DAILY RELATIONAL PROCESSES AMONG NEW PARENTS TRANSITIONING TO PARENTHOOD

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ABSTRACT

The transition to parenthood is a challenging time for many couples, as they have fewer resources to devote to the romantic aspect of their relationship while simultaneously establishing a new relationship domain in the form of coparenting. Couple functioning and coparenting play critical roles in family functioning. Better understanding of the interplay between these two aspects of the couple relationship at the daily level and identification of ways to enhance these experiences at the daily level in one or both of these domains in the early parenting years has important implications for promoting the overall family adjustment. In this dissertation, I examined how couples’ relationship feelings and coparenting are linked from one day to the next and the daily relational benefits of capitalization, a positive relational process, on couples’ daily relationship experiences in these two domains.

Data for this dissertation were drawn from 141 heterosexual couples who participated in a daily diary study for eight consecutive days at 10 months postpartum. In Study 1, I examined the association between couples’ daily feelings of relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support. For both mothers and fathers, I found a cross-day within-person bidirectional link between daily relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support. I also found an indirect effect from mothers’ daily perceived coparenting support to fathers’ daily relationship closeness through fathers’ daily feelings of relationship closeness.

In Study 2, I examined the same-day and cross-day relational impacts of capitalization processes (i.e., capitalization attempts and perceived partner responsiveness) on couples’ daily relational experiences (i.e., closeness and perceived coparenting support) in the context of each partner’s prior-night sleep. Partners’ prior-night sleep did not predict the likelihood of one’s own or partner’s daily capitalization attempts. For both mothers and fathers, sharing the most
positive event of the day with the other was associated with better daily relational experiences, with some evidence of gender difference and domain specificity. Specifically, on days when mothers shared, both partners reported higher levels of daily closeness and, when the event shared concerned the child, the relational benefits were further enhanced for fathers in both domains. On days when fathers shared, mothers reported higher levels of daily closeness and perceived coparenting support, and there were greater benefits for mothers’ perceived coparenting support when the event shared concerned the child. For both mothers and fathers, the benefits for both relational domains were stronger with higher levels of perceived partner responsiveness. Daily relational benefits did not persist into the next day or differ as a function of partners’ prior-night sleep.

In sum, the results of this dissertation (1) elucidate the interplay between new parents’ feelings about their relationship as a couple and the emerging coparenting relationship at the daily level; (2) highlight the unique importance of mothers’ feeling supported in coparenting on a daily basis during this developmental period, and (3) demonstrate the relational benefits of capitalization processes in both couples’ romantic and coparenting domains at the daily level for new parents. From a translational perspective, findings suggest that promoting capitalization processes among new parents within the first year of parenthood may be a low cost, high yield intervention strategy to potentiate couples’ daily relational experiences with respect to both couple closeness and perceived coparenting support.
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General Introduction

According to the ecological model of couple relationships, couple outcomes are a function of couple interactions, individual characteristics, life events, context, or a combination of any of these factors (Halford & Pepping, 2017). Couple interactions refer to verbal and nonverbal exchanges between the partners characterized by their behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (e.g., communication, attribution, affection). Individual characteristics refer to stable personal and experiential factors that each partner brings to the relationship, such as psychological well-being and relationship history. Life events refer to crisis situations the couple or individual partners encounter that can be chronic (e.g., experience of racial discrimination) or acute (e.g., daily hassles) as well as joyous (e.g., transition to parenthood) or troublesome (e.g., job loss). Context refers to the cultural context in which relationships occur that often shape partners’ expectations and beliefs about what a healthy relationship should look like. The transition to parenthood is one major life event that has received a significant amount of attention in the couples’ literature (Delicate, Ayers, & McMullen, 2018) and is commonly characterized by sudden declines in relationship functioning that persist over time (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Roy, Schumm, & Britt, 2014). Better understanding of protective factors for couples’ relational adjustment during this period is an important area of inquiry because the quality of the couple relationship has important implications for the physical and psychological well-being of each member of the couple, as well as their children’s adaptation through the parenting and coparenting relationships (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014; Schulz, Pruett, Kerig, & Parke, 2010; Taraban, & Shaw, 2018).

