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.

Keywords: Recovery experiences
Affective states
Absorption
Social conflict
Partners

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
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 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
Hypothesis 1. Absorption in joint activities with the partner is positively associated with a) psychological detachment, b) relaxation, and c) mastery experiences.

Whereas absorption in joint activities with the partner should promote recovery experiences, conflict with the partner should hinder relaxation and mastery experiences. Conflict is a stressor that increases tension and activation (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989). Increased levels of tension and activation make it more difficult to arrive at a state of relaxation (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Thus, when employees have a conflict with their partner during the weekend, they should be less likely to experience relaxation. One might argue that when the partner complains or criticizes the employee, employees withdraw from the interaction with the partner (Christensen, 1988) and pursue distracting activities on their own or with other people. However, we expect that conflict with the partner continues to have an effect on employees, even though employees engage in distracting activities. When employees feel angry after a conflict with their partner and ruminate about it, rumination increases their anger (Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998), which is associated with high levels of activation (Russell, 1980). As a result, employees continue to feel activated after the conflict and thus find it difficult to relax.

Hypothesis 2. Conflict with the partner is negatively associated with a) relaxation, and b) mastery experiences.

We do not expect conflict with the partner to be associated with detachment. Although conflicts with the partner should distract employees from their work-related problems, conflicts may prevent employees from pursuing activities that help them to completely detach from work.

Affective states at the beginning of the work week

Employees' affective well-being after the weekend can be seen as a result of employees' successful recovery from job stress during the weekend (Fritz et al., 2010). How employees feel when they start to work is also relevant for their performance at work (Rothbard & Wilk, 2011). Therefore, we focus on affective states at the beginning of the work week as indicators of employees' well-being on the one hand and as prerequisite of employees' successful functioning at work on the other hand.

Affective states can be described in the context of Russell's circumplex model (1980), which differentiates between affect of positive and negative valence on one dimension and high and low activation on the second dimension. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how experiences with the partner and recovery experiences are related to affective states, we focus on different positive and negative affective states associated with various levels of activation. We chose to examine vigor, joviality, and serenity as positive affective states and fatigue and negative activation as negative affective states. *Vigor* refers to the subjective feeling of energy and aliveness and is characterized by high activation (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). *Joviality* refers to feelings of happiness and enthusiasm and is associated with slightly activated affect. *Serenity* describes a state of being calm and at ease and is characterized by low activation. *Negative activation* refers to feelings of tension and distress which are associated with high activation whereas *fatigue* is characterized by low activation and refers to feelings of tiredness and exhaustion. All of these affective states are relevant for organizational behavior. For example, activated positive affective states such as vigor and joviality are particularly relevant for employees' creativity (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008) and proactive behaviors (Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, & Hulin, 2009) while feelings of negative activation are associated with counterproductive work behavior and fewer citizenship behaviors (Rodell & Judge, 2009).

Research has shown that positive and negative affective states are regulated by independent biological mechanisms and are elicited by different predictors (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999). Specifically, scholars proposed valence-symmetry between events and affective states (Dimotakis, Scott, & Koopmann, 2011; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000). This means that positive events should be associated with positive affective states, but unassociated with negative affective states. Negative events should be associated with negative affective states, but unassociated with positive affective states. In line with this research, we propose that positive weekend experiences (absorption in joint activities with the partner) are related to positive affective states, while negative weekend experiences (conflict with the partner) are related to negative affective states.

We do not make specific predictions regarding the relation between weekend experiences and affective states of high versus low activation levels. Although a study on recovery during the evening suggests that the degree of activation associated with recovery experiences corresponds closely to the activation level of specific affective states (Sonnentag et al., 2008), another study on recovery
during the weekend did not find differential relations with affective states of various activation levels (Fritz et al., 2010). We will thus examine the relations between weekend experiences and affective state of various activation levels in an exploratory way.

