sharing negative work events | 0.019 | 0.140 | .894 | -0.082 | 0.313 | .793 |
| Experiencing negative work events | 0.135 | 0.109 | .215 | 0.054 | 0.230 | .813 |

*Note*. Unstandardized coefficients are displayed. *SE* = standard error.

## 4.6. Discussion

The aim of this diary study with dual-earner couples was to examine whether sharing work events with the partner has effects on both partners' affect and self-esteem that go beyond the mere effects of experiencing work events. Sharing positive work events was positively related to employees' positive affect, but unrelated to their self-esteem. Sharing negative work events was unrelated to employees' negative affect, but negatively related to their self-esteem. Both sharing positive and negative work events were negatively associated with partners' self-esteem, but unrelated with partners' affect.

### Theoretical Contributions

Our findings suggest that sharing work events has differential implications for dual-earners' affect and self-esteem. In line with capitalization theory and with previous research (Gable et al., 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Tremmel et al., 2018), sharing positive work events was associated with employees' increased positive affect. By controlling for experiencing work events in the analyses, our results show that sharing work events with the partner has effects over and above the mere experience of affective events. Moreover, by examining a range of both positive and negative work events, we provided a more comprehensive view on work-related conversations, adding to previous studies about specific work events (Tremmel et al., 2018) and conversations about general affective life events (Hicks & Diamond, 2008).

Contrary to our hypotheses, *sharing* negative work events was unrelated to negative affect. We proposed that talking about negative work events reactivates the negative experience (Rimé, 2009) and therefore, the negative thoughts may increase negative affect. However, we found that the *experience* of negative work events was related to negative affect, indicating that in fact, there is a transfer of work events to employees' non-work time (i.e., spillover; Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). Apart from sharing negative work events there might be other reactions on negative work events

such as thinking about negative work events (Cropley et al., 2006; Walter & Haun, 2020a) which might imply being immersed in work related thoughts and withdrawing from conversations with the partner. In addition, it should be noted that previous research yielded mixed findings regarding the effects of sharing negative events on negative affect: whereas negative work-related conversations at home (not necessarily with the partner and sometimes with more than one person) were related to negative affect at bedtime and the next morning in the study of Tremmel et al. (2018), telling the partner about the most negative event of the day (which was not necessarily work-related; Hicks & Diamond, 2008) was not associated with increased negative affect. It might be, that the implications of sharing negative work events depend on further moderating factors, such as the conversation partner, the duration of work-related conversations or other, non-work-related topics or leisure activities. Another important factor might be the reaction of the partner, i.e., how they support and encourage when telling bad news (Rimé, 2009). Rimé (2009) proposed that there are two different modes of reaction which may have differential effects on the sharers' affective state. Similarly, in capitalization research it was found that having a partner who reacts enthusiastically (compared to destructive reactions) to sharing good news, is associated with higher individual and relationship well-being (Gable et al., 2004).

For self-esteem as outcome, we found a differential pattern of effects: whereas sharing was unrelated to employees' own self-esteem, experiencing positive work events was positively related to their self-esteem. Reliving a positive work experience by social sharing might be not powerful enough to increase the prediction of one's own self-evaluation. Another explanation could be that the benefits of social sharing need some time to unfold. In the study of Tremmel et al. (2018), sharing positive work events was unrelated to positive affect at bedtime but positively related to positive affect in the next morning.

Sharing negative work events was, as hypothesized and in line with social sharing theory (Rimé, 2009), negatively associated with employees' own self-esteem. As sharing negative work

events was, contrary to our hypothesis, unrelated to negative affect, our results suggest that affect and self-esteem are, although related to each other by their affective focus, distinct constructs with different associations to social sharing. In addition to the affective component, work-related self-esteem has an evaluative component that might explain the differences in effects. Work-related self-esteem indicates if people perceive themselves to be capable and competent in their job (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Talking about negative work experiences might demonstrate the employee that they did not show the desired performance, resulting in decreased self-esteem. Therefore, by not only considering affect but also self-esteem as different outcomes of sharing work events, our study extends previous knowledge and research on affective work events and their consequences for well-being and personal resources (Ohly & Schmitt, 2015; Tremmel et al., 2018; Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2018).

In addition, our study extends previous research on the individual consequences of social sharing by adding a dyadic perspective and examining in what way sharing positive and negative work events has implications for employees' partners. Based on the extended self-evaluation model and the self-expansion model (Aron et al., 2013; Beach & Tesser, 1995) we hypothesized that in intimate relationships, partners include the others' resources, perspectives, and identities in their self so that successes or setbacks are shared and will similarly influence their own affect and personal resources. In contrast to our expectations, employees' social sharing was not related to their partners' affect. This finding might suggest that in general, conversations between partners are characterized by a positive atmosphere of support and comfort which outweighs the negative emotions, resulting in non-significant associations between sharing negative events and negative affect. In the study of Hicks and Diamond (2008), similar results were found: being told about the most stressful event was not related to increased negative affect. However, being told about the most positive experience of the day was associated with increased positive affect which is contrary to our finding that employees' social sharing of positive work events is unrelated to partners' positive affect. It might be

that off-work conversation topics such as family and children or leisure activities are more relevant to one's affect during leisure time than a specific work-related event.

