Daily Hassles and Uplifts:
A Diary Study on Understanding Relationship Quality

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In this investigation, we use the Conservation of Resources (CoR) theory as a guide to examine how both uplifts and hassles are associated with positive (e.g., satisfaction, commitment) and negative (ambivalence, conflict) relational quality on a daily basis. In previous studies of hassles and uplifts, the focus has been primarily on negative outcomes at the individual level (e.g., affect). Here, we build on this previous research by examining both positive and negative events (i.e., uplifts and hassles) in associations with positive and negative relational qualities. Further, we focus on examining social and nonsocial events that are external to the relationship (i.e., do not involve the romantic partner) and how they are linked with relational qualities. Finally, we examine which patterns are confined to the same day and which carry over to subsequent days (i.e., lagged effects). Contrary to previous literature, we find that both social and nonsocial hassles are largely unrelated to relationship quality after accounting for the effects of social and nonsocial uplifts. In contrast, nonsocial uplifts bolster positive feelings about the relationship on that day. Results also show that hassles and uplifts may work together to explain relational commitment. Finally, we find that nonsocial uplifts experienced on one day are associated with trend-level declines in next day positive feelings about the relationship. Our findings suggest that preserving relationship quality through daily experiences is best achieved by equipping couples to recognize the benefits of uplifts to the relationship, especially uplifts that are nonsocial, in tandem with managing hassles.

Keywords: daily diary study, relationship quality, hassles, uplifts, conservation of resources

Daily hassles are minor stressors that are part of everyday life (Serido, Almeida, & Wethington, 2004; Wheaton, 1996). Research has focused on how these stressors negatively impact individual health and well-being (e.g., Almeida, 2005; Wheaton, 1996). Studies also have documented negative associations of daily hassles and global relationship satisfaction/quality (e.g., Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000; Totenhagen, Butler, & Ridley, 2012). Greater specificity in outcomes, however, would provide researchers and clinicians with more precise information on how daily hassles undermine relationships. Thus, in this study we extend the literature on daily hassles and relationship quality by examining the impact of daily hassles on specific positive (e.g., satisfaction, closeness) and negative relationship qualities (e.g., conflict, ambivalence) in couples.

Although research has focused on the disruptive effects of daily hassles on individual well-being and relationship quality, positive daily experiences, or uplifts, may also play an important role (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982). Because relationship processes involve both positive and negative daily interactions, we use a dyadic daily diary design to examine the process through which daily hassles and uplifts separately and in tandem contribute to daily relational well-being.

Conceptual Framework

Stressors can vary over time and exert temporary influences on spouses’ capacity to engage in adaptive processing (Neff & Karney, 2009). That is, dealing with high levels of stress—even that external to the relationship—can tax individuals’ resources needed to maintain positive relationships (Neff & Karney, 2009). We use the Conservation of Resources theory (CoR; Hobfoll, 1989) as our guiding perspective in examining how hassles may reduce relationship quality, whereas uplifts may improve relationship quality. From the CoR theory, “people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and . . . what is threatening to them is the potential loss of these valued resources” (p. 516, Hobfoll, 1989). Guided by the broader social context, resources refer to anything (e.g., objects, personal characteristics, etc.) that an individual values and are thus subjectively defined (Hobfoll, 1989).

Beyond hypothesizing that stressors arise from the potential or actual loss of resources and should be associated with distress and negative outcomes, the CoR theory also proposes that in the absence of stress individuals will “strive to develop resource surpluses in order to offset the possibility of future loss” (p. 517, Hobfoll, 1989). In this way, accumulated resources may be seen as a safeguard against the potential loss from future stressors. Resource accumulation reflects future-oriented thinking and a proactive approach to coping with future events (Aspinwall, 2005;
Schwarzer, 2001). Resource surpluses thus should be associated with more positive outcomes (Hobfoll, 1989).

Consistent with the CoR theory, we conceptualize uplifting events that make a person feel joyful or glad (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988) as adding to one’s resources, whereas hassles deplete these resources. Although not specific to the relationship, external hassles and uplifts (i.e., those not involving the partner) should still impact the relationship given that events from one domain of life spill over into other domains of life (Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002; Matjsako & Feldman, 2006; McDonald & Almeida, 2004; Serido et al., 2004). From the CoR perspective, a decrease in personal resources should affect individuals’ interactions with their partners as reflected in daily relationship quality. For example, if my day was particularly stressful and I felt taxed in terms of my time, these feelings may spill over, affecting how I interact with my partner, including my feelings of satisfaction and conflict on that day. In a similar way, Neff and Karney (2009) found that stressors external to relationships reduced the capacity of partners to interact with spouses in adaptive ways and thus reduced relationship quality.

