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Effects of Positive and Negative Events on Daily Relationship
Effect for Clinical Couples: A Daily Diary Study

Kayla Dawn Mennenga

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Effects of Positive and Negative Events on Daily Relationship Effect for Clinical Couples: A Daily Diary Study

Kayla Dawn Mennenga
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Doctor of Philosophy

Relationship satisfaction is a popular variable to consider when looking at long-term success for couples. Research indicates positive and negative events have an impact on relationship satisfaction. Considering the influence of the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation framework, the present study focuses on the daily impact of positive and negative events that happen outside of therapy on couple relationship satisfaction for couples seeking therapy. Daily diary methods were used to collect data, a first for using this method with clinical couples. Random effects and multilevel models of analysis controlled for days and couples. Results suggest that on any given day, positive events impact both male and female daily relationship satisfaction. Findings also propose that these events outside of therapy tend to occur more frequently in the evening on any given day, specifically for negative events. Understanding these findings, therapists have an opportunity to use therapy as a tool to enhance adaptive processes for couples in order for couples to continue experiencing higher levels of couple satisfaction.

Keywords: daily diary, couple satisfaction, process research, daily interactions

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I have finished. I have run the course, and I have not done it alone. In a lot of ways this paper belongs to many people. The support of those around me has been invaluable and necessary. Without these supporters, especially the few I'm about to mention, I may not have gotten to where I am today.

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Introduction

Couple distress is often a primary reason why individuals seek professional clinical help (Swindle, Heller, Pescosolido & Kikuzawa, 2000; Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006) and is highly correlated to individual emotional and behavioral disorders in other close relationships (Whisman, Sheldon, & Goering, 2000). Additionally, couple distress has a direct and adverse effect on multiple physiological systems that can contribute to physical health problems (Keicolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Couple distress enhanced by negative events is prevalent and has a strong link to emotional, behavioral, and health problems for individuals, as well as their offspring (Gottman, 1999). Such distress has an impact on individuals and other close relationships, as well as couple satisfaction, both temporarily and over time.

Doss, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) suggest that couples seek professional help, particularly couple therapy, after they have been unhappy in the relationship for a significant amount of time. In these instances, couples seek therapy in order to deal with a variety of issues, including communication problems, sexual problems, affairs, addictions, past hurts or trauma, and other mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. For many, counseling allows an opportunity for individuals to increase their overall satisfaction and positive feelings about the relationship. However, research shows that therapeutic interventions and treatment lack the ability to fully help 33 to 50% of couples (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997; Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006).

Relationship satisfaction has long been a popular topic of research, and researchers provide a variety of information about the positive (uplifts) and negative (hassles) events that occur for individuals and for couples that impact relationship satisfaction. For example, previous research has shown that higher levels of relationship satisfaction can serve as a protective factor

for psychological distress and negative life events (e.g. Waltz, Bandura, Pfaff, & Schott, 1988). Moreover, researchers have provided a variety of theories to understand couples, relationships, and systems. Karney and Bradbury (1995) posit that relationships experience vulnerabilities, deal with stressors, and have adaptive processes that influence the relationship trajectory. Furthermore, research provides insight and understanding into how these stressors and adaptive processes impact couples. Couples who foster positive experiences in their relationship tend to have more tools and skills necessary to maintain engagement and create adaptive processes that are beneficial to their relationship satisfaction. Alternatively, couples that experience negative events or stressors in their relationship suffer in their ability to remain attentive to each other and to create cohesion between them.

This leaves researchers and therapists with many questions as to how therapy can create change in relationships and how to have more influence in helping clients change. A variety of previous research has adopted the survey method in order to collect data on the variables they are studying; however, survey research has some disadvantages, such as time gaps for participant recall (Wilhelm, Perez, & Pawlik, 2012) and using current viewpoints to remember past experiences (Visser, Krosnick, & Lavrakas, 2000). Daily diary methods, however, help to fill these gaps in ways as measuring more frequent intervals of time (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Yorgason, Johnson, & Hardy, 2014) and by measuring data in more natural settings (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). The present study seeks to understand couple relational experiences that happen outside of therapy (e.g., arguments or doing something with or for one's partner) on a daily basis to provide more insight for therapists about how to have a greater impact on daily relationship satisfaction for couples who are seeking counseling.

Literature Review

Understanding relationship satisfaction, as well as the factors that impact satisfaction, has long been researched. Researchers have described both positive and negative events that occur within relationships as factors that impact relationship satisfaction. In addition, literature provides insight on how these events individually impact relationship satisfaction, daily and long-term. The current literature review examines positive and negative events and the impact on relationship satisfaction, as well as how that impacts couples. In addition, it will tie the theoretical framework and the current study together to understand the daily impact for couples in therapy and reported relationship satisfaction.

The theoretical framework discussed next provides a backdrop for understanding the impact on couple relationships and the importance of events in everyday life for individuals. It also provides insight into how couple relationships change and what impacts those changes.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand couples and relationships, Karney and Bradbury (1995) reviewed the longitudinal course of marital quality and stability and developed a framework that they believe encompasses a representative model for couple relationships. The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model contains three elements: enduring vulnerabilities, stressors, and adaptations. Karney and Bradbury posit that these three variables interact in such a way to create a more complete picture for researching couples. They describe vulnerabilities as experiences or inclinations individuals have been exposed to or acquitted in previous or alternative relationships to the couple relationships. Stressors are described as external to the couple but impact the couple. Lastly, adaptation involves the development of beneficial methods achieved through the experience of vulnerabilities and stressors in order to handle events in the couple relationship.

While the model contains these three elements, the current paper focuses on the stress and adaptive methods elements in the framework. The current study does not investigate vulnerability of the individuals because this element is long-term rather than day-to-day. Also, the current data did not have variables related to vulnerability.

The vulnerability-stress-adaptation model posits that stressful events and adaptive processes are interconnected, and collectively affect marital quality. That is, the effectiveness of a couple's adaptive processes mediates the effect of stressful life events on their marital quality. Karney and Bradbury describe stressful events as external to the couple, adding extra weight to individual stress levels, such as stress with work (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Repetti, 1989), unemployment (Aubry, Tefft & Kingsbury, 1990; Gorchoff, John, & Helson, 2008), and normative life transitions. Adaptive processes are described as the couple's ability to adjust or influence the challenges and stressors experienced. Adaptive processes also encompass the behaviors expressed by each individual during negative marital interactions (Cohan & Bradbury, 1997).

Maladaptive processes would include the "inability to empathize and support the partner, defensiveness, hostility, and disengaged problem solving skills" (Randall & Bodenmann, 2008). How the individual or partner judges the quality of the marriage impacts the adaptive process that takes place. For instance, couples who are seeking counseling often struggle to empathize and understand each other. Maladaptive processes are often the first element observed in therapy, such as a partner being defensive or unable to accept influence from another partner. Also, individuals often fight for their position instead of seeking to understand one's partner. Part of the therapy process involves fostering new and positive experiences that enhance individuals' abilities to attend to, to be empathetic toward, and to seek to understand each other.

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation framework developed by Karney and Bradbury (1995) provides a basis for the current study. Research indicates that capturing life events based on one moment in time is not sufficient in predicting couple satisfaction on a daily basis. Couples experience an ebb and flow of events throughout the day and from day to day. Furthermore, individuals are impacted differently by these events on any given day. Stressors and adaptive processes are examined in the current study by measuring positive and negative events that occur for couples on any given day. Olsen and DeFrain (1994) found that couples who have moderate levels of cohesion and adaptability tend to have higher levels of satisfaction. Adaptive processes are captured in the positive events that encourage an increase in relationship satisfaction and cohesion between the individuals. Also, adaptive processes are observed in the individual's ability to show support and be engaged with his or her partner.