Moreover, it is well known that partners in intimate relationships compare themselves to their partners on a daily basis (Pinkus et al., 2008). Usually, studies found that due to their communal orientation, partners react more positively to upward (i.e., being outperformed by the partner) than to downward comparisons (Pinkus et al., 2008; Scinta & Gable, 2005). One explanation for our results might be that there are moderating factors which have an impact on the partners' affective responses (Beach & Tesser, 1995) such that when the partner is outperformed in an area which is important to them, they do not share the joy of their partner's success. Hence, future research might include job involvement as moderator. Other possible moderators might be the partners' general level of self-esteem or empathic concern: Neff et al. (2012) found that a person's day-specific self-esteem crossed over between partners only when partners scored low in general self-esteem and high in general empathic concern, respectively.

Compared to partners' affect as outcome, we see divergent results for partners' self-esteem: both employees' sharing of positive and negative work events is detrimental to partners' self-esteem. For negative work events, this finding is in line with social sharing theory (Rimé, 2009) and our hypothesis. Thus, partners in dual-earner couples integrate the other's negative work experiences in their own self-evaluation, resulting in decreased self-esteem. However, instead of the hypothesized positive association between employees' sharing of positive work events and partners' self-esteem, we found a negative one. This is surprising as we expected that partners can benefit from each other's success, basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976), resulting in increased self-evaluation. Similarly, the results of Neff et al. (2012) suggest that the reinforced positive effect of positive work events (by social sharing) would transmit to partner's self-esteem.

The results of study 1b in Pinkus et al. (2008) might help to explain our findings: their participants reported more positive self-evaluations after downward than after upward comparisons.

However, upward comparisons made them feel more pleasant (i.e., positive affect) than downward comparisons which underlines that affective reactions to comparisons with the partner may differ from self-evaluation of one's competence (i.e., self-esteem). Thus, in terms of self-esteem and affect, there might be two simultaneous reactions on partners' success.

Moreover, our results expand knowledge on dyadic processes as we show that sharing work events, no matter if positive or negative ones, is detrimental to partners' self-esteem. When looking only at the individual level, we would have concluded that sharing positive work events is beneficial for employees, as it is associated with increased positive affect. However, when taking a dyadic perspective, we see that the individual view does not cover the full picture. Therefore, our study emphasizes the importance of more dyadic studies, considering a couple as an entity with mutual reactions. Similarly, our results contribute to research on dyadic crossover (Hobfoll et al., 2018) as they suggest that social sharing as indirect crossover process (by interactions) rather serves as transmitter of detrimental, non-desirable states (i.e., partners' decreased self-esteem).

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

The limitations of the present study include that in diary studies, no clear causal inferences can be made (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). Our dyadic design allowed to separate the effects of one's own predictors from the partner's predictors on their affect and self-esteem. However, participants were requested to indicate the social sharing of work events, their affect and their self-esteem at the same time point (before going to bed) which might be associated with common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Thus, we cannot be sure that reporting of social sharing reflects the actual sharing as it might be influenced by their affect at that moment.

Further, in our analyses, we did not find the hypothesized negative association between sharing negative work events and negative affect. We speculated that this might be due to changes of negative affect throughout the conversation which results in a non-significant association. It is

possible that first, sharing negative work events increases negative affect by recalling the negative events. However, when the employee had the possibility to vent their negative feelings, it might be that they feel relieved, resulting in decreased negative affect. Future diary studies could explore the temporal sequences and fluctuations in negative affect further by adding several measurement points throughout the evening.

As our sample size did not allow testing both symmetric and asymmetric relationships between our study and control variables in one model, we estimated four separate models. Similarly, there might be interactions between sharing positive and negative work events which we could not investigate in one comprehensive model. Therefore, for future work it might be desirable to increase sample size, allowing to test more comprehensive models.

Future research should also investigate if there are ways or situations for employees to benefit from social sharing of positive work events (in terms of increased positive affect) without condoning the negative implications for their partners' self-esteem. As it was found that a highly communal orientation is associated with feeling connected to the other person, it might depend on their communal orientation whether partners benefit from sharing successes or feel outperformed (Locke & Nekich, 2000). Furthermore, future research is needed to clarify the role of partner reactions in the association between social sharing and both employees' and partners' well-being and might consider affective vs. cognitive sharing mode (Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2018).

**Practical Implications**

Our results show that sharing positive work events is beneficial to employees' affect. However, as it is detrimental to partners' self-esteem, employees should carefully weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of sharing positive work events. In order to prevent harm to the partner, employees could rather think about the positive aspects of one's job, as positive work reflection was found to be beneficial to employees' well-being and engagement (Walter & Haun, 2020a). Further, we found that

sharing negative work events is detrimental for both employees and partners' self-esteem. However, since partner support is a powerful resource to feel better and to increase relationship satisfaction (Haun et al., 2017; Park & Fritz, 2015) and sharing emotions was found to increase social bonds (K. Peters & Kashima, 2007), we do not generally want to discourage employees to share bad news with the partner. Rather, it might be helpful to focus on finding a solution and to reframe the problem in a more positive way (Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2018; Weigelt & Syrek, 2017). Further, employees could share work events with other conversation partners. Coworkers in particular, might be appropriate to discuss work issues with, as they are familiar with the work environment and might even be able to support with solving specific work problems (Norling & Chopik, 2020).

## Conclusion

With a daily diary design, the present study showed that sharing work events with the intimate partner has implications for employees' positive affect and both employees' and their partners' work-related self-esteem. The dyadic perspective revealed that being told about an affective work event – no matter if a positive or a negative one – was detrimental to one's self-esteem. Thus, our research emphasizes the importance of taking a dyadic perspective to gain a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of dual-earner couples day-to-day interpersonal behaviors.