The majority of studies on couples’ adaptation during the early parenting years have been conducted on macro time scales, such as months or years, and couples’ daily experiences during
the transition to parenthood have rarely been examined. Recent research demonstrates that there are daily fluctuations in couple processes within the first year of parenthood and beyond (Feinberg, Jones, McDaniel, Liu, & Almeida, 2019; McDaniel, Teti, & Feinberg, 2018; Totenhagen, Butler, Curran, & Serido, 2015). Better understanding of factors that may contribute to couples’ daily relationship experiences during this transitional period may ultimately be used to optimize couples’ relationship adjustment and family well-being more generally across the transition to parenthood and during the early parenting years. The overall aim of the dissertation is to investigate couples’ day-to-day experiences during the first year of parenthood, with a primary focus on couples’ relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support as the relational outcomes. Across two papers, I examined: (1) cross-day associations between perceived coparenting support and couple closeness, and (2) the protective effects of capitalization processes, a form of positive couple interaction, on couple closeness and perceived coparenting support, in the context of parental sleep, a common individual-level risk factor for couples during this developmental stage.

The Transition to Parenthood

For many couples, the transition to parenthood is a joyous, yet stressful, period of time. Adding a child to the relationship alters couples’ established relationship dynamics and can create new sources of conflicts. Although some couples fare relatively well after the birth of the first child (Holmes, Sasaki, & Hazen, 2013), many experience sudden declines in relationship satisfaction and adjustment that can persist through the early parenting years (Don & Mickelson, 2014; Doss et al., 2009; Keizer, Dykstra, & Poortman, 2010; Mitnick, Heyman, Slep, 2009). Changes in a number of relationship domains have been demonstrated among couples transitioning to parenthood (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Kluwer
& Johnson, 2007; Sydsjö, Wadsby, Kjellberg, & Sydsjö, 2002). For example, couples fight more frequently (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007) and spend less time engaging in leisure activities together (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). Sexual relationships can also be negatively impacted as sexual concerns and problems become more prevalent for couples within the first year after birth (Pacey, 2004; Schlagintweit, Bailey, & Rosen, 2016).

The transition to parenthood is inherently a dyadic process, and empirical studies are consistent with the interdependent nature of couples’ experiences across this period. For example, Le and colleagues (2016) found mothers’ and fathers’ relationship quality to be reciprocally linked across the first three years of parenthood. Similarly, Don and Mickelson (2014) found that, within the first 9 months postpartum, the changing trajectories in partners’ relationship satisfaction are similar within dyad. Further, how well one partner adapts to the new roles and responsibilities of parenting has implications for the adjustment of the other partner. Chong and Mickelson (2016) found that fathers’ perceived fairness of childcare at 1-month postpartum predicted mothers’ relationship satisfaction at 9 months postpartum after accounting for mothers’ perceived fairness at 1 month. Leavitt and colleagues (2017) also found that mothers’ parenting stress at 6 months postpartum negatively predicted fathers’ sexual satisfaction at 1 year postpartum after controlling for fathers’ own parenting stress at 6 months.

In addition to the dyadic nature of couples’ experiences, some evidence exists regarding gender differences in men’s and women’s experiences transitioning to parenthood (Nyström & Öhrling, 2004). For example, women, on average, report greater declines in relationship satisfaction compared to men (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003), possibly due to differences in role expectations as well as differences in the salience of the parenting role to women’s and men’s identities (Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010; Lawrence, Nylen, & Cobb, 2007). Indeed,
gender roles become more differentiated after birth, with mothers doing more housework and childcare and engaging in less paid work over time (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Grote, Naylor, & Clark, 2002; Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 2002). Consistent with these findings, Le et al. (2016) found that the extent to which mothers perceive their partners to be facilitative or undermining as she fulfills the parenting role at 6 months uniquely contributes to her subsequent perceptions of relationship quality at 3 years, whereas this was not the case for fathers.