The current study seeks to capture some stress and adaptation events that couples who are seeking counseling experience. Using the daily diary method, couples will report on daily events for the duration of the study to better understand how couples experience one another on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore the study seeks to understand the impact of every day events on the couple relationship on any given day. Understanding the daily impact on couples provides insight for therapists as they help couples create daily change in their relationships.

Daily Diary Methods

Many survey methods of research have been used in order to understand relationships, relationships between different variables, and individual processes. While there are positive benefits to survey research, it is limited in a couple of ways. First, survey research requires individuals to recall information with varying degrees of time. This creates time gaps that are hard for individuals to report on these events accurately (Wilhelm, Perrez, & Pawlik, 2012). In

addition, survey research faces the problem of question development; slight variations in the wording of questions can result in rather significant changes in results (Rodgers & Miller, 1997). According to Visser, Krosnick, & Lavrakas (2000), survey methods often use a retrospective approach and involve reconstructive experiences, using current vantage points to construct memories surrounding the questions.

Furthermore, often when using survey methods, researchers try to use a broad range of questions in order to cover a large topic area or several topics (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Ohn Sizia, 2003). In doing this, researchers run the risk of implications from the results being inaccurate or irrelevant, a threat to conclusion validity (Johnson & Miller, 2014). Using a broad range of questions or covering a large topic area can lead to researchers committing a type I error (finding a relationship that doesn't exist) in the findings. Nelson and Allred (2005) indicate that survey research is hard to replicate due to the inability to describe or control for the process.

Daily diary methods, instead, provide questions for an ongoing, continuous assessment (Reis, 2012). Daily diary methods help to fill in these gaps by asking individuals about events in their more natural and spontaneous setting (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). Daily diary methods allow researchers to collect data at more frequent intervals and with less time lapse between experiences (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Yorgason, Johnson, & Hardy, 2014).

Daily diary methods were first introduced in the fields of personality and social psychology and have been used in previous research as a way to examine intimacy in relationships (Laurenceau, Barrett, Feldman, & Rovine, 2005), to understand individual responses to relationship tension (Birditt, Fingerman, & Almeida, 2005), and the impact of stress on relationships (Falconier, Nussbeck, Bodenmann, Schneider, and Bradbury, 2015). Popular research in the 1970s focused on individuals in therapy settings as a way for clinical

psychologists to understand behavior and promote self-monitoring in order to facilitate desired change (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979; Lewinsohn & Libet, 1972; Wilhelm, Perez, & Pawlik, 2012). Daily diary methods have been used to understand how individuals perceive relationship satisfaction with a variety of variables, such as intimacy (Laurenceau, Barrett, Rovine, 2005), depressive symptoms (Tolpin, Cohen, Gunthert, & Farrehi, 2006), and expressed gratitude (Gordon, Arnette, & Smith, 2011). Laurenceau and Bolger (2005) also provided ways for researchers to gather information with couples and families using the daily diary methods. The use of daily diary methods have been used in a broad range of studies with a number of variables; however, daily diary methods have not been used to study or understand treatment and process for individuals who are seeking couples counseling.

Positive Events

Previous research describes positive events in various ways stretching from big life changes, such as marriage or the birth of the first child, to every day interactions, such as communication, or smaller experiences, such as getting a care package from a relative (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lavee and Ben-Ari (2008) defined hassles and uplifts as “experiences and conditions of daily living that have been appraised as harmful or favorable to the endorser’s well-being” (p. 89; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Couples who experience an imbalance in the experience of these events, specifically experiencing negative events (hassles) tend to seek help from therapy in rebalancing the relationship.

Previous literature has labeled positive events as uplifts and negative events as hassles (Maybery & Graham, 2001; Totenhagen, Serido, Curran, & Butler, 2012). Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004) found that sharing positive daily events with one’s partner increased daily relationship satisfaction, regardless of the level of importance of the event. Sharing positive

events of the day with one's partner allows opportunities for individuals in a relationship to respond to one another in a way that enhances support and thus relationship satisfaction.

Totenhagen, Serido, Curran, and Butler (2012) found positive daily events, or uplifts, to be more impactful relationally than individually.

Many factors can influence the relationship satisfaction for a couple, including doing something with or for a partner, showing support and affection, and engaging in positive communication patterns. Bonding together during events and allowing for cohesion and the ability to empathize with one another (adaptive processes) enhances couple experiences, even in the midst of negative events that occur in the relationship. Therapists often use the therapy room and experience as a way for couples to practice and gain skills in couples' abilities to foster these behaviors. Additionally, individuals who feel positively about their relationship and tend to perceive their relationship with more optimism tend to have greater relationship satisfaction and higher levels of happiness (Srivastava, McGonigal, Richards, & Butler, 2006).

Showing support. Research indicates that showing support can positively impact relationship satisfaction. Baldwin, Ellis, and Baldwin (1999) suggest that relationship satisfaction increases, as individuals perceive more support in their relationship. Individuals who perceive their partners to be more accepting and supportive of their daily activities are likely to experience higher levels of couple satisfaction than those who feel isolated in their relationship. More recent research indicates that higher levels of emotion regulation are associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Bloch, Haase, & Levenson, 2014). Individuals who are able to regulate their emotions have the ability to stay connected and engaged with their partner on a more regular basis and in a variety of settings, events, or experiences. The ability to emotionally

regulate also indicates an adaptive process that has taken place in which the partner is able to empathize, to validate, and to understand one's partner.

Communication. Research suggests the way couples communicate impacts long-term relationship satisfaction and stability (Gottman, 1993; 1999; Heyman, 2001; Pearce & Halford, 2008). During high conflict communication, Gottman (1999) states that couples in which both partners turn toward one another during conflict show emotional connection, which contributes to the experience of feeling validated and can lead to higher relationship satisfaction. Feeling validated and emotionally connected during communication, specifically conflict, increases relationship satisfaction for individuals. Furthermore, couples express higher levels of relationship satisfaction who are able to accomplish more in conversation when they are able to attribute a positive interpretation to a negative behavior or when a positive sentiment is expressed during communication.

Additionally, relationship satisfaction can be impacted by interactions during communication that enhance connection and engagement between individuals. Gottman (1994; 1999) indicates that the way individuals in a relationship communicate and resolve conflict has a great chance of predicting longevity in the relationship. He suggests that it is *how* the couple talks about conflict that makes a difference in relationship satisfaction. In addition, his research indicates that couples who have softer start-ups for conflictual conversations are better able to validate and be responsive to the other partner, resulting in higher satisfaction. These behaviors during communication increase connection and engagement and the possibility for resolution, creating positive experiences for couples.

Time together. Leisure activity and involvement have positive outcomes for positive interactions, and spending time together produces more satisfying relationships. Research

indicates that other interactive activities enhance relationship satisfaction as well. Previous literature suggests that spending time together increases relationship satisfaction (Kingston & Nock, 1987; Orthner, 1975). Couples that spend time fostering connectedness between them tend to experience higher levels of relationships satisfaction. For example, research indicates that couples who experience positive sexual intimacy report higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Heiman et al., 2011). For both men and women, “increasing sexual functioning had a persistent, positive effect on the probability of relationship happiness” (Heiman et al., 2011, p. 749). Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, and Heyman (2000) found that individuals who shared in new and arousing activities show higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Their study showed consistent results across two questionnaires and three experiments.