# CHAPTER 5

# 5. General Discussion

The goal of this dissertation was to examine the impact of work-related experiences during leisure time on dual-earner couples' well-being. In three empirical studies, I assessed in what way work-related thoughts and work-related interactions with the partner during leisure time affect both partners' recovery experiences and well-being (i.e., affect, emotional exhaustion, work engagement and work-related self-esteem). In addition, moderators related to the work domain (i.e., couples' work-linkage) and the home domain (i.e., living with children) were investigated. In this chapter, I will summarize and integrate the main findings of the three studies followed by a discussion of the theoretical implications, strengths and limitations, directions for future research as well as practical implications of the studies. Lastly, I will end with a conclusion.

## 5.1. Summary and Integration of Findings

In study 1, my co-author and I investigated whether a specific type of partner support, work-related spousal support, is related to both partners' recovery experiences. In addition, we examined couples' work-linkage as moderator. With path analyses, we tested the data of 130 dual-earner couples. We compared work-linked with non-work-linked couples in multiple group analyses and found that receiving work-related support from a partner was associated with increased relaxation and mastery experiences for work-linked couples only but not associated with psychological detachment for neither group. For non-work-linked couples, providing work-related support was positively related to employees' mastery experiences but unrelated to psychological detachment and relaxation in both groups.

Study 2 examined the associations between positive and negative work reflection with employees' and partners' work engagement and emotional exhaustion. Further, we included living with children and couples' work-linkage as moderators. The dyadic data of 130 dual-earner couples

was analyzed using the actor-partner-interdependence model. Employees' positive work reflection was positively associated with both their own and their partners' work engagement. Their positive work reflection was also associated with their own, but unrelated to their partners' emotional exhaustion. For negative work reflection we found a negative association with employees' own work engagement and a positive association with their own exhaustion but no associations with their partners' outcomes. Living with children weakened the link between employees' positive work reflection and their own work engagement and strengthened the link between their negative work reflection and emotional exhaustion. Couples' work-linkage did not moderate any of the associations.

In study 3, the consequences of daily sharing of work events with the intimate partner for both partners' affect and work-related self-esteem were investigated. Using diary data of 73 dual-earner couples and dyadic multilevel analyses, we found that sharing positive work events was positively related to employees' but unrelated to partners' positive affect. Sharing negative work events was not associated with employees' or partners' negative affect. For work-related self-esteem as outcome, sharing positive work events was unrelated to employees' but negatively related to partners' self-esteem. Sharing negative work events was negatively associated with both employees' and partners' self-esteem.

Taken together, the findings confirm that work-related experiences during leisure time do not always drain resources and impede dual-earner couples' recovery and well-being but have the potential to build resources and to increase well-being. High work-home integration in the form of positive work reflection and sharing positive work events seem to be beneficial for employees' and partners' work engagement and for employees' positive affect. In addition, receiving work-related support from the partner was found to be beneficial to work-linked couples' relaxation and mastery experiences whereas providing work-related support was associated with non-work-linked couples' increased mastery experiences. In contrast, high work-home integration in the form of negative work

reflection and sharing negative work events seem to be detrimental to employees' work engagement and exhaustion and both employees' and their partners' work-related self-esteem. Furthermore, being told about employees' positive work events appear to come at a cost for the partners (i.e., decreased self-esteem).

## 5.2. Theoretical Implications

This dissertation overcomes several shortcomings of previous research and therefore, contributes to research on dual-earner couples' recovery and well-being in several ways. In the following, I will describe the key contributions to boundary management, COR theory, recovery and well-being research, dyadic crossover research and boundary conditions of the impact of work-related experiences during leisure time.

### Work-Related Experiences During Leisure Time as Helpful Boundary Strategy

My findings challenge the view that work-related experiences during leisure (i.e., high work-home integration) inhibit or reduce well-being (Kinnunen et al., 2016; Wepfer et al., 2018). Thinking or talking about work can be a useful strategy to increase recovery and well-being for employees themselves, at least when the work-related content is positively valenced. Related to that, this dissertation provides empirical evidence for the extended stressor-detachment model that Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) suggested. They acknowledged that there might be circumstances in which not detaching from work could be beneficial to employees' well-being, namely when work-related thoughts do help to (re)appraise or cope with work-related problems. My research confirms and even extends this assumption by demonstrating that in addition to positive work-related thoughts, positive work-related conversations with the partner can foster employees' well-being.

### Work-Related Experiences During Leisure Time as Resource-Providing and Resource-Depleting Experiences

Using a resource-based approach, my studies add empirical evidence to COR theory (Hobfoll, 2002) as they show that both positive work-related thoughts and work-related experiences with the partner act as resources for the employees themselves and, in turn, are associated with increased recovery and well-being. Similarly, resource-depleting activities such as negative work reflection and sharing negative work events are related to decreased well-being. Thus, this dissertation empirically supports COR theory's corollaries of resource gain and loss spirals (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In addition, by incorporating positive work-related experiences, my studies add to research in the area of positive psychology and capitalization theory (Gable et al., 2004; Gable & Reis, 2010; Tremmel et al., 2018).

