

Love Won't Tear Us Apart but Work Might: How Job Stressors Relate to Constructive and  
Destructive Reactions to One's Romantic Partner's Negative Behavior

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the associations between job stressors and accommodation (i.e., constructive and non-destructive reactions to negative behavior) in romantic relationships. We propose that situational constraints and workload negatively relate to self-regulatory resources that, in turn, are associated positively with constructive reactions and negatively with destructive reactions. To test our hypotheses, we surveyed 238 employees with online questionnaires twice on one workday. In general, results showed that job stressors were negatively associated with self-regulatory resources that, in turn, were associated with accommodation. In particular, situational constraints, but not workload, negatively related to self-regulatory resources. Self-regulatory resources were negatively associated with destructive reactions, but unrelated to constructive reactions. Self-regulatory resources mediated the indirect effect of job stressors on destructive reactions assessed with a scenario method. We discuss the importance of replenishing self-regulatory resources and suggest ways how to do so.

*Keywords:* job stressors, self-regulatory resources, accommodation, constructive and destructive reactions, negative partner behavior, work–life interface

### Introduction

After a demanding day at work, there should be nothing as sweet as home, especially when a caring and loving partner is waiting for you. At home you can unwind from work, recover from job stressors (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2007), and enjoy the emotional and instrumental support of your romantic partner (cf. King, Mattimore, King, & Adams, 1995). But imagine what happens when your partner meets you with anger and annoyance instead of comfort and care. After experiencing stress at work, will you still accommodate—that means, respond constructively and non-destructively—to the negative behavior of your partner (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991)? Reacting constructively and non-destructively to negative spousal behavior is not merely a nice response pattern; it prevents romantic couples from ending up in a conflict spiral, and it is beneficial for relationship survival (Gottman, 1998). Thus, accommodation in romantic relationships is crucial for accomplishing one of the most important relationship goals; namely, the maintenance of the relationship (cf. Parsons, 1951). Our study examines whether one romantic partner's job stressors negatively relate to his or her own constructive and non-destructive reactions to the other partner's negative behavior. We propose that job stressors deplete the finite stock of self-regulatory resources and thus jeopardize spousal accommodation at home. Self-regulatory resources are “an inner energy or strength” (Converse & DeShon, 2009, p. 1318) which a person uses to exert control over the self and to “change the way [it...] would otherwise think, feel, or behave” (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000, p. 247).

The goal of our study was to test whether self-regulatory resources mediate the negative effects of job stressors (i.e., situational constraints and workload) on accommodation (i.e., constructive and non-destructive reactions to the negative behavior of one's partner) within romantic relationships. We contribute to existing research in two important ways. First, we aim

to investigate the association between job stressors and accommodation in romantic relationships (Rusbult et al., 1991). To the best of our knowledge, previous research has not shed light on this association. There are several studies that have looked into job stressors and their link to negative behavior in private life (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, & Dollard, 2008; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011), but these studies rarely have looked at one partner's *reaction* to the other partner's behavior. Constructive and non-destructive reactions, however, are crucial for maintaining a healthy relationship (Gottman, 1998). Moreover, it is conceivable that escalating arguments at home might have a negative impact on the jobs of both partners because experiences in the home domain tend to spill over to the work domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Therefore, it is important to better understand the relationship between stressors on the job and accommodation behavior at home. We adopt the ego-depletion framework (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000) and propose a process model with depleted self-regulatory resources as the mediator between job stressors and accommodation. Knowing the mediators of the association between job stressors and accommodation helps to identify potential interventions that can attenuate negative effects (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). Second, we aim to further reconcile research on the work–life interface and self-regulation by explicitly addressing the ego-depletion process (cf. Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010). The integration of these two literatures is a fruitful endeavor because self-regulation is highly relevant within all life domains (cf. Carver & Scheier, 1990) and, thus, also for the interface of work and private life. In this study, we propose that dealing with job stressors draws on employees' self-regulatory resources that, in turn, make them unavailable when responding to negative partner behavior. As a consequence, the reactions to negative partner behavior are less constructive and more destructive. Accordingly, we propose a mediation model, which is depicted in Figure 1.

### **How Job Stressors Deplete Self-Regulatory Resources**

Job stressors are associated with strain and loss of resources in general (Hobfoll, 2001), and with a reduction in self-regulatory resources in particular (Diestel & Schmidt, 2009). Self-regulatory resources are needed to exert self-control (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Accordingly, when using self-regulatory resources, people can suppress inner tendencies and pursue long-term goals instead (e.g., refrain from eating a tempting cake). Self-regulatory resources and acts of self-control are highly related but distinct concepts. Like a muscle, self-regulatory resources become depleted when they are used (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Consequently, individuals may lack self-regulatory resources when they face continual self-regulatory demands—regardless of the origin of these demands (e.g., work, romantic relationship). To replenish depleted self-regulatory resources and to undo this process of ego-depletion, individuals have to rest and refrain from over-riding their reflex-like reactions. When facing strain-evoking job stressors (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992), employees exert self-regulatory resources in order to meet work-related goals despite these adverse conditions and other competing goals (cf. Muraven & Baumeister, 2000).