Likewise, individuals who are satisfied with the leisure involvement with their partner tend to have higher levels of relationship satisfaction regardless of the amount of time spent together or the type of leisure activity (Johnson, Zabriskie, & Hill, 2006), which is different from Kingston and Nock (1987) who suggested that the kind of time together does in fact matter. They found that husbands and wives who spend time talking with one another improves relationship satisfaction. In their study, husbands who reported spending time together, having fun, and eating meals together improved relationship satisfaction.

Orthner (1975) and other early literature about leisure activity suggest that it is during intense interactional patterns that leisure time becomes significant. According to early researchers (Kaplan, 1960; West & Merrian, 1970), leisure activities reduce anxiety for individuals and provide opportunities for individuals to create new interactions and adaptive processes to increase interactions in the future.

Several factors contribute to increasing relationship satisfaction. Researchers describe positive events as more impactful relationally than individually (Totenhagen, Serido, Curran, and Butler; 2012). Research indicates that experiencing positive events has positive implications for individuals and for relationship satisfaction. Positive events bond individuals in a relationship and have daily and long-term implications for satisfaction. Alternatively, research suggests there are negative events, or hassles, that also have a grave impact on relationship satisfaction. Understanding the impact of negative events on relationship satisfaction will also be explored.

Negative Events

In addition to positive factors influencing relationship satisfaction, there are negative events that contribute to individuals feeling less positive about their relationship and reporting lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Previous studies suggest that negative events create couple distress and dissatisfaction and have negative consequences for the physical and emotional well-being for spouses (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Emery, 1982). More recent studies indicate the harmful impact negative events can have on relationship satisfaction (Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). Maybery, Jones-Ellis, Neale, and Arentz (2006) found that hassles, or negative events, tend to undermine one's individual well-being, which ultimately impacts the overall relationship satisfaction in the couple relationship. Additionally, Lavee and Ben-Ari (2008) found that life satisfaction is more strongly associated with daily hassles, or negative daily events, than positive events, which has an overflow effect into relationship satisfaction. While it can take couples a long time to seek therapy and the reasons vary for why couples show up, therapy is often used as a place to increase satisfaction due to negative events taking place in the relationship (Doss, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004; Gottman & Gottman, 1999).

Negative communication. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) suggest that negativity during couple interaction predicts greater increases in couple dissatisfaction over time; husbands' and wives' reports of negativity during interaction are negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Malis and Roloff (2006) suggest from their findings that those couples who experience "serial arguments" report lower levels of relationship satisfaction and a consistent pattern in negative interactional behaviors (p. 212). Previous research completed by Heavey, Christensen, and Malamuth (1995) suggest that wives report lower relationship satisfaction when husbands withdraw as issues are raised by the wives. Furthermore, wives relationship satisfaction is also negatively impacted when there is a wife demand and husband withdraw pattern that occurs during conversation or conflict. Other research suggests that regardless of whether men or women withdraw, the presence of withdrawal behaviors is associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Malis & Roloff, 2006; Stanley, Markman, and Whitton, 2002).

Heyman (2001) suggests that couples who experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction are more likely to experience hostility and escalate their partner's hostility and tend to engage in longer negative reciprocity loops during communication. Other research contributes to negative relationship satisfaction suggesting that negative communication behaviors, such as criticism and coercion (Noller & White, 1990) contribute to lower couple relationship satisfaction. In addition Sanders, Halford, and Behrens (1999) suggest that justification, disagreement, and negative suggestions during communication contribute to overall lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Previous research also indicates that the overall rate of negative communication reported by individuals contributes to lower couple relationship satisfaction (Heyman, 2001; Kiecolt-Glaser, Bane, Glaser, & Malarkey, 2003).

Kim, Lee, and Park (2011) suggest that couples in which one individual has alexithymia, a psychological construct in which an individual lacks the skills to understand and communicate emotions effectively in a relationship, experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Broman (2005) suggests that relationships in which one partner exhibits a critical attitude tend to report lower levels of relationship satisfaction. This suggests that couples who exhibit poor adaptive processes, such as the inability to listen or understand or help their partner feel loved, tend to have lower relationship satisfaction, consistent with the Karney and Bradbury's (1995) conclusions about the role of adaptive processes for couples.

Issues related to family and time together. One of the many areas of conflict for couples involves division of labor. Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2001) found that the less satisfied partners were about the division of labor, the less relationship satisfaction individuals felt. Interestingly, the need for the work to be equal was not significant. In addition, the researchers found that the level of satisfaction with household-labor was more significantly associated with poorer relationship satisfaction than emotional work. In regards to time together, couples who reported more personal distance, such as time away from the home or involvement with school or work commitments, also tended to report lower relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1994).

McCabe (2006) provided a substantial review of factors that have impacted relationship satisfaction for couples. His overview suggests that adding children to the family provides a stressor that negatively impacts relationship satisfaction. Specifically, those who either had higher levels of relationship satisfaction or much lower levels of relationship satisfaction before the birth of the child showed a potent impact on relationship satisfaction after the birth of the child (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Adding a child to the routine of every day life can impact the relationship satisfaction as the roles shift in the home. Added stress within the

home can impact the positive and negative daily interactions that occur within a couple. Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002) found that for blended families, conflict over children was most commonly reported as a source of conflict and, consequentially, associated with lower relationship satisfaction.

Several factors contribute to negatively impacting relationship satisfaction. Researchers describe the gravity that negative events can have on satisfaction in relationships, as well as overall life satisfaction. Research indicates that experiencing these negative events has unfortunate implications for individuals and for relationship satisfaction. Negative events can create distress that limits individual ability to attend to their partner in the ways that are necessary to bond and stay connected to their partners.

Impacts of Negative and Positive Events on Couples

Literature indicates that positive and negative events have a role in the relationship and on how satisfied individuals are in their relationship. Daily events create opportunities for individuals to supportively respond to one another in their relationship (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), experience activities together (Johnson, Zabriskie, & Hill, 2006), and build intimacy in their relationship (Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000). Additionally, Totenhagen, Serido, Curran, and Butler (2012) found that uplifts, or positive daily events, tend to have a more systematic impact on relational qualities, relationship satisfaction, than other uplifts happening outside of the relationship. On the other hand, negative events can have a negative impact on the relationship satisfaction for a couple (Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000; Totenhagen, Serido, Curran, & Butler, 2012). According to Totenhagen, Serido, Curran, and Butler (2012), daily hassles, or negative events, can often deplete an individual of their resources and energy and diminish the individual's ability to communicate well or share emotionally with one's partner.

Karney and Bradbury (1995) suggest that the individual experience within a relationship matters and serve as a pathway in understanding relationship satisfaction for couples. This study sought to understand the daily impact of couple satisfaction for couples that seek counseling. Daily diary methods were used to monitor daily events, and data was used in order to explore the following questions.