### A more Nuanced and Comprehensive Picture on Work-Related Experiences During Leisure Time

Furthermore, my studies complement previous research on both dual-earner couples' predictors of as well as multifaceted outcomes of recovery and well-being. As the associations between work-related experiences and indicators of well-being do not consistently point in one direction, it seems crucial to differentiate between the different types of work-related experiences and well-being outcomes. Investigating both positively and negatively valenced experiences allowed to get a comprehensive overview of dual-earner couples' specific work-related experiences during leisure time, thereby also adding to research on contextual predictors (Steed et al., 2021). Using a variety of well-being indicators, including a motivational and an evaluative component, helped to understand patterns of relationships and differences between implications for employees' and their partners' well-being. For instance, whereas positively valenced work-related experiences seem to cross over to partners' work motivation and work-related self-esteem, they are unrelated to partners' affect and exhaustion.

**Dyadic Crossover Processes in Dual-Earner Couples**

This dissertation expands knowledge about crossover processes in dual-earner couples and showed that partners and their work-related experiences do play a role for both partners' well-being. While some studies examined the transmission of well-being indicators (Bakker et al., 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2009; Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn & Dormann, 2013) or assessed non-work-related experiences with the partner during leisure time (Hahn et al., 2012), my studies are the first, to date, that used a dyadic design to investigate to what extent employees' work-related experiences during leisure time are related to partners' well-being. Even though we found fewer consequences for employees' partners than expected, the studies do confirm that there are simultaneous processes taking place and investigating data of both partners in a couple adds value and additional insights. Partners did benefit from employees' positive work reflection by increased work engagement but were not affected by employees' negative work reflection. However, employees' sharing of both positive and negative work events showed as detrimental for partners' work-related self-esteem. These differences might indicate that the consequences of work-related experiences during leisure time differ depending on whether the partner is involved or not. Further, the results point into the direction that listening to employees' work-related experiences might be the mechanism which is necessary that employees' affective work events cross over to the partner, at least for evaluative-oriented outcomes such as self-esteem, and might come at a cost for the listener. Thereby, I provide evidence for a specific crossover mechanism (i.e. indirect transmission through interaction; Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) by assessing work-related conversations between partners. Furthermore, this dissertation shows that incorporating a systemic (e.g., dyadic) view into recovery and well-being research is valuable to better understand the different implications of one partner's actions and experiences for both partners and the different roles partners may have in work-related interactions (e.g., providing and receiving work-related support). In one of my studies, for instance, a positively valenced work-related experience (i.e., sharing positive work events) is found to be beneficial for the

employees themselves (i.e., increased positive affect) but detrimental for their partners (i.e., decreased self-esteem). Thus, by combining evidence from two lines of research (i.e., crossover and recovery/well-being), the dyadic design of my dissertation provides valuable insights into the recovery and well-being processes of dual-earner couples.

**Boundary Conditions: The Moderating Impact of Living with Children and Couples' Work-Linkage**

My research contributes to knowledge about boundary conditions of dual-earner couples' experiences during leisure time and their well-being which helped to better understand interindividual differences (Sonnentag et al., 2017) and to which groups of dual-earner couples a high work-home integration is helpful. For employees, living with children seems to be an additional demand as they could not benefit to a large extent from work-related experiences. Research on the role of children for employees' well-being is mixed: while there is evidence that living with children decreases negative mood crossover between partners (Song et al., 2008) and employees evaluate spending time with their children as positive experience (Offer, 2016; Offer & Schneider, 2011; Robinson, 2014), other studies hint into the direction that employees with children experience more work-family conflict (Hammer et al., 1997), decreased family satisfaction (Beutell, 1999) and spend more time on household activities (Bianchi et al., 2000). This might imply that for dual-earner couples with children, it is particularly necessary to find ways to recover, other than engaging in work-related experiences during leisure time, such as spending time with their children (Offer, 2016). Whereas in my study, the presence of children did not moderate the impact of work-related experiences on partners' well-being (i.e., the crossover effect), former studies on detachment found evidence that living with children weakens crossover processes between partners (Hahn & Dormann, 2013) and moderated the association between partners' detachment and employees' serenity and negative activation so that the association was insignificant for couples with children (Hahn et al.,

2014). These results hint into the direction that crossover processes of detachment and work-related experiences, respectively are different and that there might be further moderating or mediating variables involved.

When it comes to the association between work-related experiences and dual-earner couples' well-being, the moderating role of couples' work-linkage appears to be limited as only the associations between work-related spousal support and the recovery experiences relaxation and mastery experiences were affected and there was no moderation effect on the links between work reflection and both work engagement and exhaustion. More specifically, receiving work-related support was only beneficial for work-linked couples' recovery (relaxation and mastery experiences) whereas providing work-related support was only beneficial for non-work-linked couples' mastery experiences. This result could point into the direction that the special situation of work-linked couples does only become evident when work-related experiences include a specific partner interaction (e.g., partner support). Consequently, one could speculate that sharing work events with the partner (as examined in study 3), would be more strongly associated with employees' and their partners' well-being as work-linked couples are more likely to fully understand the positive or negative work event the respective partner is sharing (Ferguson et al., 2016) and in turn, both partners will be more affected by it. As a conclusion, my research shows that for the group of work-linked couples, receiving work-related support from the partner is beneficial for their recovery which helps to make precise recommendations for these subgroup of dual-earner couples and adds to the literature on work-linked couples (Ferguson et al., 2016; Fritz et al., 2019; Halbesleben et al., 2010; Halbesleben et al., 2012; Park & Haun, 2017).

