



The role of partners for employees' recovery during the weekend[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We examined the effects of positive and negative experiences with the partner (absorption in joint activities and conflict with the partner) during the weekend on affective states at the beginning of the following work week and tested whether recovery experiences (psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences) mediated these effects. In total, 269 university faculty members completed online surveys before and after the weekend. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that absorption in joint activities with the partner predicted recovery experiences during the weekend and increased positive affective states (vigor, joviality, serenity) at the beginning of the following work week. Relaxation mediated the effects of absorption in joint activities on positive affective states. Conflict with the partner increased negative affective states (negative activation, fatigue), but was unrelated to recovery experiences. Our findings emphasize the importance of experiences with the partner for employees' recovery and show that the social environment of employees matters for their recovery.

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At the end of the work week, most employees look forward to the weekend to unwind from job stress and recharge their energies for the next work week. Research demonstrates that weekends free from work activities indeed help employees to replenish their resources and improve their well-being (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Fritz, Sonnentag, Spector, & McInroe, 2010). Particularly, specific experiences during leisure time such as psychological detachment from work, relaxation, and mastery experiences (i.e., pursuing challenging activities and broadening one's horizons) help employees to recover from job stress (cf. Demerouti, Bakker, Geurts, & Taris, 2009). Despite increasing research evidence for the importance of these recovery experiences (e.g., Siltaloppi, Kinnunen, & Feldt, 2009; Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2008), there is little research about factors that enable these recovery experiences. Knowing predictors of employees' recovery experiences is essential to develop recommendations for employees on how to recover successfully from job stress and to improve interventions aimed at promoting employees' recovery experiences and well-being (Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Mojza, 2011).

In this study, we focus on the role of partners for employees' recovery during the weekend. Until recently, employees' recovery experiences such as psychological detachment were considered to be largely under the discretion of the employees themselves (Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2010) and the role of the social environment of employees was mainly ignored (Park, Fritz, & Jex, 2011). However, recent research suggests that important people in employees' life domains—such as supervisors at work and partners at home—possibly influence employees' recovery experiences and thus calls for more research on potential “enablers” or “inhibitors” of recovery experiences (Park et al., 2011). We answer this call and examine how positive and negative experiences with the partner during the weekend, namely absorption in joint activities and conflict with the partner, are related to recovery experiences during the weekend and to affective states after the weekend. Additionally, we investigate whether recovery experiences during the weekend mediate the effects of experiences with the partner on positive and negative affective states. In line with recent research (e.g., Fritz et al., 2010; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006), we examine specific positive and negative affective

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states instead of higher order factors of positive and negative affect to capture a more comprehensive picture of employees' affective experiences. Examining specific affective states is important as specific affective experiences have different effects that are not captured by higher order factors (Weiss, 2002).

Our study makes several contributions. First, our study contributes to the recovery literature by bringing further attention to the neglected role of employees' social environment for recovery processes and by extending the limited knowledge on predictors of recovery experiences. As more than 50% of the population in the US and in European countries such as Germany or the UK live with their spouses and partners (UNECE Statistical Division Database, 2008) and spend a great deal of their nonwork time together (e.g., Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004), it is timely to examine how partners contribute to or harm employees' recovery from job stress. Second, with its focus on the role of experiences with the partner, our study also complements the emerging research interest in the role of relationships for employees' well-being and experiences at work such as in the positive organizational scholarship literature (e.g., Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Third, we add to the affect regulation literature (Thayer, Newman, & McClain, 1994) by exploring how specific affective states are affected by employees' weekend experiences. Previous research suggests that employees' recovery experiences are differentially related to specific positive and negative affective states (Sonnentag et al., 2008). Fourth, we use a sample of employees, namely German university faculty members, who have great flexibility to decide when and where to work with work during the weekend being quite common. As flexible work arrangements become more frequent, and boundaries between work and nonwork become more permeable due to advances in modern communication technologies (Hecht & Allen, 2009), it is important to study occupations that share these features.

Recovery from job stress

Recovery from job stress refers to the process during which an employee's functional systems return to prestressor levels and negative effects of job stressors such as an impaired mood are reversed (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Recovery can occur when job demands do not further tax an employee's resources (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), and when spent resources are replenished or new resources are built up (Hobfoll, 1989). Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) proposed that specific experiences during nonwork time are essential for recovery because they do not put further demands on the employee and allow the restoration of drained resources.

In this study, we focus on the recovery experiences of psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery. Psychological detachment refers to a state of mind that is characterized by mental disengagement from one's job (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). In everyday life, psychological detachment from work is experienced as getting distance from one's job and as "switching off" (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Relaxation refers to the mental experiences that are associated with low physical activation as indicated by decreased heart rate, breathing rate, or muscle tension (Smith, 2005). Mastery experiences during leisure time comprise off-job activities that are challenging and that offer the opportunity to learn new things and broaden one's horizons (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

The role of experiences with the partner for employees' recovery experiences

For many employees, spending time with their partner is a positive experience. A recent survey in Germany (Stiftung für Zukunftsfragen, 2011) revealed that spending time with the partner belongs to the most favorite leisure time activities among couples. However, being together with the partner can also be a source of negative experience when conflicts with the partner arise (e.g., Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993). In this study, we focus on two forms of experiences with the partner that can contribute or harm employees' recovery during the weekend, namely absorption in joint activities and conflict with the partner. Absorption in joint activities with the partner refers to a state of being engrossed and fully immersed while pursuing joint activities with the partner (Rothbard, 2001). Conflict with the partner comprises behaviors such as expressing anger, conveying negative evaluation or criticism, or hindering the attainment of instrumental goals (Abbey, Abramis, & Caplan, 1985; Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993).

When employees become absorbed in joint activities with the partner, they should be better able to detach from work, relax, and have mastery experiences. First, when employees become absorbed in joint activities with their partner, they have the chance to leave their work role behind them. When employees are fully disengaged from their work role, work-related thoughts should be less likely to occur and work-related tension preventing relaxation should decrease. Thus, absorption in joint activities with their partner should help employees to forget about their work and to relax. Second, according to the self-regulation model of ruminative thinking (Martin & Tesser, 1996), rumination can be stopped by distraction. Concentrating on activities with their partner helps people to get distracted from their work-related problems, which may hinder both psychological detachment and relaxation. A study on work-related rumination showed that people were less occupied by work-related issues when they were in company of other people than when they were alone (Cropley & Millward Purvis, 2003).

Being absorbed in joint activities with the partner should also enable mastery experiences. Absorption in one's activities is associated with behaviors such as planning or being persistent in the face of difficulties and cognitions such as mastery orientation or self-efficacy (Martin & Jackson, 2008), which should help employees to master challenges or learn new things. Thus, being absorbed in joint activities with the partner should make it more likely to experience mastery. Additionally, when employees are absorbed in joint activities with their partner, they can mutually support and encourage each other to pursue challenging activities, which should promote mastery experiences. Moreover, being absorbed in joint activities with the partner also satisfies the need for relatedness, which facilitates intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to a natural

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