Experiences with the partner, recovery experiences, and affective states

We propose that absorption in joint activities with the partner during the weekend is associated with increased positive affective states at the start of the next work week. Additionally, we propose that employees’ recovery experiences mediate this effect. Becoming absorbed in joint activities with the partner should help to psychologically detach from work, relax, and have mastery experiences during the weekend. Psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences in turn should be related to positive affective states at the start of the next work week. In other words, absorption in joint activities with the partner should benefit employees’ affective states through promoting recovery experiences. High levels of detachment imply that people engage in preferred and distracting activities that create positive experiences and energy. Such experiences then become apparent in increased positive affective states (Fritz et al., 2010). Similarly, relaxation is perceived as positive experience, which should generate positive affective states (Stone, Kennedy-Moore, & Neale, 1995). Totterdell and Parkinson (1999) reported that engagement in relaxing activities predicted cheerfulness and calmness. Both detachment and relaxation help people to rebuild drained resources, which results in improved affective states (Fritz et al., 2010).

Mastery experiences challenge the individual without overtaxing his or her capabilities and thereby generate feelings of self-confidence and competence when successfully mastering the challenge (Sonnentag et al., 2008). Feeling competent and self-confident constitutes an uplifting positive experience, which will lead to increased positive affective states (Fritz et al., 2010). For example, after experiences of achievement during the weekend an individual may feel more energetic when having to solve problems at work. Empirical studies on recovery demonstrated that mastery experiences during nonwork time were associated with positive affective states (Fritz et al., 2010; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Taken together, we propose that absorption in joint activities with the partner results in increased positive affective states through promoting recovery experiences.

Hypothesis 3. Absorption in joint activities with the partner is associated with increases in positive affective states (vigor, joviality, serenity).

Hypothesis 4. Psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences mediate the effect of absorption in joint activities with the partner on positive affective states.

We propose that conflict with the partner during the weekend is associated with increased negative affective states at the start of the next work week. Additionally, we propose that relaxation mediates this effect. Conflict with the partner during the weekend may impair recovery processes, which becomes apparent in increased negative affective states at the start of the work week. First, conflicts with the partner put further demands on the employee, which prevents recovery to occur (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Second, conflict with the partner during the weekend may drain self-regulatory and emotional resources and hinder resource replenishment (Fritz et al., 2010). As a result, a lack of self-regulatory and emotional resources may be evident in high levels of negative affective states after the weekend. Previous research demonstrated that conflict was associated with negative well-being indicators (Abbey et al., 1985; Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993). Evidence from recovery research demonstrated that high levels of nonwork hassles including conflicts with the partner during the weekend were associated with negative affective states and other indicators of poor employee well-being (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Fritz et al., 2010).

The relation between conflict and increased negative affective states should be mediated by relaxation. Conflict with the partner should prevent relaxation during the weekend. A lack of relaxation during the weekend should in turn be associated with increased negative affective states. Relaxation results in a decrease of activation and tension (Smith, 2005) and should therefore reduce negative affective states. Fritz et al. (2010) found relaxation during the weekend to be associated with reduced fear after the weekend. Moreover, research on relaxation as stress intervention method has shown that relaxation experiences reduce anxiety and other symptoms of poor well-being (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

Hypothesis 5. Conflict with the partner is associated with increases in negative affective states (fatigue, negative activation).

Hypothesis 6. Relaxation mediates the effect of conflict with the partner on negative affective states (fatigue, negative activation).

As we do not assume that conflict with the partner is related to detachment, detachment cannot mediate the effects of conflict on negative affective states. We also do not expect mastery experiences to be a mediator because mastery experiences are most likely positive experiences which should only be related to positive affective states, but not to negative affective states according to the valence-symmetry argument (cf. Dimotakis et al., 2011).

Method

To test our study hypotheses, we used a longitudinal design including two measurement occasions. Participants responded to a general online survey assessing demographic variables when they registered for study participation, followed by two online surveys, one before the weekend (Time 1) and one after the weekend at the beginning of the next work week (Time 2). The first survey measured affective states before the weekend, and the second survey measured affective states at the beginning of the next
work week as well as weekend experiences. Thereby, we could predict changes in affective states after the weekend by controlling for affective states before the weekend.