## 5.3. Strengths and Limitations

The strengths and limitations of the three individual studies are addressed in chapters 2, 3 and 4. In the following, overarching key strengths and limitations of my dissertation will be discussed. The most prominent strength is the dyadic design of the three studies. As intimate partners share a communal orientation (Le et al., 2018), behaviors of one partner are likely to affect the other partner, too. Therefore, I took the non-independence in couples into account and considered responses of both partners. With actor-partner interdependence models (Kenny et al., 2006), the influence of each partner's own predictors was separated from their partner's predictors which revealed different consequences for both partners' well-being. In addition, the multi-source (dyadic) data I used reduced the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

By using dyadic data and different work-related experiences as predictors, another strength of this dissertation is that the role of employees' work-related experiences for their partners' recovery and well-being was studied quite comprehensively and was refined from study to study: study 1 examined providing work-related support which consists of both emotional and instrumental support. It turned out that this rather specific (limited to *work-related* support) work-related experience was related to work-linked couples' but unrelated to non-work-linked couples' recovery. Then, study 2 showed that employees' positive work reflection is associated with partners' increased work engagement but the results could not explain why (i.e., what happens between the partners in terms of crossover mechanism?). Subsequently, study 3 demonstrated that sharing work events could be one of the specific behaviors/interactions which transmits employees' work-related experiences to the partners.

With regards to limitations, all assessed variables were self-report measures which bears the risk that the actor effects (i.e., impact of employees' work-related experiences on their own recovery and well-being) overestimate the actual relationships between the variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). It should be noted, though, that many of the variables are highly subjective (e.g., recovery

experiences, affect, self-esteem, exhaustion) so that it is questionable whether other-reports would better represent the true scores but could certainly complement self-reports in future studies. In addition, a recent study showed that it is rather unlikely that common method variance invalidates findings of same source associations (Bozionelos & Simmering, 2022).

As data for studies 1 and 2 were cross-sectional, temporal dynamics of dual-earner couples' recovery and well-being process could not be examined and no causal inferences can be made. I assumed, for instance, that negatively valenced work-related experiences during leisure time result in employees' decreased recovery and well-being. However, it is also possible that employees with a lower level of recovery and well-being engage less frequently in work-related experiences. To overcome this limitation, a daily diary study (study 3) was added. With daily measurement points, experiences can be captured more accurately by reducing the recall bias (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). In contrast to laboratory studies, diary studies allow the recording of experiences in a naturalistic and spontaneous setting (Bolger et al., 2003) and the consideration of contextual and dynamic aspects (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). Therefore, with the diary study, I provide insights into daily interaction processes between partners (within-person and within-couple effects).

### 5.4. Directions for Future Research

In the following, I will elaborate on some ideas for future research which emerged from my dissertation. First, crossover mechanisms and partner interactions in dual-earner couples should be examined in more detail. In study 3, it was found that sharing work events with the partner is one interaction which enables crossover. In addition, in study 1, providing work-related support was associated with increased mastery experiences, at least for non-work-linked couples. It would be worthwhile to investigate which part of the interaction is critical to make crossover happen to better understand transmission processes. Is it that employees need to make their emotions visible, such as when venting (Shah & Huang, 2022) or capitalizing (Gable et al., 2004)? Or does crossover depend

on how thoroughly partners listen when employees talk about work? Do certain types of support provision (emotional/ informational/ esteem/ tangible/ esteem support; cf. Xu & Burleson, 2001) result in stronger/weaker crossover effects? Future research might want to take these questions into account when designing crossover studies on work-related experiences. In addition, the interplay of different work-related experiences and the reaction of partners might need to be considered in order to better understand work-related interactions between partners. Receiving work-related support was found to be beneficial for work-linked couples' recovery. However, sharing negative work events with the partners was associated with employees' decreased self-esteem. One could expect that when hearing about the other's negative experiences, the partner would provide support to comfort the other partner. There is initial evidence that when conversation partners react in a cognitive manner to the sharing of a negative work event (i.e., when they "suggest alternative explanations or reappraisal" of the negatively valenced behavior/situation; Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2018, p. 568) the detrimental impact on employees' negative affect was buffered. In contrast, reacting in an affective way (i.e., when "conversation partners provide comfort and consolation"; Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2018, p. 568) had no impact on employees' negative affect. Therefore, future studies should examine work-related partner interactions in a more nuanced way.

Second, future research about work-related experiences during leisure time and their consequences for the partner could investigate moderating factors in more detail. For employees, living with children weakened the beneficial effects of positively valenced work-related experiences and strengthened the detrimental effects of negatively valenced work-related experiences on employees' well-being. In my study, the crossover of work-related experiences on partners' well-being was not moderated by the presence of children in the household. However, former evidence showed that living with children weakens crossover processes between partners (Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn & Dormann, 2013). Therefore, future research could clarify in which circumstances the presence of children in a household constitutes an additional demand or resource and affects

crossover processes to the partner. It might be, for instance, that it depends on the amount of time partners spent either with the children or the partner or as a family.

Furthermore, in study 3, I found that employees' sharing of work events is detrimental for partners' self-esteem, regardless of the valence (both positive and negative). It seems crucial to better understand crossover processes for sharing positive work events to understand how to avoid detrimental consequences for partners. I hypothesized that intimate partners include the others' successes in their own identity (Aron et al., 2013; McFarland et al., 2001) and therefore, assumed that the benefits of sharing positive work events would transmit to the partner. It might be, that this depends on the extent of communal orientation a partner has (Locke & Nekich, 2000) or on social comparison processes (Beach & Tesser, 1995). Other studies hint into the direction that empathic concern (i.e., the extent to which one can feel into another person; Neff et al., 2012) or relationship satisfaction (Schulz et al., 2004) could play a role.