We investigate the effect of (a) situational constraints and (b) workload on self-regulatory resources. In choosing these two job stressors, we follow earlier research (Jex, 1998; Sonnentag, Mojza, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2012) that has identified situational constraints and workload as prototypically stressful experiences at work.

Situational constraints are regulation obstacles that hinder goal accomplishment at work (Peters & O'Connor, 1980). Operating with outdated information and insufficient tools are two examples of situational constraints. Being pulled away from task completion by obstacles draws on self-regulatory resources. For instance, Freeman and Muraven (2010) found that task

interruptions were associated with lower subsequent self-control—an indicator of depleted self-regulatory resources. Furthermore, employees who work with inadequate material are more likely to be frustrated and, thus, depend on their self-regulatory resources to be persistent during the goal pursuit (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). Consequently, self-regulatory resources become depleted when employees have to deal with situational constraints.

Workload refers to “the sheer volume of work required of an employee” (Spector & Jex, 1998, p. 358). When employees react to high workload demands with the expenditure of extra effort, they have aversive experiences (cf. Kahneman, 1973). Consequently, they have to overcome inner resistances and invest their self-regulatory resources when they are not willing to lower their goal standards (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). Furthermore, workload is related to the need to suppress one’s impulses to withdraw from the situation and the need to ignore distractors (for instance, chatting with colleagues or watching Internet videos at work; Diestel & Schmidt, 2009; Schmeichel, 2007). Both suppressing one’s impulses and ignoring distractors depletes self-regulatory resources (Schmidt & Neubach, 2009).

To sum up, our first hypothesis reads:

H1: (a) Situational constraints and (b) workload are negatively associated with self-regulatory resources.

### **How Accommodation Draws on Self-regulatory Resources**

Like work, the home domain also draws on employees’ self-regulatory resources because things do not always go as they should and, consequently, employees might find that their romantic partner behaves negatively at least once in a while (Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993). For example, a romantic partner might be rude or might act in a thoughtless way. In such a situation, only “a pro-relationship response [...] can preempt the vicious cycle of negative reciprocity that

is characteristic of distressed relationships” (Finkel & Campbell, 2001, pp. 263-264). In particular, accommodative behaviors (i.e., highly constructive and minimal destructive responses to a partner’s negative behavior) prevent relationship conflicts from escalating. Because bad experiences have more impact than good ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001, p. 323), escalating relationship conflicts may harm relationship quality substantially. Thus, accommodation at home in order to avoid conflict escalation is crucial for maintaining romantic relationships (cf. Gottman, 1998; Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998).

The accommodation process occurs in three steps. First, individuals appraise their partner’s negative behavior. For those who are able to change the appraisal of their partner’s negative behavior in the first place, constructive and non-destructive reactions are facilitated. For instance, with respect to their partner’s laziness, employees could appraise it differently and not regard it as an offense. Changing one’s thoughts and using different appraisals are by no means without cost: They deplete self-regulatory resources (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Second, individuals suppress negative impulses when accommodating. These more or less strong, negative impulses are very likely due to the widespread preference for reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Third, individuals show behaviors that are more constructive and less destructive than the initially intended reaction that has been suppressed.

Whereas constructive reactions are defined as active attempts “to improve conditions,” destructive reactions refer to actions that aim at “destroying the relationship” (Rusbult et al., 1991, p. 53). Examples of constructive reactions include discussing the situation with one’s partner or trying to resolve the problem; examples of destructive reactions include yelling back at the partner or threatening to leave the relationship. Finkel and Campbell (2001) postulate that motivational as well as ability factors bring reactions to negative partner behavior in line with

long-term relationship goals. Specifically, partners need to control themselves when transforming automatic impulses into more constructive and less destructive reactions. While performing this transformation, self-regulatory resources become further depleted. In line with this idea, an experiment has shown that suppressing one's emotions when watching a movie, in contrast to letting emotions flow honestly, resulted in less constructive reactions to hypothetical negative partner behavior afterwards (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). Changing the appraisal of one's partner's behavior and refraining from reflex-like impulses in order to bring one's behavior in line with long-term goals requires self-regulatory resources (cf. Mischel, 1996). Therefore, we propose in our second hypothesis that accommodation should be hindered when self-regulatory resources are depleted:

H2: Self-regulatory resources are (a) positively associated with constructive reactions and (b) negatively associated with destructive reactions.

In sum, after employees experience job stressors, they will struggle more with accommodation because dealing with both job stressors and the negative behavior of one's partner draws on the same finite stock of self-regulatory resources. Thus, we propose indirect effects of job stressors on constructive and destructive reactions via self-regulatory resources:

H3: Self-regulatory resources mediate the negative associations between (a) situational constraints and (b) workload on the one hand, and constructive reactions on the other hand.

H4: Self-regulatory resources mediate the positive associations between (a) situational constraints and (b) workload on the one hand, and destructive reactions on the other hand.