Research Questions

This study seeks to understand how relationship satisfaction is influenced on a daily basis by both positive and negative events. The present study will investigate the following questions:

1. When do individuals report positive and negative events occurring?
2. At what time of day are positive events most frequently experienced compared to negative events?
3. Do positive events and negative events occur more frequently for men than for women?
4. How do positive events and negative events influence reported relationship satisfaction on any given day?
5. Do positive events influence reported relationship satisfaction on any given day differently for women than they do for men?
6. Do negative events influence reported relationship satisfaction on any given day differently for women than they do for men?
7. Which type of positive event has the largest impact on reported relationship satisfaction for any given day?
8. Which type of negative event has the largest impact on daily relationship satisfaction on any given day?

Methods

Sample

Participants were 33 clinical couples who qualified for the study and who requested treatment for relationship issues and who agreed to participate in the study. Participants received treatment at one of two university clinics located in the western United States and in the southeastern United States, both connected to a marriage and family therapy program in the university. Most participants reported being married (83.7%), and 55% percent of participants reported being married for an average of 7 years or less. Male participants reported an average age of 30.7 years (SD = 6.7) and female participants reported an average age of 28.8 years (SD = 6.0). Sixty-nine percent of participants reported an annual income of \$40,000 or less, and 97% of participants reported some education beyond high school. Most participants reported their race as White (83%). Couples completed the Daily Diary of Events in Couple Therapy and provided responses for up to 28 days after therapy started, resulting in information for 543 total days, and the couple provided information an average of 16.4 days. Over the course of the project, couples participated in 67 therapy sessions, an average of 2 therapy sessions per couple.

Measures

Demographics. Participants completed a demographics questionnaire offering background information on age, race, relationship status, length of marriage or relationship, and annual income.

Daily Diary of Events in Couple Therapy (DDECT). The questionnaire used for this study was adapted and specifically designed for this study from the Daily Inventory of Stressful Events (Almeida, Wethington, & Kessler, 2002) to assess the impact of events in clinical couples daily life. The DDECT consisted of six main questions including did the individual try

something from therapy at home, was there an argument, did something happen that the individual wanted to argue about but decided not to, did something positive happen, did something happen at work or school that influenced the relationship, and did the individual exercise. The questions were answered with either a yes or a no, and each question had additional open-ended follow-up questions. Additionally, as follow up, individuals rated how much the events impacted their stress level, the relationship, their daily routine, and thoughts about self and their partner.

The focus of this paper relies on responses to two of the six sections from the DDECT. The sections used for the study are positive and negative events that occurred on a daily basis. Positive events are described as any positive event that participants report is positive in their relationship. If participants responded ‘yes’ to having a positive experience with their partner, then they answered 7 follow-up questions. The follow up questions asked individuals to describe the event, what about the event was positive, how positive it was, how the positive event impacted the relationship, when and how the positive event took place, how often something positive occurs in the relationship, and how the positive event affected various aspects of their life, such as health, finances, and how they feel about their partner and themselves.

Negative events are described in the context of individuals reporting on arguments that occurred in the relationship or something negative that happened at work or school. Therefore, the categorical variables coded were topics that couples argued about. If participants responded ‘yes’ to having an argument or disagreement with their partner since the day before, then the individual answered 8 follow-up questions similar to the follow up questions described above for positive events. The follow up questions asked about what the argument was about, when and how the argument occurred, the intensity of the argument, how stressful the argument was, and

how the argument impacted several areas about the relationship, such as how they feel about their partner and how their partner feels about themselves.

The data for this paper were gathered using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2015).

Procedures

Data for this study were collected at two university clinics in different regions of the United States. Clients (couples) contacted the clinic requesting services for relationship problems. Study procedures were described to potential participants who then indicated their willingness to participate by signing a consent form approved by the IRB. Couples were then assigned a therapist. Participants were given instructions on how to complete the DDECT that would require approximately 20 minutes. Each day, participants individually received an email containing a unique URL for that day that linked them to the DDECT and were asked to complete it each day sometime in the evening, ideally about the same time each evening; however, no specific time was instructed to the clients. If clients failed to complete the assessment three days in a row, a person on the research team would contact them reminding them to complete the DDECT. Participants were compensated by receiving free therapy sessions during the 28 days of the DDECT.

The lag between when participants reported on events and the date they were reporting could be recorded because participants were asked to provide the date for which they were reporting, and the Qualtrics program on which the questionnaire was generated provided a time stamp for the day the participants completed the survey and an identifier for which day the survey was sent. The average reporting lag was 1.07 days ($SD = 1.59$) for females and 1.36 days ($SD = 2.33$) for males. This suggests that participants, in general, reported about the events of the day after the events had occurred. Additionally, the median lag was one with 89.3% of lags being

two or less for females and 85.8% for males. The study only included days for which both individuals in the couple reported on events.

Variables

Independent variables for the current study include both positive and negative events that are reported on daily by individuals in a relationship. The dependent variable discussed is the daily relationship effect. Each of the independent variables are measured against the base category “no event”.

Positive events. In order to create variables for the positive events open-ended responses, a team of researchers on the study coded the open-ended responses and grouped them into similar categories. Originally, participants provided a variety of messages that were combined and resulted in sixteen different categories. The categories were combined further to create the 5 categories used for the study. First, one researcher grouped the open-ended responses and numbered them, resulting in 16 categories. Three additional researchers individually grouped the variables by combining open-ended responses, labeled them, and numbered them. The principal investigator provided input about the groups and labels and then had the lead researcher collapse the provided categories from each of the researchers down to 9 categories. The group of researchers worked together for one final time to collapse the responses down to a more manageable number, resulting in 5 categories that best represented the responses.

The final categories for positive events were: 1) did something with/for partner; 2) showed support/affection; 3) positive communication; 4) external positive experiences; and 5) personal change. For example, category 1, “did something with/for partner”, was coded by combining four open-ended responses: spent time together, exercised together, acts of kindness, and helped partner. For category 2, “showed support/affection”, two open-ended responses were

combined: supported each other/felt supported and showed affection/had sex. Category 3, “positive communication” was created by combining four open-ended responses: better communication, getting along, resolved conflict, and no fighting. Three open-ended responses were combined to create category 4, “external positives”: partner handled stressful events, received good news, and positive therapy experience. Lastly, category 4, “personal change” was a single open-ended response that was used as a category. In addition, individuals reported on events that happened at work or school with open-ended responses that were also coded following the same process for the positive experiences. Two categories were created to fit with positive events: 1) good news/positive experience, and 2) completed task at work/school.

Negative events. In order to create variables for the open-ended responses provided by participants in regards to what couples argued about, a similar process occurred compared to the positive events open-ended responses. One researcher grouped the open-ended responses and numbered them. Then, three additional researchers individually grouped the variables by combining open-ended responses, labeled them, and numbered them. The first round of collapsing categories resulted in decreasing the number of categories from 22 to 10. The principal investigator provided input about the groups and labels and then had the lead researcher collapse the provided categories from each of the researchers one final time down to 4 categories that represented the responses the best.

The final categories labeled for what couples argued about were: 1) issues related to the family/time together; 2) communication; 3) complaints about relationship/partner; and 4) daily tasks. For example, category 1, “issues related to the family/time together”, was created by combining six open-ended responses: in-laws, accidents/emergencies, kids, time spent/extracurricular activities, future/goals, and health issues. Category 2, “communication”,

was coded by combining three open-ended responses: previous arguments, miscommunication, and lying. For category 3, “complaints about relationship/partner”, seven open-ended responses were combined: emotions/reactions/stress, topics from therapy, sex, behaviors, support issues, complaints about relationship, and previous relationships. Finally, combining five open-ended responses created category 4, “daily tasks”: scheduling, finances, housing/household chores, parking, and work. In addition, individuals reported on events that happened at work or school with open-ended responses that were coded following the same process for the negative events. Two categories were created to fit with negative events: 1) stress with work or school/partner’s work or school, and 2) negative experiences.