Third, future studies might want to examine the interplay of work-related and non-work-related experiences with the partner. Hahn et al. (2012), for instance, found that positive non-work-related experiences with the partner (i.e., absorption in joint activities) were beneficial for employees' recovery and well-being whereas negative experiences (i.e., conflict) increased negative affective states. It would be interesting to examine non-work-related and work-related experiences during leisure time in one study to investigate whether having a positive non-work-related experience could buffer the effects of a negative work-related experience on employees' well-being (and vice versa). In line with COR theory and loss or gain spirals (Hobfoll et al., 2018), it could be that having a negative (positive) experience in one domain makes it more likely to have also negative (positive) experiences in the other domain, too. In addition, it could be studied which experiences (work-related vs. non-work-related) do have a greater impact on employees' well-being and whether this depends on further moderating factors such as work-linkage, children, job or family satisfaction.

Fourth, future research on work-related experiences during leisure time should consider refined study designs. In an interview study with couples, Pearlin and McCall (1990) found that the timing of providing support is essential to make it successful: people need some time to elapse between describing the problem and receiving support. Therefore, including several measurement points during the evening could help to record experiences in real time and to clarify temporal processes of work-related experiences with the partner in particular and their outcomes. Furthermore, in the study of Tremmel et al. (2018), the effects of sharing positive work events showed in the next morning only and not at the same evening. Thus, beside the rather short-term consequences I found in my study, it seems fruitful to add further measurement points, for instance, in the next morning, when examining dyadic data of dual-earner couples.

In addition, it could be interesting to investigate work-related experiences in life phases when work plays a more important role for a temporally limited time period, such as when starting a new job. In such phases, it is likely that dual-earner couples are more influenced by work and therefore, more occasions for work-related experiences during leisure time might occur. Work-related gains such as a new job are related to happiness (Ballas & Dorling, 2007) so that these situations are likely to provide many opportunities to study dyadic processes in work-related experiences with the partner which would help to get more insights into the specific mechanisms and processes. Furthermore, future research might want to investigate dual-earner couples working from home. As the data collection of all three studies took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, employees' specific place of work was not considered. Due to the pandemic many employees moved to working from home (Bick et al., 2020) which implies a greater blurring between the work and the home domain as well as working and leisure time (Desrochers et al., 2005). Therefore, when both partners work from home, work-related experiences during leisure time could be more likely and could also have a greater impact on dual-earner couples' well-being as the work role and domain became more present.

Regarding study participants, future research could seek to capture a more diverse sample to check whether the findings of my dissertation are valid for other population groups as well. In my studies, around 70 % of the participants held an academic degree and the mean age ranged between 32 and 35 years. Further, only heterosexual dual-earner couples were considered. Regarding age, for instance, it might be that for older employees who have a longer work history, the work domain became less important and work-related experiences during leisure do either happen less frequently or could have less influence on their well-being. When it comes to conversation partners for work-related experiences during leisure time, it could also be interesting to investigate employees' broader social environment such as family or friends. In the study of Tremmel et al. (2018), for instance, around 40 % of work-related conversations were held with friends, relatives or co-workers. Thus, future research could compare work-related conversations with different conversation partners and their consequences for employees' well-being to enlarge knowledge about the impact of employees' social environment.

### 5.5. Practical Implications

The findings of my dissertation show that segmenting work and home is not always the best strategy to ensure well-being as this would imply missing out on the benefits of work-related experiences during leisure time. In my studies, different work-related experiences during leisure time have differential effects on different indicators of well-being and recovery so that a more nuanced view is necessary. At the moment no ultimate conclusion which is valid for all kinds of work-related experiences and situations can be drawn. As a preliminary recommendation, employees should be encouraged to think positively about their work because me and other researchers (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Meier et al., 2016) found positive work reflection to be beneficial for employees but also for their partners. In addition, other studies show that thinking positively about work can buffer the effects of negative work events or work reflection (Bono et al., 2013; Casper et al., 2019).

A method to implement more positive thinking could be a gratitude journal in which employees note work-related things they are grateful for (Cunha et al., 2019; Kaplan et al., 2014) or meditation (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Such interventions of positive psychology are shown to be positively related to subjective well-being (Bolier et al., 2013) so that the beneficial effects go even beyond the ones of the increase of positive work reflection.

In my dissertation, negatively valenced work-related experiences were consistently related to decreased well-being for both partners in dual-earner couples which is in line with other empirical evidence (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Ott et al., 2019). Employees who tend to regularly think or talk negatively about work might need to practice switching off from work (i.e., to mentally detach; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007) to ensure that their resources can replenish and they can recover from job demands. A recent meta-analysis (Karabinski et al., 2021) suggests that detachment outside work is more effective than detachment at work and interventions are more impactful when they include boundary management, emotional regulation or sleep improvement strategies. Internet-based recovery trainings, such as "GET.ON Recovery" (Ebert et al., 2015; Thiart et al., 2015) or the mindfulness-based intervention used in Michel et al. (2014) consist of several modules which cover different topics (sleep, recovery activities, work-home segmentation, boundary tactics, perseverative cognitions, coping with feelings, mindfulness and action plans) and promote employees' recovery and in particular, their detachment (Karabinski et al., 2021).