Whereas hassles should decrease the quality of interactions between partners by usurping available resources, uplifts are expected to improve positive relationship quality by adding to individuals’ resources. In addition to separate effects, it is possible that hassles and uplifts combine in some way. For example, although hassles should be associated with less positive, and more negative, feelings about the relationship, experiencing increased uplifts along with hassles may attenuate this effect. It is also possible, that uplifts may contribute to positive feelings about the relationship that dissipate in the presence of increased hassles. In this study, we consider how hassles and uplifts, both individually and in combination, are linked with daily relational outcomes.

Daily Hassles and Diminished Well-Being

Empirical research on individual well-being supports that daily stressors are associated with negative outcomes. Research shows that even after accounting for life events, hassles were significantly associated with increased somatic health symptoms (e.g., backaches, headaches, etc.; DeLongis et al., 1982) as well as decreases in health and positive mood (DeLongis et al., 1988).

Although most research on daily hassles has focused on individual well-being, some studies found that daily hassles were associated with decreased marital quality (Harper et al., 2000), as well as decreased relationship satisfaction in gay and lesbian couples (Totenhagen et al., 2012) and pregnant cohabiting women (Totenhagen & Curran, 2011). These studies, while informative, have some limitations. For example, Harper and colleagues (2000) collected data about daily hassles retrospectively (i.e., during the past month), which may reflect memory bias in participants (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Moreover, this method does not allow examination of how hassles experienced on a particular day are associated with changes in feelings about the relationship on that day. Further, the studies did not examine more specific aspects of relationships than global relationship quality/satisfaction (e.g., Totenhagen & Curran, 2011).

To extend what is known about daily hassles and relationship quality, we examine the association between hassles and specific relational constructs (e.g., commitment, ambivalence, conflict) on a daily basis. Increased specificity in the prediction of relational variables affords increased precision in identifying the underlying mechanisms of daily changes of specific relational qualities. Guided by the CoR theory and previous research, we expect hassles will be associated with increased negativity (conflict and ambivalence) and decreased positivity (satisfaction, commitment, closeness, maintenance, and love).

Associations Between Daily Uplifts and Well-Being

Whereas hassles may deplete an individual’s resources, uplifts should add to an individual’s subjective resources, making a person feel joyful, glad, or satisfied (DeLongis et al., 1988). Although research on daily uplifts is limited, studies have found that uplifts are correlated with positive but not negative affect (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981; Maybery, Jones-Ellis, Neale, & Arentz, 2006).

The few empirical studies examining both uplifts and hassles provide mixed support on the utility of uplifts in association with individual outcomes. Two studies using the same sample found that, after controlling for hassles, associations between uplifts and psychological outcomes (Kanner et al., 1981) and uplifts and health outcomes (DeLongis et al., 1982) were no longer significant.

It is possible that uplifts may play a greater role in relational versus individual outcomes. For example, a study examining family (comprised of family and marital satisfaction) and life satisfaction of Jews and Arabs in Israel (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2008) found that both hassles and uplifts, even when included in the model together, were associated with family and life satisfaction. This study did not examine links with marital or relationship satisfaction specifically, however, nor did it differentiate between hassles internal versus external to the relationship.

Given that CoR provides a theoretical basis for the beneficial effects of uplifts, as well as limited empirical evidence of positive associations between uplifts and relational outcomes (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2008), we expect that uplifts will have a positive association with positive relational qualities. However, given empirical evidence that uplifts are associated with positive but not negative affect (Kanner et al., 1981; Maybery et al., 2006), we expect that uplifts will not be significantly associated with negative relational qualities.

Hassles and Uplifts: Combined Effects

Although hassles and uplifts have been examined in the same analysis (e.g., Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2008), few researchers have tested how positive and negative events interact with each other to influence outcomes. It is possible that hassles and uplifts combine in some way to impact relationship quality. For example, uplifts might buffer the undesirable effects of hassles in that they add to the resources being depleted by hassling events. Alternatively, hassles may dissipate the positive feelings brought on by experiencing uplifting events because they draw from these resources being added. Empirical evidence is somewhat mixed with respect to the interaction of positive and negative events, with some finding that they do not significantly interact (Charles et al., 2010) and others finding that they do (Finan et al., 2010). Further, these studies focused on individual (e.g., affect) rather than relational...
outcomes. Given mixed empirical evidence of the significance of an interaction, we pose the following research question: Do hassles and uplifts interact to affect relational outcomes?

Same-Day and Lagged Effects

Another consideration is that of lagged effects. DeLongis and colleagues (1982) found that although hassles were associated with decreased same-day mood, the more stressful a day was, the better that person’s mood was the next day. One speculation is that in comparison to the highly stressful day, the next day “feels” substantially better. These findings indicate the complexity of fluctuating daily experiences and support the use of daily diary techniques to examine same-day and lagged effects.