Timing of events. For both positive and negative events, individuals reported on when the events took place during the day, such as before breakfast or between getting home from work/school and dinner or between dinner and bedtime.

Daily relationship effect. Individuals were asked to report on their relationship in the daily diary assessment. Individuals reported on positive and negative events that occurred during the day, as well as the intensity of the impact the events had on the relationship, life, and toward their partner. The variable for the daily relationship effect will serve as the dependent variable and was created by calculating the average of clients responses to questions related to the effect of events on their relationship. The client responded to how the events impacted the relationship on any given day. In addition, the client also responded if there was not an event and how no event also impacted the dependent variable. Thus, the effect is always compared to nothing happening. The values in this variable range from 1 to 5; therefore, higher scores for daily relationship effect indicates higher positive benefit to the relationship.

Analysis

Daily diary studies capture every day life in the most natural setting as possible (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003). Using daily diaries, individuals provide frequent reports on events and experiences of their daily lives. This method of data collection allows researchers to track changes over a short period of time and to examine micro processes shortly after they have taken place (Yorgason, Johnson, & Hardy, 2014).

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the underlying characteristics of the study. Correlations were also examined to understand the existing relationship between variables. In order to observe the frequency and timing of positive and negative events (research questions 1 and 2), descriptive and frequency statistics were used. A Chi-Square test was also run in order to test for an association among these variables. Independent samples t-tests were used to observe differences in predictor variables between husbands and wives in regards to the frequency of experience of both positive and negative events (research question 3). Because the data is considered panel data, a random effects regression model was used in Stata version 14.0 to explore the impact of positive and negative events on relationship as it refers to husbands and wives (research questions 5 and 6).

Multilevel regression with categorical variables was used in order to observe the differences between categories within predictor variables. This analysis strategy also accounted for the fact that data are nested within couples and days. This method of analysis was also used to examine the impact of the predictor variables on relationship satisfaction on a daily basis (research question 4). Finally, investigating the type of positive event that has the largest impact on relationship satisfaction (research question 7) required running multiple random effects regression models. In order to observe the largest impact, each variable was set as the base

category in order to create different base categories for comparison and thus determine the significance level of each separate variable.

Results

This study examined the impact of positive and negative events on couple relationship satisfaction on any given day. Data was collected using a daily diary method. The dependent variable in each model is daily relationship effect. Table 1 shows the correlations for the dependent variables. The correlation coefficient for female daily relationship effect ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .86$) and male relationship effect ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .99$) was .2, suggesting that the two dependent variables have a moderate and significant correlation.

Occurrence of Events

To answer research question 1 and 2—how often and when individuals are reporting negative and positive events occurring in their daily routine, frequencies were run for the independent variables, positive and negative events. Table 2 shows the correlations, means, and standard deviations for the independent variables.

Results show that on any given day, males (79%) and females (77%) do not report an argument occurring (see Table 3). For a positive event occurring on any given day, the majority of males (53%) report that nothing positive occurs; however, the majority of females (65%) report a positive event taking place, such as showing support or affection to one's partner or experiencing positive communication. Further analysis concludes that males and females report that on any given day arguments occur most often in the evening (males = 69.48%; females = 70.12%), indicating that arguments occur more often after he/she returns from work and before bedtime. Furthermore, on any given day, males and females also report positive events occurring

in the evening (males = 64.71%; females = 68.29%). Given the results, there is a significant association for couples experiencing both positive and negative events between the time they come home from work or school and before bedtime; however, this was only significant for negative events ($\chi^2 = 21.47; p < .0001$).

Events and Gender

Research question three asks about the difference of occurrence of events for males and females. A paired *t*-test was run to determine whether there was a statistically significant mean difference between male and females for reported occurrence of daily events. For daily experience of arguments, results indicate a mean difference of .02 between males and females ($t = 1.04; p = .297$). This would indicate that males and females report similar rates of arguments. However, reports of positive events were different. Males and females have a mean difference of .183 ($t = 6.82; p < .000$). This indicates that males ($M = .47; SD = .50$) and females ($M = .65; SD = .48$) report a statistically significant difference in the frequency of experiencing positive events. Females are reporting more frequent experiences of positive events than males (see Table 4).

Impact of Events on Daily Relationship

Research questions four, five, and six were asked to understand the impact of positive and negative events on daily relationship effect, and if there is a different impact for women and men. A random effects model was used to answer all questions. Other names have been used to describe random effects models, such as a mixed model, a multilevel model, or a hierarchical linear model (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This type of analysis was chosen because it accounts for nested variables; events were nested within couples within days.

Research question 4 focused on the overall impact of positive and negative events on the dependent variable, while questions 5 and 6 focused on the difference of impact the events had on the dependent variable for males and females. Controlling for days and couples, results indicate (see Tables 5 and 6) that on any given day, individuals who report positive or negative events occurring show a significant impact on individual daily relationship satisfaction in all five positive events. This indicates that on any given day that an individual reports a positive event occurring, male ($Wald \chi^2 (18) = 357.28, p < .0001$) and female ($Wald \chi^2 (18) = 1479, p < .0001$) individual relationship satisfaction is either positively or negatively impacted by the event. For instance, when the wife reports showing support or affection as a positive event, her daily relationship satisfaction improves by 1.06 ($p < .0001$). For males, his relationship satisfaction on any given day improves by 1.12.

Males also show improvement in their relationship satisfaction on any given day when they report experiencing personal change as a positive event ($b = 1.20; p < .0001$). Females reporting a negative event involving communication ($b = -.41; p = .002$) or complaints about the relationship or partner ($b = -.40; p < .0001$) show a decline in their relationship satisfaction on any given day. However, male relationship satisfaction on any given day shows a decline when females report a negative event around communication ($b = -.30; p < .05$). In addition, research questions 5 and 6 focused on the gender differences in daily relationship satisfaction as it relates to positive and negative events. Models were analyzed independently for males and females.

Males. Results suggest that, for males, on any given day if he reports something positive happening, his daily relationship satisfaction is higher on that day. On any given day, if a male reports doing something positive with or for his partner ($b = 1.06; z = 4.48; p < .001$), support or affection shown in the relationship ($b = 1.12; z = 4.66; p < .0001$), positive communication

occurring ($b = 1.08$; $z = 5.90$; $p < .0001$), something positive external to the relationship occurring ($b = 1.00$; $z = 5.72$; $p < .0001$), or personal change taking place ($b = 1.20$; $z = 5.16$; $p < .0001$), then his daily relationship satisfaction improves (see Table 5). For instance, on any given day that males report doing something with or for their partner, his daily relationship satisfaction is 1.06 points higher than on other days.

In addition, on any given day, if the female reports positive communication as a positive event, then the male's daily relationship satisfaction increases ($b = .32$; $z = 2.37$; $p < .01$). This would indicate the importance for males to experience positive events on any given day due to the impact that it has on his reported satisfaction for that day. This also highlights the importance of both partners experiencing positive communication as a way to increase relationship satisfaction for males on any given day. In the same way that communication influenced an increase in relationship satisfaction, having a negative experience with communication in a relationship can have just as negative of an impact on the daily relationship satisfaction. For instance, on any given day that females report arguing about communication, male relationship satisfaction is lower compared to other days ($b = -.30$; $p < .05$).