Sample and procedures

We sent out invitation emails to all faculty members (e.g., full professors, assistant professors) of five German universities. We excluded faculty members at medical schools because they usually work in hospitals and universities at the same time. Faculty members were invited to take part in a study on “work–life balance in universities” and were promised to receive feedback on the study results as incentive for participation. At registration, participants filled in the general survey. After registration, we sent participants the links to fill in the online surveys before and after the weekend.

Initially, 414 faculty members registered for participation. Eighty-four participants had to be excluded because they failed to complete all surveys. These participants did not differ from the remaining participants with regard to demographic variables (gender, age, family situation, and children in the household). Since we focused on the role of partners for recovery during the weekend, we only included participants who spent the weekend with their partner. The final sample comprised 269 faculty members (96 women, 173 men). The vast majority (92.2%) lived with their partner in a joint household. More than half of participants (55.4%) had children in their household. The average age of participants was 43.6 years ($SD = 8.4$).

Measures

All items (except for the demographic variables) had to be answered on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

Absorption in joint activities with the partner

We measured absorption in joint activities with the partner with three items that we adapted from the absorption subscale of the family engagement scale by Rothbard (2001). A sample item was “When I was together with my partner this weekend, I was completely engrossed by it”. Cronbach’s alpha was .86.

Conflict with the partner

Conflict with the partner was measured with five items from Abbey et al.’s (1985) scale. A sample item was “During the weekend, how much has your partner misunderstood the way you thought and felt about things”. Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Recovery experiences during the weekend

Recovery experiences during the weekend were measured using the Recovery Experience Questionnaire (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Each scale included four items. A sample item for psychological detachment was “During the weekend, I distanced myself from work” ($\alpha = .92$). A sample item for relaxation was “During the weekend, I used the time to relax” ($\alpha = .90$). A sample item for mastery experiences was “During the weekend, I did something to broaden my horizons” ($\alpha = .86$).

Affective states

All positive and negative affective states were measured via the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994) except for vigor and fatigue which were assessed with items from the Profile of Mood States (McNair, Lorr, & Droppleman, 1971). Affective states were measured before the weekend (Time 1) and at the start of the next work week (Time 2). Vigor was measured with five items (e.g., “energetic”, “alert”), joviality was measured with six items (e.g., “cheerful”, “happy”), serenity with three items (e.g., “calm”, “at ease”), negative activation with six items (e.g., “afraid”, “nervous”), and fatigue with four items (e.g., “tired”, “exhausted”). Cronbach’s alpha for all affective states at Time 1 and Time 2 ranged between .76 and .93.

Control variables

We assessed a range of control variables that might influence our predictor and outcome variables (gender, children in the household, home demands, and work during the weekend). We used one-item measures for all control variables, except for home demands that were assessed with a three-item-scale by Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2005). A sample item was “Do you find that you are busy at home?” ($\alpha = .85$).

Results

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between all study variables. We conducted hierarchical regression analyses to test our hypotheses controlling for gender, children in the household, home demands, and work during the weekend in all analyses.

Experiences with the partner and recovery experiences

Hypothesis 1 stated that absorption in joint activities with the partner is positively associated with the recovery experiences of a) detachment, b) relaxation, and c) mastery. Hypothesis 2 stated that conflict with the partner is negatively associated with
Experiences with the partner and affective states

To examine the relations between experiences with the partner during the weekend and affective states at beginning of the new work week, again we conducted hierarchical regression analyses. In Step 1, we included the control variables as well as the respective affective state before the weekend. In Step 2, we included weekend experiences with the partner (absorption and conflict). In the Step 3, we entered recovery experiences (detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences). Regression results

Table 2
Hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses predicting recovery experiences (N = 269).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Detachment</th>
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<th>Relaxation</th>
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<th>Mastery experiences</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
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<td>Step 1: Control variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genderb</td>
<td>−.11</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.15**</td>
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<td>Children in householdb</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>−.37**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home demands</td>
<td>−.13</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>−.50**</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>−.15</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work during weekendb</td>
<td>−.43**</td>
<td>−.41**</td>
<td>−.08</td>
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<td>−.04</td>
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<td>−.36</td>
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<td>Step 2: Experiences with partner</td>
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<td>Absorption in joint activities</td>
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<td>Conflict</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>19.83**</td>
<td>23.26**</td>
<td>19.94**</td>
<td>32.51**</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>5.88**</td>
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<td>ΔR²</td>
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<tr>
<td>ΔF</td>
<td>23.38**</td>
<td>44.51**</td>
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Note. Standardized regression coefficients β are displayed.