Considering both concurrent and lagged associations of hassles and uplifts with relationship quality is important given previous research on the “staying power” of these variables in examining individual outcomes. In a daily study of spousal support and strain, strain was more strongly associated with same-day negative mood than support was (DeLongis, Capreol, Holtzman, O’Brien, & Campbell, 2004). Further examination of the effects on the following day, however, found that strain was no longer significant, whereas support was still associated with decreased negative mood. The findings suggest that while negative experiences may invoke a stronger initial reaction, positive experiences may have longer-lasting impacts. In a daily study of positive and negative interpersonal events (Finan et al., 2010), both positive and negative interpersonal events were associated with undesirable effects (i.e., increased fatigue and decreased positive affect) on the following day, even though positive events were initially associated with better same-day outcomes (i.e., decreased fatigue and negative affect). These authors speculate that this association between positive events on one day and undesirable outcomes on the following day may reflect a return to “normal” levels of fatigue and positive affect (i.e., homeostatic balance). That is, initially (on the same-day) the effect may have been positive, but by the next day things returned to homeostatic levels. Given the potential complexity involving positive and negative daily events and how they might be associated with concurrent and next-day individual well-being, in the present study, we examine the associations of both hassles and uplifts with same-day and next-day relational qualities.

Summary of Hypotheses and Research Questions

Although the CoR perspective would argue that hassles will be negative for relationships, whereas uplifts will be positive for relationships, the empirical evidence is both limited and mixed. On the basis of the CoR theory and mixed empirical findings, we advance the following hypotheses and research questions.

**H1:** Daily hassles will be negatively associated with same-day positive relational qualities (i.e., satisfaction, commitment, closeness, maintenance, and love) and positively associated with same-day negative relational qualities (i.e., conflict and ambivalence).

**H2:** Daily uplifts will be positively associated with same-day positive relational qualities but unrelated to same-day negative relational qualities.

**RQ1:** Do hassles and uplifts interact to affect relational outcomes?

**RQ2:** How are daily hassles and uplifts associated with next-day relational qualities?

Empirical studies demonstrate that the type of hassle is associated with differences in both frequency (Almeida, Wethington, & Kessler, 2002) and impact (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989). Thus, for our analyses, we aggregated hassles into two types: social (i.e., interactions involving other people) and nonsocial (e.g., household chores, work demands; Lepore, Evans, & Palsane, 1991). To keep the measures of hassles and uplifts consistent, we also aggregated uplifts into the same two categories. Thus, we examine the above hypotheses and research questions for both social and nonsocial events.

**Method**

**Procedure and Participants**

Participants were recruited through Family Studies and Human Development and Communication classes at a large Southwestern university in the United States. Students could earn extra credit by participating in the study along with their romantic partner or by passing a flyer on to other couples (e.g., parents). Thus, not all participants were students. To qualify, both individuals in a couple had to be at least 18 years old, in a romantic relationship with their current partner for at least 6 weeks, and have their own e-mail address.

The original study sample consisted of 313 couples who agreed to participate in the study. Of these, 85 couples were excluded because only one partner completed the daily portion of the study being used for investigation here. Additionally, in the data cleaning process, we used time and date stamps to remove any entries that were deemed invalid due to duplicate entries (i.e., submitting data more than once in a single day). The time and date stamps also permitted us to identify daily entries in which partners did not “match” (i.e., both did not submit an entry on a particular day). Only those couples who completed and matched on at least 3 days were retained in the final sample. After this data cleaning process, an additional 64 couples were excluded, leaving a final sample of 164 couples.

Data were collected via a secure Internet-based system. Participants were e-mailed instructions to access the study website and create unique couple IDs that indicated each member’s gender. They also were asked to complete surveys separate from their partners. The first time they logged onto the system, they completed a questionnaire in which demographic information was gathered as well as other data not discussed here.

Next, individuals logged onto the website at approximately the same time each day for 7 consecutive days to complete daily questionnaires. Seven days is relatively common in daily diary studies (e.g., Almeida et al., 2002) as it reduces participant fatigue (e.g., Bolger et al., 2003) and minimizes dropout. Participants answered the same questions each day and were asked to think about every item as they had experienced it within the past 24 hours.

Participants were primarily Caucasian (67.4%) and Hispanic (13.4%) and highly educated (84.8%) reported at least some college...
or more), and 62.7% of the sample was currently enrolled in college. Ages ranged from 18–66 years (M = 25.73, SD = 10.37), relationship length ranged from 2 months to 44 years (M = 5.73, SD = 8.92), and 23.8% of the couples were married.

Participants completed on average 5.9 days of data, and approximately 40% of days completed were consecutive in nature. In testing whether certain types of couples were more likely to complete more days of data, none of the tested variables were significant (i.e., relationship length, age, ethnicity, student status, marital status, or having children). We also tested whether days following a particularly stressful or uplifting day were more likely to be missing, but none of the effects were significant.

**Measures**

**Hassles and uplifts.** We adapted the 53 item Hassles and Uplifts scale (DeLongis, 1985). To reduce participant fatigue and to encourage retention (Bolger et al., 2003; Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009), we shortened the scale as others have done (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2008).