Females. Continuing to understand gender differences in daily relationship satisfaction as it relates to positive and negative events (research questions 5 and 6), a separate model was run to analyze the impact of positive and negative events for female relationship satisfaction. A similar pattern was observed for females as for males. On any given day that a positive event was reported, female daily relationship satisfaction improved. For instance, if a female reported doing something positive with or for her partner ($b = .99$; $z = 12.78$; $p < .0001$), support or affection shown in the relationship ($b = 1.07$; $z = 8.96$; $p < .0001$), positive communication occurring ($b = .93$; $z = 11.25$; $p < .0001$), something positive external to the relationship

occurring ($b = 1.24$; $z = 13.09$; $p < .0001$), or personal change taking place ($b = 1.42$; $z = 4.79$; $p < .0001$), then her daily relationship satisfaction increases (see Table 6). For instance, on any given day that females report doing something with or for their partner, her daily relationship satisfaction is .96 points higher.

Different from the impact for males, there was no impact for female daily relationship satisfaction when husbands reported something positive occurring on any given day. Females experienced more impact on daily relationship satisfaction from their own reports of negative events on any given day than males did. For instance, on any given day when a female reported negative events around family issues/time together ($b = -.40$; $z = -2.39$; $p < .05$), communication ($b = -.41$; $z = -3.05$; $p < .001$), complaints about the relationship/partner ($b = -.40$; $z = -4.24$; $p < .0001$), or daily tasks ($b = -.46$; $z = -2.81$; $p < .001$), then her daily relationship satisfaction is lower compared to other days. Significant for females, on any given day when she reports a negative event around complaints about her relationship or partner, her daily relationship satisfaction declines by .40 points ($p < .0001$). These results indicate that unlike males, females experience more impact from the negative events reported by their partners.

Largest impact of positive and negative events. Research questions 7 and 8 explore which of the individual variables, both positive and negative, showed the largest impact on daily relationship satisfaction for any given day. Analysis was run individually for males and females. Multiple random effects models were run in order to observe the largest impact. Each variable was set as the base category in order to compare the significance of impact for each variable. In order to check each variable for both males and females, 36 separate models were used.

Results indicate that individuals experiencing personal change had the largest impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day ($b = 1.42$; $z = 4.79$; $p < .0001$); this was similar when

looking at only positive events. When analyzed by gender, results indicate that for both males ($b = 1.20; z = 5.16; p < .0001$) and females ($b = 1.42; z = 4.79; p < .0001$), experiencing personal change had the greatest impact on daily relationship effect. Looking at the next factor influencing daily relationship satisfaction, males report that having positive communication ($b = 1.08; z = 5.90; p < .0001$) is more likely to improve his relationship satisfaction on any given day. For females, however, not experiencing a positive event ($b = -1.42; z = -4.79; p < .0001$) seems to have a greater impact on her relationship satisfaction on any given day. These findings suggest that males and females who experience personal change on any given day report higher relationship satisfaction on those days compared to other days. Also, experiencing a positive event has a strong impact on the relationship satisfaction for any given day.

For negative events, the variable with the overall impact was female complaints about the daily tasks ($b = -.456; z = -2.81; p < .001$). When looking at the difference for males and females, males also experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction on the days during which females report an argument about communication ($b = -.302; z = -2.07, p = .05$). For himself, relationship satisfaction tends to be lower on days when negative events are reported; however, the results were not significant. When observing females, complaints about daily tasks ($b = -.456; z = -2.81; p < .001$) have the greatest impact on her relationship satisfaction, lowering her overall satisfaction more on those days than on other days in comparison. Females also report a greater negative impact on daily satisfaction when she reports arguments about communication ($b = -.407; z = -3.05; p < .002$). Findings suggest that both males and females are impacted by what happens at work or school.

Discussion

This study focused on the impact of daily positive and negative events on daily relationship satisfaction for couples seeking therapy. The dependent variable being observed was daily relationship effect, and the independent variables included both positive and negative events experienced on a daily basis outside of therapy, and models of analysis controlled for days and couples. It is important to note that the negative events do have an impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day; however, the contribution is smaller in comparison to the positive events. One reason this could be true is because the negative events are topics for arguments rather than other negative events that could take place, like the loss of a job or a crisis that occurred.

Results suggest that on any given day, positive events impact both male and female daily relationship satisfaction. However, females tend to experience more events, both positive and negative, that impact her daily relationship satisfaction. Findings suggest that, for individuals, experiencing positive events is important and has an important role in couple satisfaction on any given day. This is an interesting finding because previous research indicates that couples who are distressed experience lower rates of positive events (Jacobson, Follette, & McDonald, 1982). Even couples who receive counseling experience positive events on any given day.

Findings associated with the first and second research questions, indicate that events, both positive and negative, occur more frequently in the evening on any given day, suggesting that the evening is the time of day when individuals in a relationship could potentially come together, whether it's because of positive events or negative events (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). This finding could suggest that males and females share similar patterns of emotional experiences as they report having similar events at similar times during the day (Koh, 2005).

Males and females are impacted similarly, individually, by positive and negative events, and they report experiencing these events sometime after they get home from work or school and before bedtime. This could suggest that couples who experience similar emotional patterns also share similarity in the way individuals in a couple relationship experience positive and negative events. After a long day, individuals are worn down and have experienced the stressors of the day. Often home is a place where individuals either experience solace or more stress. Individual experiences at home may influence the perception of events that take place once they are home from work or school. Furthermore, for families in which one partner stays home, adding another individual can either enhance or diminish the experience at home.

Next, the study sought to explore whether positive and negative events occur more frequently for men or women. Results show that males and females report similar rates of arguments ($t = 1.04$; $p = .297$). However, reporting of positive events had different outcomes for males and females. According to the results, females are reporting more frequent experiences of positive events than males. It may be possible that women have a greater sensitivity to relationships and tend to attribute these positive events to the betterment of the relationship (Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000). Previous research indicates that females tend to show greater positive emotions than men (Grossman & Wood, 1993; Koh, 2005; Myers & Diener, 1995). These findings have implications for women experiencing greater amounts of overall warmth and emotional expressiveness and the ability to identify when positive things are occurring in the relationship. Additionally, women might be more inclined to identify a positive event because they experience it emotionally in comparison to men.

Next we investigated the impact that daily positive and negative events have on the relationship satisfaction on any given day. For overall impact of positive and negative events on

relationship satisfaction, results indicate that on any given day if individuals report a positive event occurring, then the individual will report greater levels of relationship satisfaction.

Consequently, for individuals who report a negative event occurring on any given day, his or her relationship satisfaction will be less on those days. This seems to make sense in that events of the day can have an impact on how individuals perceive their partner (Srivastava, McGonigal, Rickards, & Butler, 2006), their relationship, or their overall life satisfaction. Also, experiencing negative events can often deplete an individual of their resources and energy, impacting the individual's ability to be fully engaged in the relationship (Totenhagen, Serido, Curran, and Butler; 2012).