a) relaxation, and b) mastery experiences. After entering the control variables in the first step of the hierarchical regressions analyses, we entered absorption and conflict in the second step. Regression results can be found in Table 2. Absorption significantly predicted psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences. Conflict with the partner was not related to recovery experiences. Thus, Hypothesis 1a–c was fully supported, whereas Hypothesis 2a–b received no support.
can be found in Table 3. Hypothesis 3 stated that absorption is positively related with positive affective states. Results from regression analyses (see Table 3, Step 2) showed that absorption was significantly related with increased vigor, joviality, and serenity after the weekend. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was fully supported. Hypothesis 5 stated that conflict with the partner is associated with increased negative affective states after the weekend. Results showed that conflict was a significant predictor of negative activation and fatigue (see Table 3, Step 2). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was fully supported.

The mediating role of recovery experiences

In Hypothesis 4 we proposed that psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery mediate the relations between absorption and positive affective states. Results of regression analyses showed that relaxation was positively associated with positive affective states whereas absorption was not a significant predictor anymore (see Table 3, Step 3). To test the mediation hypothesis we ran mediation models with multiple mediators, using the bootstrapping procedures described by Preacher and Hayes (2008). For each positive affective state, we calculated bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CI) (with 1000 bootstrap resamples) including the respective affective state before the weekend, the control variables, and conflict with the partner as covariates. For vigor as outcome, the total indirect effect including all the mediators was significant (point estimate for indirect effect = .11; 95% CI = .05, .17). However, relaxation was the only significant mediator (indirect effect = .09; 95% CI = .03, .15); both the 95% CI of psychological detachment and mastery included zero. For joviality as outcome, the total indirect including all mediators was significant (indirect effect = .11; 95% CI = .05, .18). Again, relaxation was the only significant mediator (indirect effect = .08; 95% CI = .03, .14). For serenity as outcome, the total indirect including all mediators was also significant (indirect effect = .14; 95% CI = .07, .21) with relaxation being the only significant mediator (indirect effect = .08; 95% CI = .03, 15). Taken together, Hypothesis 4 was supported for relaxation as mediator.

Hypothesis 6 stated that relaxation mediates the relation between conflict with the partner and negative affective states. Results of the regression analyses (see Table 3, Step 3) showed that relaxation and psychological detachment were significant negative predictors of negative affective states. However, from testing Hypothesis 2 we know that conflict with the partner was not related to relaxation. Consequently, relaxation cannot mediate the relation between conflict with the partner and negative affective states. Thus, Hypothesis 6 received no support.

Discussion

In this study, we tested the idea that partners matter for employees’ recovery. We investigated the role of experiences with the partner for employees’ recovery experiences during the weekend and affective states at the start of the next work week. Absorption in joint activities with the partner was associated with psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences whereas conflict with the partner was unrelated to recovery experiences. Absorption in joint activities with the partner increased positive affective states after the weekend. Relaxation mediated this effect. Conflict with the partner predicted increased negative affective states after the weekend. Recovery experiences did not mediate this effect.
Absorption in joint activities with the partner was associated with the recovery experiences of psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery during the weekend. Becoming completely engrossed in joint activities with the partner seems to help employees to find distraction from work-related issues and stop thinking about work. Being absorbed in joint activities with the partner also seems to reduce prolonged activation caused by job stress and thereby promotes employees’ relaxation. In addition, absorption in joint activities with the partner seems to facilitate mastering challenging activities and learning new things. Our findings suggest that spending time with the partner and getting fully absorbed in joint activities benefit employees’ recovery experiences. Thus, our study suggests that partners matter for employees’ recovery experiences and thereby extends the limited knowledge about predictors of recovery experiences.