We retained items representing each of the nine factors in the original scale (see DeLongis, 1985): household, finances, work, environmental and social issues, home maintenance, health, personal life, and family and friends. We examined each item on face validity and focused on collapsing like-items into more general items (e.g., “home repairs,” “yardwork,” “car maintenance,” and “housework” were collapsed to “home maintenance”). The shortened scale included 15 items: your child(ren), your relative(s), your partner, family related obligations, your friend(s), your job, your finances, exercise, your health, your neighborhood (e.g., neighbors), pets, home maintenance (e.g., housework), amount of free time, recreation and entertainment outside the home (e.g., movies, sports), and social commitments.

Using the same overall instructions as DeLongis (1985) and DeLongis et al. (1988), participants were asked to indicate for each of the 15 items how much of a hassle and how much of an uplift it was today on a 0 (none) to 3 (a great deal) scale. Further, we added a response option in which we asked participants to indicate if an item did not apply that day, which allowed us to differentiate missing data in the scale because a participant did not experience that item versus missing for other reasons (e.g., skipped the item).

To account for the possibility that different types of hassles and uplifts exert different effects on relationships, we aggregated hassles and uplifts into those dealing with social (i.e., job, finances, exercise, health, neighborhood, pets, home maintenance, free time, recreation outside the home) events. Because we are primarily interested in events external to the relationship for this study, we dropped the “your partner” item versus missing for other reasons (e.g., skipped the item).

Means and standard deviations were as follows: social hassles (M = 1.35, SD = 1.78), social uplifts (M = 3.72, SD = 3.05), nonsocial hassles (M = 3.42, SD = 3.13), nonsocial uplifts (M = 5.83, SD = 4.85).

**Relational qualities.** We assessed all relational qualities via single items in which responses rested on a 1- (not very much or just a little) to 7- (very much or a lot) point scale, with a score of 4 indicating neutral. Participants were asked how they felt today with respect to each quality (e.g., “Today, how satisfied were you with your relationship with your partner?”; “Today, how much did you work on, or maintain your relationship with your partner?”; “Today, how ambivalent, or uncertain did you feel about the future of your relationship with your partner?”). Possible positive daily relational qualities include satisfaction, commitment, closeness, maintenance, and love. Possible negative daily relational qualities include ambivalence and conflict. In previous work using this sample, the authors found that all seven of these relational qualities varied within-person from day to day and are therefore suitable for daily examination (Totenhagen, 2011).

In Table 1, we present estimates of within- and between-person correlations for all study variables. We separated men and women to remove shared variance due to couples. We computed within-person correlations using person-centered scores and between-person correlations using individuals’ mean scores. Because of the time-nested data structure, we do not report significance tests. On the whole, between-person correlations of the study variables were larger than within-person correlation estimates.

Upon further examination of the correlations, we noted that the within-person correlations for three of the positive relational qualities (i.e., satisfaction, closeness, and love) were fairly high (largely in the .6 to .7 range). Given these fairly high within-person correlations, this pattern suggests that these constructs may be tapping into the same concept for individuals. Thus, we combined these three constructs into a composite variable called “positive feelings about the relationship.” We retained the other positive relational qualities (i.e., maintenance and commitment) as distinct dependent variables given their relatively lower within-person correlations with satisfaction, love, and closeness.

**Analyses and Results**

**Concurrent Multilevel Models (H1, H2, RQ1)**

To examine how hassles and uplifts are associated with relational qualities on the same day (H1, H2), we ran several dyadic multilevel models. We correct for multiple hypothesis testing by using a Bonferroni-adjustment. Because different patterns were expected for positive versus negative dependent variables, we adjusted the p value required for significance to .0167 for positive dependent variables (given that there are three) and .0250 for negative dependent variables (given that there are two). Because empirical studies examining the combined effects of both hassles and uplifts on specific relational outcomes are limited, we describe as trends those effects that do not reach the adjusted level of significance, but which are at p < .05.

We included relationship length as a control in all models given that the present sample includes a variety of relationship lengths and that variability in a number of the outcomes under investigation was found to differ depending on relationship length (Totenhagen, 2011). We person-centered all predictors such that each person’s daily score on each independent variable was centered on
that person’s mean score for that variable across all the days of the study (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). Thus, measures of that person’s mean score for that variable across all the days of the study (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). Thus, interpretation of predictors is for hassles or uplifts above or below a person’s own average. Given that we have distinguishable dyads as our sample (i.e., We implemented multilevel models in SAS PROC MIXED and the use of multilevel modeling (MLM) was necessary given various forms of nonindependence. Days within individuals are likely to be related to each other, and dyadic nonindependence may exist in that partners are likely to be related in their overall average scores (i.e., intercepts) as well as their day to day variability in scores (i.e., fluctuations in daily scores are likely to be related between partners).