From an organizational standpoint, companies can contribute to reduce employees' negative work-related experiences by improving work conditions. A first step could be to record the current status quo of job demands and resources and then, in a second step, to develop appropriate interventions together with the employees. Niks et al. (2018), for instance, found that for the nursing department in a hospital, the introduction of job crafting and lean management led to an increase in detachment and other well-being indicators. In addition, as sharing work events was detrimental for partners' well-being, employees can use their colleagues and their team at work as an alternative to

discussing work-related issues with their partners. Organizations could offer possibilities for employees to regularly connect with colleagues so that work-related topics can be discussed among themselves (e.g., weekly / monthly catch-up meetings). Managers could also establish a weekly routine to reflect together as a team about the good and bad things of the work week.

Related to that, employees could try to involve other people of their own network (i.e., not exclusively the partner) when it comes to sharing work-related things with others. As crossover processes primarily take place between closely related individuals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), they might be less likely to occur with colleagues or friends. If employees feel the need to discuss work events with their partners, they should make sure that the conversation helps to either re-appraise the work-related issue in a more positive way or to solve the problem (Horowitz et al., 2001; Lazarus, 2006; Weigelt & Syrek, 2017).

For dual-earner couples who live with children, it seems to be even more important to take care of their well-being. As they could benefit less from positive work reflection and experienced more detrimental effects from negative work reflection, mentally detaching from work might be a more appropriate strategy for them. As mentioned above, interventions from positive psychology such as focusing on own strengths, positive future thinking (Bolier et al., 2013) or practicing mindfulness (Michel et al., 2014) could help them to recover from work and increase their well-being. In addition, parents might want to seek out for further support such as after-school care clubs or holiday care to reduce the demand of childcare. Moreover, for work-linked couples, receiving work-related support from the partner seems to be beneficial so that they could be encouraged to integrate supportive work-related conversations in their joint leisure time.

## 5.6. General Conclusion

For a long time, work-related experiences during leisure time were seen as detrimental to employees' recovery and well-being processes and switching off from work at home was the most suggested strategy to replenish drained resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2016; Wepfer et al., 2018). This dissertation confirmed that high work-home integration in the form of work-related experiences during leisure time can be beneficial for dual-earner couples' well-being but that it is necessary to distinguish between different experiences and their valence. Whereas positively valenced work-related experiences build resources and foster employees' well-being, negatively valenced work-related experiences drain resources and decrease employees' well-being. In contrast, being told about employees' work events (regardless of the valence) inhibits partners' well-being. Therefore, my studies confirmed that for dual-earner couples, it adds value to analyze couple data (i.e., responses of both partners in a couple) and emphasize that it is important to consider the potentially differential consequences for both partners' well-being. I hope that the findings of my dissertation stimulate future research on the specific mechanisms and boundary conditions for spillover and crossover processes in dual-earner couples which will advance our knowledge about their unique resources and needs.

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# APPENDIX

## German Abstract: Zusammenfassung

Doppelverdienerpaare müssen sowohl die Anforderungen der Arbeitswelt als auch des Privatlebens unter einen Hut bringen, sodass es besonders wichtig ist, dass sie ihre Freizeit nutzen, um sich zu erholen und verbrauchte Ressourcen wieder aufzufüllen. Während frühere Forschung zeigte, dass die Trennung von Arbeit und Privatleben für die Erholung und das Wohlbefinden von Arbeitnehmenden hilfreich ist, zeigt diese Dissertation die Vor- und Nachteile einer hohen Integration von Arbeit und Privatleben auf, indem sie die Auswirkungen arbeitsbezogener Erfahrungen in der Freizeit auf das Wohlbefinden beider Partner/-innen in Doppelverdienerpaaren untersucht. Konkret werden in den drei Studien die Folgen von a) arbeitsbezogener Unterstützung durch den/die Partner/-in, vom b) Nachdenken über die Arbeit und c) vom Teilen von Arbeitsereignissen mit dem/der Partner/-in betrachtet. Durch die Verwendung einer dyadischen Perspektive in allen drei Studien schließt diese Dissertation die Lücke, dass die Forschung über die Erholung und das Wohlbefinden von Doppelverdienerpaaren bisher nur selten Daten beider Personen eines Paares zur Untersuchung arbeitsbezogener Erfahrungen in der Freizeit mit einbezogen hat.

Studie 1 untersuchte die arbeitsbezogene Unterstützung durch den/die Partner/-in als Strategie zur Integration von Arbeit und Privatleben, die hilft, sich von der Arbeit zu erholen. Anhand von Querschnittsdaten von 130 Doppelverdiener-Paaren (260 Personen) wurden die Zusammenhänge zwischen arbeitsbezogener Unterstützung durch bzw. für den/die Partner/in und Erholungserfahrungen (mentales Abschalten, Entspannung, Mastery-Erfahrungen) untersucht. Darüber hinaus wurde die Verbundenheit durch die Arbeit (beide Personen eines Paares arbeiten in der gleichen Organisation und/oder im gleichen Beruf) als Moderator untersucht. Das Actor-Partner-Interdependence-Modell wurde verwendet, um die abhängige Struktur der dyadischen Daten zu berücksichtigen. Die Ergebnisse der Multigruppenanalysen, in denen Paare mit und ohne

Verbundenheit durch die Arbeit verglichen wurden, zeigten, dass das Erhalten von arbeitsbezogener Unterstützung durch den/die Partner/-in bei Paaren, die über die Arbeit verbunden waren, mit erhöhter Entspannung sowie erhöhten Mastery-Erfahrungen im Zusammenhang stand. Das Erhalten arbeitsbezogener Unterstützung stand nicht im Zusammenhang mit mentalem Abschalten. Das Geben von arbeitsbezogener Unterstützung stand nur bei Paaren, die nicht über die Arbeit verbunden waren, in einem positiven Zusammenhang mit erhöhten Mastery-Erfahrungen, während es sowohl bei Paaren mit als auch ohne Verbundenheit über die Arbeit nicht mit mentalem Abschalten und Entspannung zusammenhing.