## **Method**

### **Procedure and Sample**



We tested our hypotheses with a sample of employees working in a broad range of occupations. Our sample was approached by Respondi AG. This is an online panel provider that operates in 10 European countries and offers bonus points that the respondents can use to purchase goods (see also Selenko, Batinic, & Paul, 2011). The online panel provider constantly monitors the integrity of its members (Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2012) and has strong quality management. Respondi AG is ISO 26362 certified, meaning it was awarded a certificate for being a quality online sampling provider because they, for instance, randomly draw samples from the panel and they exclude cheating participants with inconsistent answers across the surveys.

Our study participants had to answer two questionnaires in total. In line with the approach taken by Christian and Ellis (2011) who studied self-control processes within one day, we asked our study participants to answer two questionnaires on a regular working day: a first online questionnaire directly after work (Time 1) and a second some hours later in the evening (Time 2), with an average time lag of 249 minutes ( $SD = 112$  minutes). At Time 1, we requested the respondents to have worked for at least six hours on that particular day. This condition was met by 804 persons, of which 767 respondents (i.e., 95.5%) finished the first questionnaire. At Time 2, 415 persons (i.e., 51.7% of the initial sample) responded to the second questionnaire. To be included in the final sample, our respondents had to meet two additional requirements. First, it was necessary that they had spent at least 10 minutes with their romantic partner<sup>1</sup> in the evening. Second, they had to provide correct answers to six comprehension questions. We imposed this requirement to identify any careless responses (ref. Meade & Craig, 2012). In sum, 238 persons (i.e., 29.6% of the initial sample) met all requirements. Respondents in the final sample and respondents whose data were dropped from analyses did not report different levels of situational

constraints ( $t(801) = 1.47$ , *ns*,  $d = 0.10$ ), workload ( $t(799) = 1.06$ , *ns*,  $d = 0.08$ ), or self-regulatory resources ( $t(780) = 1.60$ , *ns*,  $d = 0.08$ ).

Mean age of our respondents (57.6% males) was 40.85 years ( $SD = 9.61$ ). Among all respondents, 218 persons (i.e., 91.6%) worked as employees and 20 persons (i.e., 8.4%) were self-employed. In total, 107 respondents (i.e., 45.0%) held a managerial position. Mean working time was 8.39 hours ( $SD = 1.13$ ). Two-hundred-twenty-seven persons (i.e., 95.4%) co-habited with their partner and 147 respondents (i.e., 61.8%) were married. Mean relationship length in our sample was 13.15 years ( $SD = 10.09$ ).

### Measures

All items were provided in German. In case there was no originally developed scale or validated scale translation in German, we applied the back-translation method by Brislin (1970).

Job stressors and self-regulatory resources were measured at Time 1, with response scales ranging from 1 = *not true at all* to 5 = *very true*. We assessed the situational constraints participants experienced on the day of data collection with a four-item scale of Semmer's Instrument for Stress Oriented Job Analysis (1984; e.g., "Today, I had to work with outdated information"). Cronbach's alpha was .73. We measured participants' day-specific workload by using Spector and Jex' five-item quantitative workload scale (1998) and adapting the items to the particular day. An example item is "Today, there was a great deal to be done." Cronbach's alpha was .90. Participants' current level of self-regulatory resources was measured with the Brief Self-Control Scale (Bertrams & Dickhäuser, 2009; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). The original scale contains 13 items. We adapted the time frame of 10 items to the particular moment (e.g., "Now, people would say that I have iron self-discipline") and disregarded three items that could not be adapted in a meaningful way (e.g., "I say inappropriate things"). Cronbach's alpha

of the measure was .76. These 10 items refer more to self-regulatory resources as a reservoir of assets to be used to override impulses than to self-control as an actual behavior.

To test whether the variables measured at Time 1 represent distinct constructs, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). The results revealed that the measurement model with situational constraints, workload, and self-regulatory resources as three distinct factors ( $\chi^2 = 289.86$ ,  $df = 144$ ,  $RMSEA = .07$ ,  $CFI = .91$ ) showed a better fit than the best two-factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 104.70$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the one-factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 379.86$ ,  $\Delta df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

At Time 2, we assessed constructive and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior. To account for a presumably low base rate of negative partner behavior, respondents had to report constructive and destructive reactions in two different ways—an approach that helped us to test our hypotheses with two different methods. First, to measure actual constructive and destructive reactions, we asked respondents at Time 2 to fill in whether their romantic partner had behaved in a negative way during the particular evening (Rusbult et al., 1991). In total, 82 participants reported that their partner showed at least one of the following behaviors: doing something thoughtless, saying something mean, behaving in an unpleasant manner, or being rude. We measured the actual constructive and destructive reactions to these behaviors with an adapted three-item voice measure and an adapted three-item exit measure of the Rusbult et al.'s (1991) accommodation scale. An example item of constructive voice measure is “When my partner did something thoughtless, I talked to my partner about what’s going on, trying to work out a solution.” An example item of a destructive exit measure is “When my partner was rude, I did things to drive my partner away.” The response scales for these actual constructive and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior ranged from 1 = *not true at all* to 5 = *very true*. We computed a mean score of the constructive reactions to the different types of negative

partner behaviors because the inter-correlations between the reactions ranged from .67 to .87.

Similarly, we computed a mean score of the destructive reactions (the inter-correlations between the reactions ranged from .76 to .89).