We implemented multilevel models in SAS PROC MIXED and used the random and repeated statements to set up the error structure to deal with the nonindependent data. The random statement accounts for interdependence between individuals within a couple in their average scores (intercepts), and the repeated statement accounts for interdependence between individuals within a couple in their daily fluctuations, as well as for the autocorrelation of days within individuals. The fixed effects, which are essentially the regression estimates for the independent variables, include social and nonsocial hassles, social and nonsocial uplifts, the interaction of nonsocial hassles by nonsocial uplifts, and the interaction of social hassles by social uplifts, as well as the cross-domain interactions of social hassles by nonsocial uplifts and nonsocial hassles by social uplifts.

Given that we have distinguishable dyads as our sample (i.e., each couple consists of a man and a woman), we began each analysis by assessing whether examination of sex differences was necessary. We used the full maximum likelihood estimation method in SAS, which permitted us to compare the full model including sex as a main effect and moderator of all associations against a nested model that did not include sex (see Singer & Willett, 2003). These nested model comparisons for allseven outcomes revealed that the inclusion of sex did not result in significantly better fitting models. Thus, we removed sex from the models in the interest of parsimony given that men and women did not significantly differ in their associations.

For each of the relationship outcomes, we first report whether social and nonsocial hassles erode relationship quality (H1); we next report if social and nonsocial uplifts bolster relationship quality (H2); and finally we report if hassles and uplifts interact to impact relationship quality (RQ1). To indicate direction and provide some sense of relative magnitude, we report both unstandardized (b) and standardized (B) regression coefficients for the simple slopes involved in significant or trending interactions, as well as significant or trending main effects. We chose this method over estimating effect sizes given that in multilevel models negative values for r² are possible and make interpretation difficult (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). All significant or trending interactions (RQ1) were probed at ±1 SD for high and low values of the variables of interest (Aiken & West, 1991). Below, we outline the significant fixed effects and trends (p < .05) for each model (full results are available upon request).

**Positive feelings about the relationship.** For hassles and the composite dependent variable of positive feelings about the relationship (H1), neither of the conditional main effects was signif-

### Table 1
Within- and Between-Person Correlations of Study Variables

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**Note.** Correlations for men are reported above the diagonals and correlations for women are reported below the diagonals. Because of the time-nested data, significance tests are not reported.
icant. For uplifts (H2), we found that nonsocial uplifts were positively associated with positive feelings about the relationship ($b = .09, p = .0006, B = .06$). None of the interactions were significant (RQ1).

**Commitment.** For hassles and commitment (H1), neither of the conditional main effects was significant. For uplifts (H2), we unexpectedly found that social uplifts were negatively associated with commitment ($b = -.04, p = .0017, B = -.10$) and nonsocial uplifts were positively associated with commitment ($b = .03, p = .0015, B = .10$). Both of these conditional main effects, however, were qualified by higher level interactions (RQ1).

The interaction of nonsocial hassles by nonsocial uplifts was significant ($b = -.01, p = .0121$). Probing of the interaction revealed that nonsocial uplifts were significantly positively associated with commitment ($b = .05, p = .0001, B = .19$) on days with low nonsocial hassles, but on days with high nonsocial hassles, uplifts were no longer significantly associated with commitment ($b = .01, p = .3285, B = .04$). See Figure 1a.

The interaction of social hassles by social uplifts for commitment was also significant at a trend level ($b = -.02, p = .0380$); however, probing of the interaction revealed an unexpected interaction effect. When social uplifts and social hassles combined, there was an unexpected negative association between social uplifts and commitment that was accelerated on days with high social hassles ($b = -.07, p = .0003, B = -.17$). In contrast, on days with low social hassles, social uplifts were not significantly associated with commitment ($b = -.01, p = .4148, B = -.02$). The interaction is graphically depicted in Figure 1b.

**Maintenance.** For hassles and maintenance (H1), neither of the conditional main effects was significant. For uplifts (H2), we found a positive trend between nonsocial uplifts and maintenance ($b = .03, p = .0488, B = .07$). None of the interactions were significant (RQ1).

**Ambivalence.** For hassles and ambivalence (H1), we found that nonsocial hassles were positively associated with ambivalence ($b = .05, p = .0023, B = .10$). That is, increased nonsocial hassles were associated with increased ambivalence. For uplifts (H2), neither of the conditional main effects was significant. None of the interactions were significant (RQ1).

**Conflict.** For conflict, neither of the conditional main effects of hassles (H1) nor the conditional main effects of uplifts (H2) were significant, nor were any interactions (RQ1).

**Lagged Multilevel Models (RQ2)**

Given questions as to whether the effects of hassles and uplifts linger or quickly dissipate from one day to the next (e.g., DeLongis et al., 1982, 2004), we included both social and nonsocial hassles and uplifts simultaneously and ran a series of lagged effects models. We used the prospective change model outlined by Larson and Almeida (1999) to predict the dependent variable today from yesterday’s independent variable(s) while controlling for yesterday’s dependent variable score. Controlling for the previous day’s dependent variable score allows one to argue that yesterday’s predictors were associated with change in the dependent variable from one day to the next.