In Studie 2 wurde untersucht, ob positives und negatives Nachdenken über die Arbeit in der Freizeit mit dem Arbeitsengagement und der Erschöpfung der Arbeitnehmenden und ihrer Partner/-innen zusammenhängen. Darüber hinaus wurde untersucht, ob (a) das Zusammenleben mit Kindern und (b) die Verbundenheit über die Arbeit diese Zusammenhänge moderieren. Zur Analyse der dyadischen Daten von 130 heterosexuellen Doppelverdienerpaaren (260 Personen) wurden Mehrebenenanalysen im Rahmen des Actor-Partner-Interdependence-Modells gerechnet. Es wurden positive Zusammenhänge zwischen dem positiven Nachdenken über die Arbeit und dem Arbeitsengagement der Arbeitnehmenden sowie dem ihrer Partner/-innen gefunden. Positives Nachdenken über die Arbeit stand auch im Zusammenhang mit einer geringeren Erschöpfung der Arbeitnehmenden. Negatives Nachdenken über die Arbeit stand in einem negativen Zusammenhang mit dem eigenen Arbeitsengagement und in einem positiven Zusammenhang mit der eigenen Erschöpfung, war aber nicht mit dem Arbeitsengagement und der Erschöpfung der Partner/-innen verbunden. Moderatoranalysen ergaben, dass das Zusammenleben mit Kindern den Zusammenhang zwischen positivem Nachdenken über die Arbeit und eigenem Arbeitsengagement schwächte und den Zusammenhang zwischen negativem Nachdenken über die Arbeit und Erschöpfung verstärkte.

In Studie 3 wurden die täglichen Folgen des Teilens positiver und negativer Arbeitsereignisse mit dem/der Partner/-in für den Affekt und das arbeitsbezogene Selbstwertgefühl der

Arbeitnehmenden und ihrer Partner/-innen untersucht. Während einer Arbeitswoche füllten 73 heterosexuelle Doppelverdienerpaare (146 Personen) nach der Arbeit und vor dem Schlafengehen Online-Fragebögen aus. Dyadische Mehrebenenanalysen zeigten, dass das Teilen positiver Arbeitsereignisse positiv mit dem eigenen positiven Affekt, nicht aber mit dem positiven Affekt der Partner/-innen verbunden war. Das Teilen negativer Arbeitsereignisse stand weder mit dem negativen Affekt der Arbeitnehmenden noch mit dem der Partner/-innen in Verbindung. Das Teilen positiver Arbeitsereignisse war nicht mit dem eigenen Selbstwertgefühl verbunden, aber negativ mit dem der Partner/-innen. Das Teilen negativer Arbeitsereignisse stand in einem negativen Zusammenhang mit dem Selbstwertgefühl sowohl der Arbeitnehmenden als auch der Partner/-innen.

Zusammengenommen zeigten die drei Studien dieser Dissertation, dass arbeitsbezogene Erfahrungen in der Freizeit (d. h. Erhalten und Geben von arbeitsbezogener Unterstützung, Nachdenken über die Arbeit und Teilen von Arbeitsereignissen mit dem/der Partner/-in) unterschiedliche Auswirkungen auf das Wohlbefinden von Arbeitnehmenden und ihren Partnern bzw. Partnerinnen haben und dass es sinnvoll ist, zwischen verschiedenen arbeitsbezogenen Erfahrungen (z. B. Nachdenken über die Arbeit vs. Interaktion mit dem/der Partner/-in) und ihrer Valenz (positiv vs. negativ) zu unterscheiden. Durch die Kombination der Forschung zu Erholung und Wohlbefinden mit der Crossover-Forschung bestätigt diese Dissertation, dass es für Doppelverdiener-Paare einen Mehrwert darstellt, Paardaten zu analysieren (d. h. Daten beider Personen eines Paares), und zeigt auf, dass es wichtig ist, die potenziell unterschiedlichen Folgen für das Wohlbefinden beider Personen eines Paares zu berücksichtigen.

## Overview of Manuscripts/Publications Included in this Dissertation

Walter, J., & Haun, V. C. (2020). Work-related spousal support and recovery experiences among dual-earner couples – Work-linkage as moderator. *Occupational Health Science, 4*(3), 333–355. doi: 10.1007/s41542-020-00066-1

Walter, J., & Haun, V. C. (2020). Positive and negative work reflection, engagement and exhaustion in dual-earner couples: Exploring living with children and work-linkage as moderators. *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung*, *35*(2), 249-273. https://doi.org/10.1177/2397002220964930

Walter, J., & Haun, V. C. (under review). "Darling, you won't believe what happened at work today": A diary study on sharing work events among dual-earner couples. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*.

**Declaration regarding the doctoral examination procedures**

## ERKLÄRUNG

**Gemäß § 6 Absatz 2 f) der Promotionsordnung der Fachbereiche 02, 05, 06, 07, 09 und 10 von 04. April 2016**

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**Ausbildungs- und Studienverlauf**

*XX*

## Courses of Higher Education

XX

## Overview of Academic Teachers

XX