Second, we measured hypothetical constructive and destructive reactions of all 238 respondents; specifically, we asked about the most likely response to negative partner behavior described in three scenarios (see Appendix; Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998). We chose these relatively extreme, but still realistic scenarios to ensure that our respondents would appraise the partner's behavior as negative. We instructed the respondents to imagine the scenarios vividly and report how they would react in the given situation if their partner behaved in the described way. Their hypothetical constructive and destructive reactions to the scenarios were assessed with the voice- and exit-measure of the accommodation scale (Rusbult et al., 1991), each consisting of four items. Example items are "In this situation, I talk to my partner about what's going on, trying to work out a solution" and "In this situation, I do things to drive my partner away" respectively. Again, we treated the reactions in three scenarios as items and computed mean scores of the constructive reactions as well as the destructive reactions over all scenarios. The reliabilities of both scales were satisfactory ( $\alpha_{\text{hypothetical constructive reactions}} = .84$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{hypothetical destructive reactions}} = .94$ ). The response scales for hypothetical accommodation ranged from 1 = *not true at all* to 5 = *very true*. A CFA on the hypothetical reactions at Time 2 showed that the two-factor solution with constructive and destructive reactions as two distinct factors ( $\chi^2 = 34.33$ ,  $df = 8$ , RMSEA = .12, CFI = .96) outperformed the one-factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 170.28$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, confirmatory factor analyses revealed constructive and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior to be not just two ends of one continuum, but rather distinct constructs.

We assessed age, gender, job control, and working time as *control variables* when predicting self-regulatory resources. Because individuals' self-control might develop with age (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), a positive association between age and self-regulatory resources is conceivable. Furthermore, the society ascribes impulsiveness and emotionality (i.e., low self-regulatory resources) to women (Parsons & Bales, 1955), which might prompt women to correspond according to the stereotype (Eagley, 1987) and show less self-regulation. Moreover, employees with high job control (i.e., a job resource) can decide how to do their job according to their personal preferences. Therefore, it is conceivable that employees with high job control spend less self-regulatory resources during work than do others. We asked respondents to indicate their job control on that particular day with the adapted self-determination scale (Spreitzer, 1995; e.g., "Today, I had significant autonomy in determining how I do my job"). The response scale ranged from 1 = *not true at all* to 5 = *very true*. Cronbach's alpha of the three-item scale was .93. We controlled for working time because the "model of personal-relational equilibrium" by Kumashiro et al. (2008, p. 95) posits that the longer people invest resources in one life domain (e.g., spent time at work), the more they are inclined to invest resources in another life domain (e.g., spent time with one's partner). Thus, long work hours might deplete one's self-regulatory resource because the impulse to do something else needs to be suppressed.

In the prediction of constructive and destructive reactions, we controlled for age, gender, length of relationship, relationship commitment, and negative affect. Carstensen, Fung, and Charles (2003) argued that age is associated with a higher preference for maintaining positive affect and avoiding negative affect. Thus, to prevent a vicious circle of social conflicts, older people could react more constructively and less destructively to negative partner behavior. With respect to gender, stereotypes regard females as being less rational than are males, especially

during conflict situations (Parsons & Bales, 1955). As described in the social role theory (Eagley, 1987), men and women behave in a manner that fits their social role. Therefore, it could be that women react differently than men to negative partner behavior. Because couples engaging in accommodation are likely to outlive other couples, there might be a positive association between relationship length and constructive reactions on the one hand, and a negative association between relationship length and destructive reactions on the other hand. Furthermore, it is important to figure out whether self-regulatory resources predict accommodation over and above the affective resource relationship commitment because relationship commitment is a central motivational factor for accommodative behavior (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). Accordingly, we assessed relationship commitment with a six-item measure by Stanley and Markman (1992;  $\alpha = .92$ ). An example item is “I want to grow old with my partner.” The response scale ranged from 1 = *not true at all* to 5 = *very true*. Finally, we controlled for negative affect to rule out the possibility that negative mood spillover (Eby, Maher, & Butts, 2010; Judge & Ilies, 2004) causes the link between job stressors and accommodation. Other studies (Ferguson, 2012; Restubog et al., 2011) have already shown negative emotional states to mediate the effect of job stressors on undermining social interaction at home. We measured negative affect with negative-affect items from the PANAS (Krohne, Egloff, Kohlmann, & Tausch, 1996; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). In order not to overburden our respondents with a long survey, we used a subset of six items (Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2008). We validated this six-item measure in another sample of 27 persons (74.1% female) with a mean age of 24.4 years ( $SD = 3.3$ ) and found that it was highly correlated with the ten-item scale ( $r = .96$ ). The respondents reported how much they felt—for instance, “nervous”—on a scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. Cronbach’s alpha of the 6-item scale was .87.

## Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of all study and control variables.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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We tested our hypotheses with ordinary least squares regression analyses. Hypotheses 1a and 1b proposed that situational constraints and workload are negatively related to self-regulatory resources. Entering the control variables age, gender, job control, and working time in Model 1 explained a significant proportion of the variance in self-regulatory resources (see Table 2).