We used a similar MLM as the concurrent models, except that we no longer used the autoregressive structure because this would be redundant with the lagged version of the outcome variable. In other words, the autoregressive component of the model (ar1) is the piece that accounts for days within an individual being correlated. In this prospective change model for RQ2, the correlation between 2 days is already accounted for by including the dependent variable at $t - 1$.

We again used a Bonferroni adjustment (i.e., $p < .0167$ for positive dependent variables; $p < .0250$ for negative dependent variables). The models for four of the dependent variables (i.e., commitment, maintenance, ambivalence, and conflict) resulted in no trending or significant fixed effects. The only model demonstrating any effects was the model for positive feelings about the relationship. We found a negative trend in the association between nonsocial uplifts yesterday and today’s positive feelings about the relationship ($b = -.08, p = .0492, B = -.05$). No other main effects or interactions were significant.

**Discussion**

Previous research examining daily experiences and relationship outcomes has focused on hassles and how they undermine rela-
tionship quality (e.g., Harper et al., 2000). We extend this work by also studying positive daily events (i.e., uplifts) and how they may bolster relationship quality. In this study, we focus on experiences external to the relationship (i.e., those not involving the partner). Because a significant portion of one’s day is likely to be spent outside of the relationship, it is important to consider how people manage their daily life demands and the events they encounter throughout their day.

In this study, we offer several contributions to the literature. First, by simultaneously examining external positive and negative events and the associations with positive and negative relationship qualities, we found that nonsocial uplifts had a more systematic impact on relationship outcomes than either social or nonsocial hassles. This pattern is contrary to predominant research documenting the more prominent role of hassles in undermining individual well-being (e.g., Kanner et al., 1981; Maybery et al., 2006) and salience of social events compared to nonsocial events (Almeida et al., 2002; Bolger et al., 1989). Second, we find some evidence for the combined effects of hassles and uplifts, specific to relationship commitment only. Third, we find some support for next-day effects of daily experiences on relationship quality, with nonsocial uplifts associated with decreased positive feelings about the relationship at a trend level ($p < .05$) on the following day.

### The Salient Role of Nonsocial Uplifts in Understanding Positive Relationship Quality

To appreciate how to foster healthy relationships, researchers and practitioners need to understand what strengthens relationships in addition to what erodes relationships. In light of mixed evidence (DeLongis et al., 1982; Kanner et al., 1982; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2008) but in line with the CoR theory, we expected that uplifts would improve positive relationship outcomes (H2). Consistent with the idea that positive events should be beneficial for relationship outcomes, we found that daily nonsocial uplifts contributed to higher positive relational outcomes. In contrast, and contrary to our hypothesis (H1), we found that both nonsocial and social hassles were largely unrelated to relational outcomes. More specifically, our findings indicate that daily nonsocial hassles chip away at same-day relationship feelings only in the case of ambivalence, but social hassles were not significantly associated with any of the relational qualities in terms of main effects. This pattern was surprising given support in the literature on the deleterious effects of daily hassles (e.g., Harper et al., 2000; Totenhagen & Curran, 2011). In contrast to previous studies, however, the present study focused systematically only on those hassles and uplifts external to the relationship, excluding any interpersonal hassles with the partner. We found these external hassles to be largely unrelated to relational outcomes.

Uplifts, on the other hand, bolstered same day relationship feelings more systematically, especially in the case of nonsocial uplifts. Much of what we know about the impact of daily experiences focuses on individual outcomes such as affect and mood (e.g., DeLongis et al., 1982, 1988; Kanner et al., 1981), and these studies find little evidence for the role of positive experiences. In the present study, we focused on positive and negative relational qualities and found that positive experiences external to the relationship had a positive impact on couples’ perceptions of their relationships. Although research examining the phenomenon of spillover has largely focused on the negative aspects (Grzywacz et al., 2002; Matjasko & Feldman, 2006), perhaps spillover also involves “bringing home” the beneficial effects of positive events experienced through the course of a day. These uplifting experiences may build up an individual’s personal resources, resulting in additional resources to be drawn upon in interactions with his or her partner later.

It is notable that it was largely experiences in the nonsocial realm of uplifts, and in one case hassles, that were significantly associated with relational qualities. Nonsocial uplifts were associated with three positive daily relational qualities (positive feelings about the relationship, commitment, and trend level for maintenance), whereas social uplifts were associated only with commitment (although negatively and qualified by a higher level interaction). Additionally, although hassles played a minor role in terms of main effects, nonsocial hassles were associated with increased feelings of ambivalence that day. Social hassles were not significantly associated with any of the relational qualities examined.