The impact of the positive and negative events on daily relationship effect was also observed for males and females. Results on daily positive events will be discussed first. Males and females had similar patterns, reporting a positive event occurring on any given day improves both his relationship satisfaction for him and her relationship satisfaction for her. Specifically, if males and females report doing something positive with or for his or her partner, showing support or affection in the relationship, experiencing positive communication with his or her partner, experiencing something positive external to the relationship, or engaging in personal change, then his or her relationship satisfaction on any given day will improve. Interestingly, on any given day, if the female reports positive communication as a positive event, then the male's daily relationship satisfaction improves. Neff and Karney (2005) suggest that women tend to communicate more to their partners about the relationship than men. In doing so, when women report more positive interactions with their spouses, it not only increases her satisfaction but also impacts the spouse's satisfaction as well. This was not observed for females. Findings associated with the occurrence of positive events indicates the importance of couples engaging in positive

interactions on a daily basis and fostering adaptive processes that enable them to engage, empathize, and validate one another in order to positively influence relationship satisfaction on any given day.

For negative events, on any given day when males report arguing about communication or having a negative experience at work or school, they experience lower relationship satisfaction on this day compared to others. This finding suggests that external stressors as suggested by Karney and Bradbury (1995) have an impact on the functioning of a relationship and an impact on relationship stability and quality over time. Females, on the other hand, experience more impact from negative events occurring on any given day. Negative events around family issues/time together, communication, complaints about the relationship/partner, and daily tasks significantly impacted female relationship satisfaction on any given day. Additionally, females reporting negative events involving work, school or stress related to her partner's work or school, she experiences lower levels of relationship satisfaction on this day than compared to others. Males also negatively impact female relationship satisfaction on any given day if he reports a negative event involving family issues/time together. Males, on the other hand, were not impacted by females' reports of daily negative events.

Lastly, we investigated which positive and negative event had a greater impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day. Results indicated that among the positive events that occurred, experiencing personal change had the most impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day, and it was the largest impact out of all variables analyzed. This suggests that not only are positive events quite impactful but couples who are able to spend time working on themselves individually and who feel good about themselves are likely to experience an increase in their relationship satisfaction on any given day. Also noteworthy is that having something

positive happen outside of the relationship has a positive impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day. This might suggest that individuals are able to bring the positive events that occur outside the relationship into the relationship and have a meaningful impact interpersonally. Findings related to positive events gives greater insight into the need for more adaptive processes. As couples are able to engage in more positive experiences, they are using and improving adaptive processes that help improve their relationship satisfaction on any given day (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

For negative events, the variable with the largest impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day was female complaints about daily tasks. Also, females reporting a negative event about communication have more impact on male relationship satisfaction on any given day. However, for negative events that he reports, the greatest impact on any given day for his relationship satisfaction is reporting a negative work experience. This finding seems to support the influence of work-family spillover; males often have a hard time separating work and home. Additionally, Karney and Bradbury (1995) suggest in their vulnerability-stress-adaptation framework that external stressors to the couple can create a positive or negative impact for the couple. When work is going poorly or negative events are occurring at work, males tend to relate that to all areas of life (Sok, Blomme, & Tromp, 2014). Research also indicates this being a problem as there is a bigger struggle to maintain work and home boundaries (Berkowsky, 2013).

For females who experience negative events, female complaints about the relationship or the partner have the largest impact on relationship satisfaction, lowering her satisfaction on any given day when this is reported compared to others. Results support the research by Karney and Bradbury (1995) indicating that that couples, specifically females for this study, are impacted by

stress at work or school. This would suggest that females also struggle with work spillover and are impacted by what's happening for their husbands.

Clinical Implications

The results of this study offer valuable information for therapists and researchers who work with couples. Among the most important findings, results suggest that most events happen in the evening and that clinicians asking couples to complete homework at other times during the day might not prove to be as likely to occur or as effective for change. Therapists may need to understand and assess when couples are experiencing their positive and negative events during the day and use that to help couples create desired changes. Therapists may discover that couples need to adjust what they are practicing from therapy while they are at home.

Also, findings suggest that positive events occurring on any given day have a significant impact for females and males and their reported levels of relationship satisfaction. This suggests that clinicians should be cognizant of fostering and enhancing adaptive processes for couples dealing with significant amounts of stress. Both individuals in the relationship are impacted by their individual experiences of events, as well as how their partners experience events. However, women experience more impact, both positive and negative, on relationship satisfaction on any given day. Therapists may want to pay special attention to partner effects, especially when the woman reports positive or negative events (Falconier, Nussbeck, Bodenmann, Schneider, & Bradbury, 2015). These findings may be important to explore with a couple to understand how their daily lives are impacting them individually and relationally, as well as ways for the couple to create adaptive processes as the couple experiences the events.

Findings from the study also suggest that events that occur on a daily basis have a significant effect on relationship satisfaction on any given day. Therapists often seek ways to

help couples find ways to improve their relationship satisfaction; however, not all couples are the same. A recent study conducted by Johnson, Mennenga, Oka, Tambling, Anderson, and Yorgason (*under review*) found that on most days, individuals are not trying something they learned from therapy, are reporting positive events, and not having arguments. However, the study did report that the way individuals feel about themselves and about their partner has significance. This may mean that providing homework for couples may need to be adjusted in order to create the impact that homework has been used for in the past. Therapists may want to focus on how to build on the positive events and understand what creates the positive events for the couple in order for them to continue in the adaptive processes they use and feel positively about their partners.

Finally, the finding that doing something with or for one's partner had the most impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day had the largest impact for both males and females. Literature in spending time together indicates that couples who spend time together have higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006) suggest that it is couples who have moderate levels of cohesion and adaptability that have these higher levels of satisfaction. Couples who operate at a level that is comfortable for them individually have higher levels of satisfaction. For therapists, understanding whether both individuals in the relationship are on the same page about the events that are happening seems to be an important element for therapy conversation. Furthermore, helping individuals become comfortable or more flexible to make necessary adjustments would also be important. This is important for couples as they have to adjust to their events, in this case leisure activities or time together, over time. Therapists have an opportunity to use therapy as a tool to enhance adaptive processes for couples in order for them to continue experiencing higher levels of couple satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations of this study that will be discussed in terms of types of validity. One of the goals of research is to be able to apply results to other populations or settings, thus having high external validity for the study. While the sample size for this study was a respectable 33 clinical couples and an appropriate size for the study, couples participated in completing an average of two sessions out of a possible four sessions. Also, most participants were Caucasian, so care should be taken not to generalize these findings beyond similar situations and participants. However, the study does maintain some ecological validity. Questions were asked on a daily basis and have been able to observe the relationship of variables within a more full understanding of the circumstances and environment in which they are likely to occur (Reis, 2012).

With more external/ecological validity, less internal validity may exist, which is a limitation for the study. A majority of daily diary studies rest on correlational designs to understand the relationship between variables, which limits the ability for researchers to standardize the environment in which data is being collected. This can lead to having alternative explanations, and thus less internal validity. Another limitation on the internal validity of the study is that a treatment model was not prescribed to the therapists, so we are unable to know what therapists actually did in session.

There are also limitations to the construct validity of the study. While the same process was conducted to produce the codes, the process for coding is limited as it is not adopted or adapted from a preexisting method of coding variables. In doing this, we may not have fully captured the construct for positive or negative events when the open-ended responses were collapsed into categories. The study may not have captured the full extent of positive and

negative events, as well as the consistency with which participants experienced an event as positive or negative. In the struggle to operationalize these events, therapists may have a hard time implementing the results for use in practice.