As hypothesized, absorption in joint activities with the partner was associated with increased positive affective states after the weekend. Absorption in joint activities with the partner seems to enable employees to replenish their resources during the weekend, which becomes apparent in increased positive affective states after the weekend. Absorption in joint activities with the partner—as specific characteristic of social interactions with the partner—is a relational resource in employees’ private lives. Relational resources benefit employees’ affective well-being (cf. Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). By focusing on absorption in joint activities with the partner as relational resource in the private life, our study complements recent research on work-related relational resources for employees’ well-being and thriving at work (e.g., Niessen et al., 2011). Our study emphasizes the relevance of relational resources in the private life domain for employees’ well-being at work.

Consistent with our hypothesis, conflict with the partner was associated with increased negative affective states after the weekend. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that daily hassles during the weekend—including conflicts with family members—are associated with increased negative affective states after the weekend (Fritz et al., 2010). Conflicts drain employees’ emotional and self-regulatory resources and hinder the establishment of new resources (Hobfoll, 1989). As a result, after the weekend, self-regulatory and emotional resources may be lacking, which becomes evident in increased negative affective states.

Moreover, our results also showed that absorption in joint activities with the partner did not decrease negative affective states, and conflict did not decrease positive affective states. This pattern of results is in line with previous research that suggested the valence-symmetry between affective events and subsequent affective states (Dimotakis et al., 2011; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Positive weekend events and experiences seem to increase positive affective states after the weekend, but do not decrease negative affective states while negative weekend events and experiences seem to increase negative affective states, but do not decrease positive ones.

Regarding the relations of weekend experiences with affective states of various activation levels, we found uniform effects of weekend experiences on positive and negative affective states of various activation levels. Absorption in joint activities with the partner was associated with positive affective states of high and low activation levels. Conflict with the partner was associated with both high and low activation negative affective states. Similarly, relaxation and detachment were associated with both high and low activation affective states. Thus, our results did not replicate Sonnentag et al.’s (2008) findings of differential relations between nonwork experiences and affective states of various activation levels, but were more in line with Fritz et al. (2010) findings of uniform relations. These differences might be due to different study designs. While Fritz et al. (2010) and our study used between-person designs, Sonnentag et al.’s (2008) study used a within-person design. Within-person designs might be able to capture more fine-grained differences in affective states—such as different activation levels—than between-person designs. Future studies should examine the relations between weekend experiences and affective states using a within-person design (cf. Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Mojza, 2010) to test whether our failure to find differential relations was due to our between-person design.

With regard to the proposed mediating role of recovery experiences, we found that only relaxation mediated the relation between absorption and positive affective states. Becoming absorbed in joint activities with the partner seems to help to relax during the weekend, which results in increased positive affective states at the beginning of the work week. In contrast to our expectations, psychological detachment and mastery experiences did not act as mediators. We found that psychological detachment was related to negative affective states, but unrelated to positive affective states. Although this pattern of results is in line with a diary study on recovery during the evening by Sonnentag et al. (2008), it is inconsistent with a recent study by Fritz et al. (2010) who found that psychological detachment during the weekend was related to positive, but not to negative affective states. Fritz et al. (2010) proposed that detachment may take different forms during the week as opposed to the weekend. On weekdays, detachment may mainly imply forgetting negative aspects of work, which implies a decrease in negative affective states. On the weekend, people mostly have time to detach by engaging in activities that include pleasurable and positive features, which implies an increase in positive affective states. However, since in our sample 62% of the participants indicated that they had worked on the weekend, they had less time to engage in positive and distracting activities that could have increased positive affective states. Future research is needed to examine different forms of psychological detachment and their consequences.

Mastery experiences did not act as mediator of the relation between absorption in joint activities with the partner and positive affective states as mastery experiences were unrelated to positive affective states. This finding is surprising given that previous research found positive relations between mastery experiences and positive affective states (Fritz et al., 2010). However, the differences between the results may be due to differences between the studied samples. Our sample consisted of faculty members while Fritz et al. (2010) examined preschool teachers. Fritz et al. (2010) suggested that specific employees with specific job features may benefit more from some types of weekend experiences than others. Specifically, employees who have a lot of mastery experiences at work may need different experiences during nonwork time and thus benefit less from mastery experiences during nonwork time. Faculty members frequently have to master intellectually challenging tasks at work and learn new things. Thus,
they may benefit less from mastery experiences during the weekend. Future research should clarify which job experiences qualify the effects of recovery experiences. A deeper understanding of the moderators of the relations between recovery experiences and well-being would allow us to make more precise recommendations for optimal ways to recover from job stress.