This pattern is intriguing in several ways. In previous research, authors have found daily hassles in the social realm (i.e., interactions involving other people) versus the nonsocial realm (e.g., household chores, work demands) to be more frequent (Almeida et al., 2002) and potent (Bolger et al., 1989). Here, we find that nonsocial events—particularly uplifting events—play a more prominent role in relationship quality, especially when relationship quality is positive.

These other studies focused on individual outcomes such as affect and mood, however. It may be that social uplifts are beneficial for individual well-being, but because of their interpersonal nature, these interactions involve a mutual “give” and “take.” Thus, social uplifts, in contrast to nonsocial uplifts, may divert interpersonal resources from the relationship and may not be as beneficial for relationship well-being.

### Interaction Effects

Given that empirical evidence was mixed with respect to the interaction of positive and negative events (Charles et al., 2010), in the current study, we examined how hassles and uplifts might interact with respect to relational qualities (RQ1). We found interesting patterns with respect to the interaction of hassles and uplifts for commitment. We found that nonsocial uplifts bolster feelings of commitment when experienced on a day characterized by low nonsocial hassles, but not under conditions of high nonsocial hassles. That is, when an individual is able to build upon his or her personal resources through uplifting nonsocial events without these resources being usurped by hassling nonsocial events, then this individual is likely to feel more commitment toward his or her partner. Stockpiling these personal resources may contribute to one feeling in a position to commit. For example, individuals often report a lack of nonsocial resources (e.g., finances) as a reason for delaying marriage (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005; Muraco & Curran, 2012). Recognizing uplifting nonsocial events that occur during the day while downplaying any hassling nonsocial events may help couples remain committed to each other.

We found a different pattern with respect to social uplifts and social hassles (although this interaction was significant at a trend level after applying a Bonferroni adjustment). Here, social uplifts...
were associated with declines in feelings of commitment on days when individuals experienced high social hassles, but not on days characterized by low social hassles. Speculating on the meaning of this interaction, we return to the idea of personal resources and interpersonal resources. It may be that engaging in social interactions with individuals other than one’s partner, even if these experiences are perceived as uplifting, may divert interpersonal resources (e.g., time, energy) away from the partner. When also experienced in combination with hassling social events, one’s interpersonal resources may become even further depleted, leaving the individual with fewer interpersonal resources for interacting with his or her partner. Couples may want to focus on sharing in their positive social events during the day and supporting each other through the hassling social events. By connecting over these experiences, perhaps they can avoid such a depletion of resources and instead build resources together.

It is interesting that both of the same-day interactions occurred only for daily feelings of commitment, though in opposite direction. In considering the seeming opposite patterns of the interactions for the social and nonsocial realms, perhaps a common thread in their association with commitment is that they become “overcommitted.” For example, in the social domain, having a lot of uplifts and hassles may lead one to feel stretched too thin—particularly with regards to their interpersonal resources. Feeling as though one already has too many commitments, one may begin to feel less committed to the partner. Similarly, in the nonsocial realm, although uplifts may be beneficial for feelings of commitment when they occur in the context of low hassles, experiencing them along with high hassles might result in the individual feeling as though he or she has too many commitments and thus they no longer experience that boost in commitment to the partner. Couples may need to look for signs of overcommitment in experiences outside of the relationship—particularly regarding social experiences—to maintain or bolster feelings of commitment to their partners. These conclusions are speculative, however, especially given that the interaction in the social realm was significant only at a trend level after correcting for multiple hypothesis testing. We recommend that studies should be conducted to see if these patterns are replicated and whether feeling overcommitted outside of the relationship might be a potential mechanism through which daily experiences impact the relationship.

**Returns to Homeostatic Levels in Next-Day Associations**

In the present study, we used lagged analyses to examine if same day effects of positive and negative events carry over to the next day (RQ2). This examination is important because it can help to establish some arguments for direction of effects as well as untangle the complexity by which events on one day might impact how we feel later on (i.e., the next day).

We found a negative trend in the association between nonsocial uplifts and positive feelings about the relationship on the next day. It may be that uplifts’ saliency are more proximal. That is, what appears to be a negative effect from one day to the next may actually be a reflection of those initial positive effects declining closer to original levels the next day. Finan and colleagues (2010) had similar speculations regarding the findings in their study, suggesting that individuals may be returning to their homeostatic balance.

The present findings may also be thought of as analogous with findings from DeLongis et al. (1998) whereby the more stressful the previous day, the better a person’s mood was the next day. It could be that in comparison to a particularly “good” day (i.e., higher than usual uplifts), the next day feels comparatively “worse” than usual. Note that these lagged-effects were at a trend level and for one outcome only (positive feelings about the relationship). With approximately 40% of completed days being consecutive in nature for the present study, it is possible that with more consecutive data, more lagged effects would become significant. Future research should continue to examine the extent to which findings hold from one day to the next.