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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In Model 2, we entered the predictors situational constraints and workload, which improved the prediction of self-regulatory resources. Situational constraints were negatively associated with self-regulatory resources over and above, for instance, the resource job control, whereas workload did not relate to self-regulatory resources. Thus, data supported Hypothesis 1a, but not Hypothesis 1b. The results did not change when considering the predictors situational constraints and workload in two separate regression analyses.

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INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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Hypothesis 2a stated that self-regulatory resources and constructive reactions are positively associated with each other (see Table 3). Model 1, which included the control variables age, gender, relationship length, relationship commitment, and negative affect, did not explain variance in *actual* constructive reactions. Control variables entered in Model 1 explained variance of *hypothetical* constructive reactions. Specifically, the affective resource relationship commitment was positively associated, and negative affect was negatively associated with constructive reactions. Entering self-regulatory resources as a core predictor variable in Model 2 did not significantly explain more variance in constructive reactions, neither for the actual nor for the hypothetical measure. Thus, there is no support for Hypothesis 2a.

In Hypothesis 2b, we proposed that self-regulatory resources are negatively related to destructive reactions (see Table 3). Model 1, with the control variables age, gender, length of relationship, and the resource relationship commitment, explained a significant proportion of variance in *actual* and *hypothetical* destructive behavior. So, being highly committed to one's relationship was negatively associated with both actual and hypothetical destructive reactions. Furthermore, females and participants with higher levels of negative affect indicated more hypothetical destructive reactions in the scenarios. Entering self-regulatory resources in Model 2 contributed significantly to the prediction of actual destructive reactions as well as of hypothetical destructive reactions. Self-regulatory resources negatively related to destructive reactions. In sum, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Hypothesis 3a and 3b proposed that self-regulatory resources mediate the indirect effect of job stressors on constructive reactions. Bootstrapping analyses (cf. Hayes, 2013; see Table 4) showed that the indirect effects of situational constraints and workload on both actual and



hypothetical constructive reactions were not significant. In sum, there was no support for Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b.

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INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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Hypotheses 4a and 4b proposed an indirect effect of the job stressors situational constraints and workload on destructive reactions via self-regulatory resources. Considering situational constraints, we found an indirect effect on destructive reactions in the hypothetical situations, .0263, 95% CI [.0037, .0662]. There was no indirect effect of situational constraints on actual destructive reactions. Thus, support for Hypothesis 4a is mixed. Furthermore, there were no indirect effects of workload on actual and hypothetical destructive reaction. Therefore, we rejected Hypothesis 4b.

### **Discussion**

In this study, we investigated the mediating role of self-regulatory resources in the associations between situational constraints and workload on the one hand, and constructive and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior on the other hand. The results support the hypothesis that situational constraints negatively relate to self-regulatory resources. There was no association between workload and self-regulatory resources. Situational constraints might consume more self-regulatory resources than workload because workload could come with positive features, such as a sense of achievement and fulfillment (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000). Furthermore, workload is conceivably associated with a higher salience of deadlines and goals, which improves the attentional pull of work tasks (Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005). Employees save self-regulatory resources when experiencing task attentional

pull because it “help[s] individuals [to] resist the pull of off-task attentional demand” (Beal et al., 2005, p. 1059).

Data supported the hypothesis that self-regulatory resources relate negatively to destructive reactions, but there was no support for the proposition that self-regulatory resources relate positively to constructive reactions. Considering the process of accommodation, we have to differentiate between the suppression of destructive behavior and the engagement in constructive behavior. Whereas the suppression of negative impulses draws on self-regulatory resources (cf. Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), the engagement in positive behaviors might need more than that. Constructive reactions most likely also require good communication skills. Furthermore, it is conceivable that employees who experience a high level of work-related resources have an elevated positive affect (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) at home and, that in turn, might enable them to show constructive reactions to negative partner behavior (ref. Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000).

Overall, evidence for indirect effects of job stressors and constructive as well as destructive reactions was weak. This pattern of results can be mainly explained by the findings that workload was unrelated to the depletion of self-regulatory resources, and that self-regulatory resources were unrelated to constructive reaction. We found mixed support for the hypothesis that self-regulatory resources mediate the indirect effect of situational constraints on destructive reactions. This result is in line with the work–home resources model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) that suggests that work demands have a negative indirect effect on home outcomes via depleted personal resources. What is more, the lack of support for the mediation hypothesis in the actual situation might have been caused by a relatively low statistical power, as compared to the hypothetical situations.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

The study has two major strengths. First, we separated measurement points and measured the predictor variables and accommodation outcomes at different times to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Second, we used two different operationalizations and measured actual and hypothetical accommodation to account for the low base rate of actual negative partner behavior. This way we also could test our hypotheses with two different methods.

But we also have to consider several limitations of our study. The two-wave correlational design does not allow a causal interpretation of our results. An alternative interpretation could be that a lack of self-regulatory resources aggravates the appraisal of situational constraints. Moreover, we did not sample enough individuals to analyze thoroughly the effects of job stressors and self-regulatory resources on *actual* accommodation. Lastly, we used the Brief Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004) to measure self-regulatory resources in which we adapted the time frame to capture the resource at the moment of data collection. In hindsight the measure validated by Bertrams, Unger, and Dickhäuser (2011) would have been preferable.