In contrast to our hypothesis, conflict with the partner was unrelated to employees’ relaxation and mastery experiences during the weekend. When confronted with conflict with the partner, employees may reduce the time they spend with their partners and engage in distracting activities. This might reduce the influence conflicts with the partner have on employees’ recovery experiences. Although conflict with the partner may continue to have an effect on employees’ recovery experiences due to increased activation or drained self-regulatory resources, these effects may be attenuated when employees become absorbed in other activities (e.g., sports). Future research should measure how much time employees actually spend with their partner and how employees experience other activities. This would allow examining these factors as potential moderators of the (non)relation between conflict and recovery experiences.

As conflict with the partner was unrelated to relaxation, relaxation did not act as mediator in the relation between conflict with the partner and negative affective states. Apparently, conflict with the partner directly affects employees’ negative affective states without affecting recovery experiences. Conflict with the partner can put employees in a bad mood (Bolger et al., 1989) without necessarily keeping them from relaxing, detaching, or having mastery experiences during the weekend. Daily hassles such as conflict with the partner drain employees’ emotional and self-regulatory resources (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Fritz et al., 2010). The lack of resources becomes evident in employees’ impaired mood after the weekend, but does not necessarily have to affect employees’ relaxation experiences. Relaxation usually results from engaging in non-demanding low-effort activities (Tinsley & Eldredge, 1995) that do not require much self-regulatory resources (Sonnentag & Jelden, 2009). Thus, relaxation has effects on employees’ negative affective states that are independent from the effects of conflict with the partner.

**Limitations**

Our study is not without limitations. First, all variables were assessed by self-reports, which might have increased common method bias (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In addition, measures of weekend experiences and affective states at the beginning of the work week were collected at the same time. Thus, occasion factors may have influenced the findings. We tried to reduce threats of common method variance and occasion factors by including control variables (affective states before the weekend, work during the weekend, home demands). Future research might assess weekend experiences and affective states separately (e.g., weekend experiences on Sunday evening, affective states on Monday morning) and include reports by partners and co-workers.

Second, our study does not allow us to draw finite causal conclusions about the relations between employees’ experiences with their partner and their recovery experiences. Recovery experiences and experiences with the partner may have reciprocal influences on each other. For example, forgetting about work may also help employees to become more engaged in family activities, which in turn may help to more fully switch off from work. Future research may use experience sampling methodologies to shed more light on the changes over time.

**Implications for research and practice**

We focused on two specific experiences with the partner, namely absorption in joint activities and conflict with the partner. Thereby, we provided first evidence for the relevance of partners for employees’ recovery. Future research may examine the role of further experiences with the partner such as discussing positive and negative work experiences with the partner (Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Ilies, Keeney, & Scott, 2011). In addition, partners’ recovery experiences may also be relevant for employees’ recovery experiences. For example, when the partner ruminates and talks about work-related problems, employees may be prompted to think about their own work-related problems and be unable to detach from work themselves.

With regard to practical implications, our study showed that partners can help each other to recover from job stress by pursuing joint activities with the potential to become completely absorbed in them. Employees could make plans with their partners to pursue challenging and exciting activities to successfully unwind from job stress. Additionally, our findings have implications for specific interventions that aim at promoting recovery experiences (e.g., Hahn et al., 2011). Considering the role of partners in such interventions (e.g., instructing participants to plan joint activities with their partners) may increase the effectiveness of the interventions.

In conclusion, our results suggest that avoiding conflict with the partner is not sufficient for feeling happy and full of energy after the weekend. Employees should try to seek out positive experiences with their partner and relax during the weekend to have a good start into the new work week.

**References**