**Limitations**

For this study, we relied on mostly single-item measures of relationship quality to increase retention and minimize drop out, or rushing through the surveys, due to participant fatigue (Bolger et al., 2003). These single items comprised four of our five relationship quality variables (i.e., commitment, maintenance, ambivalence, and conflict). This choice was made in balance with the recognition that short measures may, for example, result in attenuated observations. Second, although approximately 37% of the sample was not students, everyone recruited had some tie to the university where the study was conducted. Although having a variety of ages and relationship lengths is a strength, true generalizability is not known. Third, we followed conventions of previous studies (e.g., Almeida et al., 2002) and collected 7 days of data. It is possible that the selected study week was unique in some way (e.g., a particularly stressful week) and not representative of more normative or routine daily experiences. Although more days of data would not necessarily guarantee that “normal” daily life has been captured, the chances are increased.

Additionally, only about 40% of submitted days were consecutive. This means that many participants may have skipped or missed filling out a particular day(s) in the study. This pattern had minimal impact on same-day analyses, but may have greatly reduced power to find significant patterns of results in the lagged analyses because any time a day was missing, that day’s data was not used to predict the following day. It should also be noted that a large proportion of the original sample was excluded from analyses for having too much missing data (i.e., did not complete at least 3 days of valid diary entries) or for other reasons that made their data invalid for the present study (e.g., only one partner participated; multiple entries were submitted on the same day).

Finally, although we found overall consistent patterns of results (e.g., positive effects of same-day nonsocial uplifts on positive relational qualities), we suggest cautious interpretation of others (e.g., lagged effect of nonsocial uplifts on positive feelings about the relationship) given the number of analyses conducted and the possibility of Type I error. We attempted to minimize the possibility of Type I error by applying a Bonferroni adjustment to correct for multiple testing of hypotheses, but recommend that future research continue to examine the complexity of the day-to-day lives of couples so that patterns can be established and practitioners can feel confident in using the research to inform their work with couples.
Implications and Future Research

We found that daily nonsocial uplifts bolster relationship outcomes on the same day. Thus, it seems important to help individuals recognize uplifting events, particularly those nonsocial events having to do with work, home maintenance, and so forth, as well given that they are associated with increased positive outcomes for relationships. In this way, practitioners can help couples build positive feelings in their relationships.

It is also important to consider how daily experiences combine to boost or erode relationships. We examined discrete relational outcomes and found that commitment was particularly influenced by same-day experiences in both the social and nonsocial realms. Helping couples to see, for example, nonsocial events as investments in the self will be beneficial in building resources and bolstering commitment, but a caution is warranted: nonsocial uplifts may no longer be beneficial when the individual also experiences a lot of nonsocial hassles. Further, couples may need to be cautious about overextending themselves socially, as days with increased social uplifts and high social hassles are associated with declines in commitment. Research that contextualizes the findings from the present study by examining whether the same patterns of results are found for positive and negative relational (as opposed to individual) constructs would be an important extension in the steps toward understanding how daily processes outside of the relationship might impact the relationship.

The negative association for the lagged effects of nonsocial uplifts on positive feelings about the relationship may suggest that feelings about the relationship quickly return to homeostatic levels. In this case, these negative associations may not be a concern. If, on the other hand, these next-day effects occur because when an individual experiences an especially uplifting day and feels particularly good about the relationship, the next day feels comparatively worse (e.g., does not live up to high expectations based on yesterday’s experiences), then it may be important to help couples focus on the positive things they experienced without creating unrealistic expectations for subsequent days. These distinctions may be difficult to untangle. Future researchers who are examining the lagged effects of daily experiences on relationship quality may try asking participants to reflect on how their feelings about their relationships each day compare to how they typically feel about their relationships. Although this method would be at risk of some bias given that current feelings about the relationship can color an individual’s perceptions of the overall relationship, it would provide one way for researchers to try to understand whether fluctuations in feelings from day to day are reflective of returns to homeostatic levels.

Concluding Remarks

Our study relies on both theoretical and empirical approaches in understanding changes in relationship quality as a process that unfolds over time, which is vital if we are to understand what makes some relationships flourish while others wither. Although CoR theory is more often applied to individually focused studies (e.g., affect, mood), we found it useful in framing our study of positive and negative relational quality. CoR is unique among other stress theories in that it allows us to consider both what strengthens (e.g., uplifts) and what weakens (e.g., hassles) relationships. We used this theory in combination with methodological and statistical approaches that permitted the examination of how such positive and negative events sustain or erode relationships on the same day in which they occur and how these effects carry over to the next day. We found that commitment was particularly influenced by same-day hassles and uplifts and suggest that future work continue to examine whether distinct patterns exist for discrete relationship outcomes. Our findings allow us to conclude that couples should be equipped to deal with hassles as they occur and to recognize uplifting events on a daily basis as well, particularly those nonsocial events that may be uplifting throughout the day. Recognizing and appreciating “the good things” on a daily basis may help couples to preserve relationship quality.

References