Future research should investigate a more comprehensive model of the associations between stressors at work and reactions to the negative behavior of one's partner at home. Our study offers several starting points to do so. First of all, it is a worthwhile endeavor to study other job stressors that may have an effect on destructive reactions to negative partner behavior via depleted self-regulatory resources. For instance, when facing conflicts at work (ref. Giebels & Janssen, 2005) and when accommodating as a response to a negative co-worker behavior, an employee should have less self-regulatory resources and, thus, a higher level of destructive reactions to negative partner reactions. Moreover, facing customer incivility, that is clients

showing “rude, impolite, or discourteous” behavior (Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012, p. 122), might be particularly drawing on self-regulatory resources. Many organizations in the service sector prescribe so-called display rules (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003) that set a norm for the expression of emotions during the interaction with clients. Employees who suppress their initial emotional response when facing impolite and aggressive costumers and instead show emotions that are in line with the display rule might exert self-regulatory resources (ref. Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010). As a consequence, employees should have a higher level of destructive reactions to negative partner behavior on days with high customer incivility. Relatedly, we investigated the short-term effects of work demands on constructive and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior only. It would be highly relevant to study the long-term effects as well. For example, it is conceivable that due to repeated escalating arguments work demands have a detrimental effect on marital stability and divorce via depleted self-regulatory resources and impaired accommodation in the long run (ref. Gottman, 1998).

Second, our conceptual model (see Figure 1) offers the possibility to include moderators. For instance, it might be fruitful to investigate factors that buffer the association between situational constraints and self-regulatory resources. Possible moderators in this association are instrumental support provided by co-workers or the supervisor (Halbesleben, 2006) or rejuvenating experiences during breaks (Troughakos, Beal, Green, & Weiss, 2008). Moreover, future research might also shed light on moderators of the relationship between self-regulatory resources depleted at work and accommodation at home. For example, leisure activities that replenish self-regulatory resources may attenuate the relationship between the self-regulatory resources as reported directly after work and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior at home. Particularly, the relevance of eating sugary food should be investigated as sugar may be

the biological essence of self-control (Gailliot et al., 2007). Furthermore, the intensity and frequency of negative partner behavior in every-day life could help set boundary conditions for the relationships of the focal person's self-regulatory resources with his or her constructive and destructive reactions. It is conceivable that the stronger or more frequently the partner engages in negative behavior, the more the focal person habituates to this behavior. Thus, his or her reactions to this negative behavior would not be very pronounced, irrespective of the level of available self-regulatory resources.

Third, an accommodating person is embedded in a greater social context and future research could include more contextual factors when studying the relationship between job stressors and accommodation. For instance, more attention should be paid to variables pertaining to the partner who possibly instigates the negative behavior and to couple-level variables. Romantic partners might have different opinions about the same situation. Obviously, both partners' experiences at work and the negative behavior itself could be relevant for accommodation. Also, a couple's imbalance of power (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005) should be important for the course of an argument within a romantic relationship and for the prevalence of accommodation.

Finally, future research on accommodation might also want to shed light on effects that run from home to work. For instance, it is an interesting question whether partners showing accommodation at home suffer from a depletion of self-regulatory and energetic resources, which deteriorates their well-being (cf. Hobfoll, 2001). As a consequence of accommodating at home, their performance at work might suffer (cf. Rothbard & Wilk, 2011).

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

From a theoretical point of view, the results of our study show that it is important to differentiate between constructive and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior. In line with Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran's approach (2005) to identify the overlap between related constructs, we showed that constructive and destructive reactions to negative partner behavior related differently with another variable; namely, self-regulatory resources. Thus, constructive and destructive reactions are not just two ends of one continuum.

In terms of practical implications, our study highlights the relevance of reducing situational constraints. Furthermore, with our findings we underline the necessity to replenish one's self-regulatory resources again after work when they have been depleted. That means that, directly after work, employees might consider to engage in activities that are attractive in itself and, thus, do not exert self-regulatory resources. Examples for these activities that can be easily integrated in the daily life are having a coffee, window shopping, or playing a video game while commuting. During these activities exerted self-regulatory resources can be replenished.

The suppression of destructive reactions when one appraises negative partner behavior may prevent detrimental effects in the home domain as well as in the work domain. Following the argumentation of Baumeister and colleagues' that "bad is stronger than good" (2001, p. 323), reducing destructive reactions could be even more important than encouraging constructive reactions for the de-escalation of relationship conflicts and the maintenance of romantic relationships. When relationship conflicts escalate, both partners' work might suffer from this development. In line with Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Schilling (1989), escalating relationship conflicts might be related to impaired mood, and therefore are a risk factor for strain-based work-family conflict (see also Bakker et al., 2008). The established link between work-family conflict and negative organizational outcomes (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, &