Also, another threat to construct validity occurs because the variables can be changed, modified, or experienced differently due to the context of the situation. The consistency of reporting events as positive or negative is unable to be measured. Similarly, we do not have the ability to know whether both males and females are recalling the same day. A husband might be recalling an event earlier in the day, but the wife might be recalling two days prior. Another limitation to the construct validity of the study involves the exclusion of other negative events. By only capturing the arguments, couples may not be reporting on other negative events that could have a larger impact on relationship satisfaction on any given day.

Finally, the current study has some threats to conclusion validity. Large variability in the data can obscure the ability to identify trends or patterns in the data and limits the ability to draw the proper conclusions or see the effect between variables. It also increases the chances of finding a relationship in the data that doesn't exist, committing a type I error. The study used several independent variables, which has the potential to increase the chances of making a type II error, missing a relationship that exists. Also, the possibility of missing the full extent of positive and negative events (increasing threat to construct validity) has the potential to also increase the chances of a type II error (Johnson & Miller, 2014). Not knowing the reliability of the DDECT questions limits the ability to draw proper conclusions about the data. Unreliability between the measurement and interpretation can increase the threat to conclusion validity.

The implications of this study raise a number of important areas of exploration for future researchers. First of all, whether individuals experienced both a positive and a negative event on

the same day and measuring the impact of having both events on the same day any given day is an interesting notion. Future studies could gain insight into the importance of both individuals in a relationship experience different levels of satisfaction based on the similarities or differences in reporting positive and negative events. For instance, does it matter that the wife reported a positive event but the husband did not for that same day?

Furthermore, previous research conducted by Gottman (1994; 1999) indicates that it is how a couple talks about topics, not necessarily the topics that are important to the relationship. Measuring the intensity and the type of resolution that occurred after an argument would provide insightful information for therapists as they work with couples in therapy; understanding whether the resolution of the argument or negative event has a different impact on daily relationship satisfaction above and beyond reporting that the event occurred.

Another area of interest is measuring these variables over time. Observing the change of relationship satisfaction of couples over time would provide insight for therapists, and it is often a goal of couples that enter therapy. Also, understanding the impact that an event has over the course of therapy has value in helping clients move through events with less lasting impact for their relationship.

Conclusion

The current study sought to understand some stress and adaptation events that couples who seek counseling experience and report on any given day for the duration of the study. Understanding the daily impact on couples provides insight for therapists as they help couples create daily change in their relationships, as well as how individuals interpersonally experience these events on a daily basis. Findings from this study suggest that changes in daily relationship satisfaction are mostly impacted by positive events that occur on any given day. Likewise, results

of the study show that spending time together has value for individuals on a daily basis. Clinicians can capitalize on bringing couples together in the evening in order to foster positive events for the individuals in the relationship. Also, couples that attend therapy can use therapy as a way to foster adaptive processes as they learn how to adjust and deal with every day stressors within their relationship, as well as stressors external to their relationship.

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Table 1

Correlations, Means, and SD of Department Variables

Variables	1	2
1. Female Daily Relationship Effect	-	
2. Male Daily Relationship Effect	.20***	-
Mean	3.64	3.35
SD	.86	.99
n (observations)	669	527

Note: *** indicates $p < .0001$

Table 2

Correlations, Means, and SD of Independent Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Negative Event – Female	-					
2. Negative Event – Male	.40***	-				
3. Positive Event – Female	-.04	.03	-			
4. Positive Event – Male	-.11*	.03	.19***	-		
5. School/Work Event – Female	.04	-.01	.08*	.04	-	
6. School/Work Event – Male	-.06	.04	.06	.1*	.06	-
Mean	.23	.21	.65	.46	.13	.09
SD	.42	.41	.48	.50	.33	.28
n (observations)	704	590	702	590	701	589

Note: * indicates $p < .05$; *** indicates $p < .0001$

Table 3

Frequency of Events		
Variables	Freq.	Percent
Yes Negative Event - Female	165	23.44
No Negative Event – Female	539	76.56
Yes Negative Event – Male	126	21.36
No Negative Event – Male	464	78.64
Yes Positive Event – Female	454	64.67
No Positive Event - Female	248	35.33
Yes Positive Event – Male	278	47.12
No Positive Event – Male	312	52.88

Table 4

Paired t-tests for Independent Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	<i>t</i>	p-value
Negative Event – Female	0.23	0.02	0.42		
Negative Event – Male	0.21	0.08	0.41		
	0.02	0.02	0.45	1.04	0.29
Positive Event – Female	0.65	0.02	0.48		
Positive Event - Male	0.47	0.02	0.50		
	0.18	0.03	0.62	6.820	0.0001*

Note: * indicates $p < .0001$

Table 5

Impact of Positive and Negative Events on Male Daily Relationship Effect

	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	p value
Female - Positive				
Did Something for/with Partner	0.111	0.105	1.06	0.287
Showed Support/Affection	0.173	0.183	0.94	0.346
Positive Communication	0.327	0.138	2.37	0.018*
External Positives	-0.125	0.164	-0.76	0.449
Personal Change	-0.473	0.595	-0.79	0.427
Male – Positive				
Did Something for/with Partner	1.057	0.236	4.48	0.000***
Showed Support/Affection	1.121	0.241	4.66	0.000***
Positive Communication	1.085	0.184	5.90	0.000***
External Positives	1.002	0.175	5.72	0.000***
Personal Change	1.204	0.233	5.16	0.000***
Female – Negative				
Family Issues/ Time Together	-0.217	0.210	-1.03	0.302
Communication	-0.302	0.146	-2.07	0.038*
Complaints About Relationship or Partner	-0.180	0.144	-1.26	0.209
Daily Tasks	-0.059	0.104	-0.57	0.568
Male – Negative				
Family Issues/ Time Together	-0.131	0.178	-0.74	0.460
Communication	0.113	0.238	0.47	0.635
Complaints About Relationship or Partner	-0.023	0.1069	-0.21	0.833
Daily Tasks	-0.026	0.098	-0.27	0.788

Note: * indicates $p < .05$; *** indicates $p < .0001$

Table 6

Table 6

Impact of Positive and Negative Events on Female Daily Relationship Effect

	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	p value
Female - Positive				
Did Something for/with Partner	0.995	0.078	12.78	0.000***
Showed Support/Affection	1.067	0.119	8.960	0.000***
Positive Communication	0.932	0.083	11.25	0.000***
External Positives	1.241	0.095	13.09	0.000***
Personal Change	1.421	0.297	4.79	0.000***
Male – Positive				
Did Something for/with Partner	0.058	0.091	1.60	0.523
Showed Support/Affection	0.129	0.081	1.60	0.110
Positive Communication	0.046	0.078	0.60	0.552
External Positives	0.160	0.149	1.08	0.281
Personal Change	-.014	0.348	-0.04	0.967
Female – Negative				
Family Issues/ Time Together	-0.399	0.167	-2.39	0.017*
Communication	-0.407	0.133	-3.05	0.002**
Complaints About Relationship or Partner	-0.397	0.094	-4.24	0.000***
Daily Tasks	-0.457	0.162	-2.81	0.005***
Male – Negative				
Family Issues/ Time Together	-0.182	0.126	-1.45	0.147
Communication	-0.269	0.200	-1.34	0.180
Complaints About Relationship or Partner	-0.01	0.125	-0.04	0.965
Daily Tasks	-0.053	0.142	-0.37	0.711

Note: * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .001$; *** indicates $p < .0001$