Semmer, 2011) also points to the relevance of reducing relationship conflicts. Next to being important for the de-escalation of relationship conflicts, self-regulatory resources are also relevant for other critical topics in the private domain, such as refraining from cheating on one's partner, exercise activities, and diet success (Ritter, Karremans, & van Schie, 2010; Sonnentag & Jelden, 2009; Vohs & Heatherton, 2000). To sum up, we think it is worthwhile for both the work and home domains to invest resources in the primary prevention of job stressors (Burke, 1993). Reducing situational constraints at work (cf. Semmer, 1984) should be particularly helpful: providing access to state-of-art tools and materials will not only improve the employees' output, but will also save their self-regulatory resources. Also employees themselves can do something to save their self-regulatory resource. When equipped with a certain amount of job control and skill variety (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), they may plan their day such that more and less attractive tasks alternate throughout the work day. By doing this, self-regulatory resources that were depleted when dealing with a less attractive task can be replenished afterwards. If employees are particularly interested in shielding their private life from negative work influences, they may end their workday with a task that is attractive and that does not require many self-regulatory resources. Eventually, engaging in job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) might be an avenue for employees to get rid of their unattractive tasks in favor of attractive tasks and pleasant activities.

### **Conclusion**

Accomplishing goals as an employee and as a romantic partner is crucial for being satisfied with the two roles, and for performing well both at work and in a romantic relationship. We think that reconciling research on the work–life interface and self-regulation has high

potential to inform us about how individuals pursue their goals at work and in their private lives, and how they can be supported in doing so.



**Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> We did not have any restrictions regarding the legal status of the couple or the sexual orientation of the partners.

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## Appendix

### *Scenarios for the Measurement of Hypothetical Accommodation*

Scenario 1: “You feel neglected by your partner, who has been really busy lately. Nevertheless, you plan a dinner for an upcoming evening, which your partner reluctantly agrees to. Your partner is over half an hour late, not ready for dinner, and explains to you that he/she has to cancel the dinner because work is due the next day.”

Scenario 2: “Your partner invites you to a family reunion but spends most of the evening talking to others. Without telling you, your partner leaves with his/her cousins. You are left alone for several hours, until your partner finally returns.”

Scenario 3: “You and your partner have agreed to go to a pub. Later, your partner decides not to go to the pub because he/she is tired. You go to the pub with friends. When you come back home, your partner is gone. He/She left a note telling you that he/she went out with a new [opposite-sex/same-sex] colleague.” [In this scenario, we adapted the gender of the colleague with respect to the respondent’s sexual orientation.]

Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Study Variables*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Age	40.85	9.61	-													
2 Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.58		.08	-												
3 Job control	4.00	0.99	.12	-.08	(.93)											
4 Working time	8.39	1.13	.07	.15*	.10	-										
5 Situational constraints	2.31	0.87	-.07	.07	-.22**	.12	(.73)									
6 Workload	3.15	0.93	.05	-.07	-.08	.27**	.41**	(.90)								
7 Self-regulatory resources	3.40	0.61	.17**	.18**	.14*	.07	-.25**	-.10	(.76)							
8 Negative affect	1.68	0.53	-.08	.14*	-.06	.10	.28**	.21**	-.27**	(.87)						
9 Relationship commitment	4.42	0.72	.00	-.05	.01	-.15*	-.13	-.12	.09	-.19**	(.92)					
10 Length of relationship	13.15	10.09	.66**	-.02	.08	.02	-.08	.02	.14*	-.04	.08	-				
11 Hypothetical constructive reactions	3.47	0.67	.06	.04	.05	.00	-.01	-.10	.18**	-.23**	.39**	.05	(.84)			
12 Hypothetical destructive reactions	2.36	0.81	-.24**	-.29**	-.12	-.07	.16**	.18**	-.32**	.19**	-.30**	-.19**	-.48**	(.94)		
13 Actual constructive reactions	2.70	0.99	-.03	.02	-.13	.05	.00	.01	.15	-.16	.13	-.09	.49**	-.14	-	
14 Actual destructive reactions	1.84	0.71	-.05	.15	.02	.02	.13	.29**	-.21	.15	-.39**	.04	-.15	.34**	.05	-

*Note.* Correlations in lines 1 to 12 ( $N = 238$ ) and correlations in lines 13 and 14 ( $N = 82$ ). Cronbach's alphas are shown in parentheses.

The inter-correlations between the actual constructive reactions and between the actual destructive reactions ranged from .67 to .87 and from .76 to .89 respectively. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ . <sup>a</sup> 0 = female; 1 = male.

Table 2

*Hierarchical Regression Predicting Self-regulatory Resources from Job Stressors*

Variables	Self-Regulatory Resources	
	Model 1	Model 2
Control variables		
Age	.14*	.13*
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.17**	.18**
Job control	.13	.08
Working time	.02	.05
Main effects		
Situational constraints		-.24**
Workload		-.00
R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.13
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.11
F (R <sup>2</sup> )	4.71 **	5.71***
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.05**
F (ΔR <sup>2</sup> )		7.19**

Note.  $N = 238$ . \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . <sup>a</sup> 0 = female; 1 = male.

Table 3

*Hierarchical Regressions Predicting Constructive and Destructive Reactions from Self-regulatory Resources*

Variable	Constructive reactions				Destructive reactions			
	Actual constructive reactions (N = 82)		Hypothetical constructive reactions (N = 238)		Actual destructive reactions (N = 82)		Hypothetical destructive reactions (N = 238)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Control variables								
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.08	.04	.08	.06	.12	.21	-.32***	-.28***
Age	.04	.03	.06	.05	-.17	-.16	-.15	-.13
Length of relationship	-.12	-.14	-.03	-.03	.16	.19	-.07	-.06
Relationship commitment	.11	.12	.36***	.36***	-.38**	-.40***	-.28***	.27***
Negative affect	-.16	-.13	-.17**	-.14*	.03	-.04	.17**	.12*
Main effect								
Self-regulatory resources		.14		.10		-.29**		-.18**
R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.07	.18	.19	.19	.26	.26	.29
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-.01	-.00	.17	.17	.13	.20	.24	.27
F (R <sup>2</sup> )	0.84	0.94	10.43***	9.10***	3.49**	4.34**	16.05***	15.40***
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.02		.01		.07		.03
F (ΔR <sup>2</sup> )		1.43		2.19		7.17**		9.27**

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . <sup>a</sup> 0 = female; 1 = male.



Table 4

*Indirect Effects of Job Stressors on Constructive and Destructive Reactions via Self-Regulatory Resources*

Predictor	Outcome	N	Indirect effect	SE	Confidence Interval		Indirect effect significant ( $p < .05$ )?
					Lower limit	Upper limit	
Situational constraints	Actual constructive reactions	82	-.0069	.0373	-.1305	.0385	No
	Hypothetical constructive reactions	238	-.0143	.0109	-.0443	.0002	No
	Actual destructive reactions	82	.0095	.0409	-.0501	.1276	No
	Hypothetical destructive reactions	238	.0263	.0155	.0037	.0662	Yes
Workload	Actual constructive reactions	82	.0014	.0385	-.0666	.0973	No
	Hypothetical constructive reactions	238	-.0021	.0062	-.0224	.0056	No
	Actual destructive reactions	82	-.0019	.0380	-.0707	.0847	No
	Hypothetical destructive reactions	238	.0049	.0121	-.0152	.0341	No

*Note.* Bootstrap sample size = 5000.

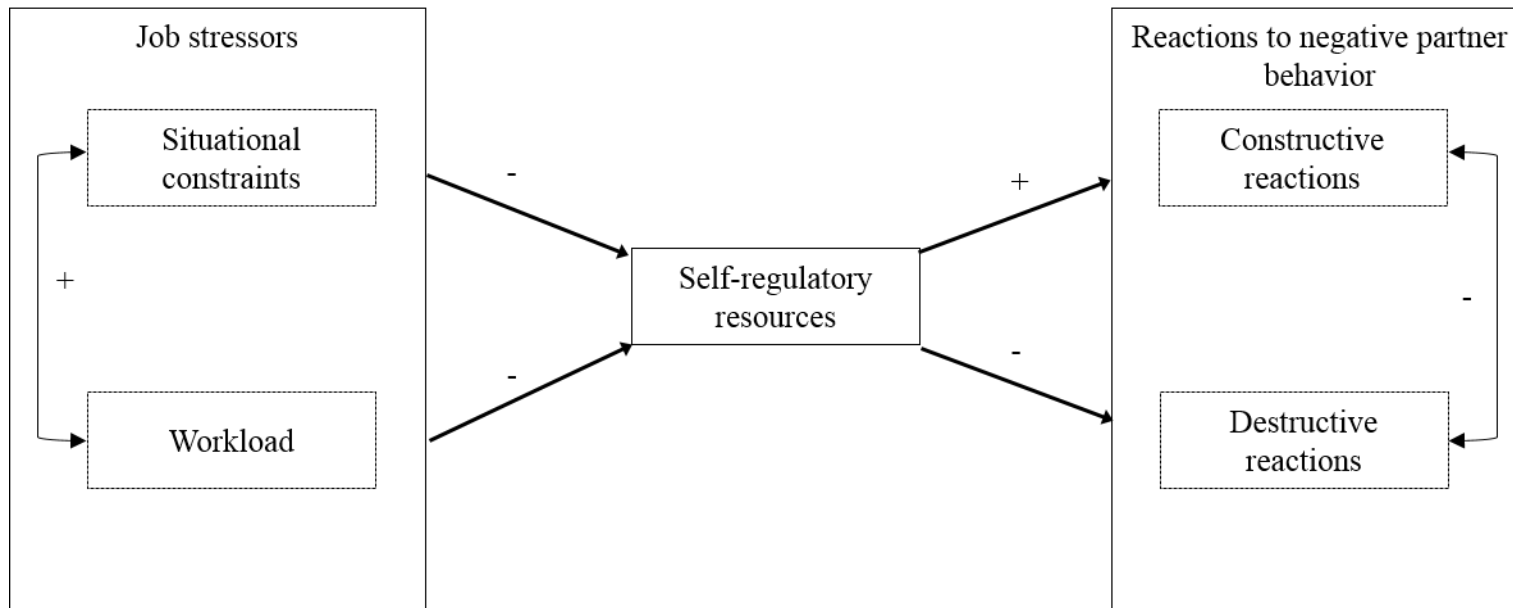


Figure 1. Conceptual model.