**New Role as a Coparent**

One unique aspect of the couple relationship that emerges with the birth of the first baby is the coparenting relationship. It is defined as the extent to which parents work together in rearing their children and support one another in fulfilling their roles as parents (Feinberg, 2003). Coparenting is conceptually different from the romantic aspects of the couple relationship, as it involves issues related to parenting and caregiving (Feinberg, 2003). Empirically, it is also a more proximal predictor of parenting and child outcomes than the marital relationship (Baril, Crouter, & McHale, 2007; Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). Despite the domain specificity, within two-parent families, coparenting is documented to be linked to couples’ relationship functioning (Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Morrill, Hines, Mahmood, & Córdova, 2010). Furthermore, as suggested in the ecological model of coparenting (Feinberg, 2003), these two constructs are expected to be bidirectionally linked. That is, the couple relationship before birth sets the stage for the development of the coparenting relationship; once coparenting is established, how well couples function as a coparental team also alters the trajectory of the couple relationship in the future (e.g., Don & Mickelson, 2014; McHale et al., 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004). However, only two studies in the extant literature have directly examined the theorized bidirectional link during the early
parenting years in a dyadic context controlling for prior levels of coparenting and couple functioning (Le et al., 2016; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). Both studies demonstrated the influence of coparenting on couples’ subsequent relationship functioning. Specifically, in Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2004), with coparenting and marital behaviors observationally coded at the dyadic level based on laboratory tasks, coparenting at 6 months predicted marital behaviors at 3 years after taking into account marital behaviors observed at 6 months. Similarly, as noted earlier, in Le et al. (2016), using self-report data from both partners, this was found to be true only for mothers. Given its impact on couples’ marital relationship at the global level and its more immediate impacts on parenting and child outcomes, the coparenting relationship is conceptually an important relational outcome to consider in addition to the romantic aspect of couples’ relationship when examining new parents’ relational experiences transitioning to parenthood.

**Daily Experiences for New Parents**

To date, the majority of studies on couples during the transition to parenthood have been conducted across macro time periods ranging from months to years, which tend to capture relatively stable, global relational patterns. However, given that how couples feel about their romantic relationship fluctuates on a daily basis (Feinberg et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2018; Totenhagen et al., 2015), the global relationship patterns that persist over longer periods of time are likely the result of daily experiences and behavior exchanges between members of a romantic dyad that accumulate over time. Thus, directly examining couples’ daily experiences across the transition to parenthood provides opportunities to better understand relevant relational processes that may ultimately be targeted to optimize successful couple adaptation during this period.
Thus far, only one prior study has examined couples’ experiences at the daily level during the transition to parenthood (Feinberg et al., 2019), and it identified several potential protective and risk factors for new parents. For both mothers and fathers, on days when they spent more time at work or reported experiencing more stress in general, both partners reported lower relationship intimacy that day. In contrast, on days when both mothers and fathers spent more time doing chores, the partner reported greater intimacy, although fathers, but not mothers, also reported more arguments as a result of fathers’ greater involvement. There are also some notable gender differences observed in this study. Specifically, for mothers, but not fathers, on days when parents found their infants’ behaviors such as fussing, crying, waking at night more stressful, they reported lower levels of intimacy. Moreover, for fathers, on days when they slept more, mothers reported greater intimacy and, on days when they spent more time exercising, both partners reported greater intimacy and fathers reported fewer arguments with their partner. However, on days when mothers spent more time exercising, both partners reported more arguments. Feinberg et al. (2019) is the first empirical study that highlighted new parents’ daily experiences within the first year postpartum and some of the relational processes that occur on a day-to-day basis. However, there are still unanswered questions about the daily relational experiences of new parents, such as the role coparenting plays at the daily level during this period of time.

**Daily Experience of Coparenting**

Given the central role coparenting plays in family functioning (Feinberg, 2003) and its implication for couples’ relationship functioning over time (Le et al., 2016; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004), it is important to better understand new parents’ daily coparenting experiences and the relational dynamics between coparenting and couple functioning at the daily level during this
family transitional period. To date, few studies have examined couples’ coparenting experiences at the daily level. Exceptions include McDaniel et al. (2017; 2018), which included a sample of parents with at least one child under five, both of which demonstrated daily fluctuations in couples’ coparenting relationship. Consistent with the positive link demonstrated in prior work using more global assessments (e.g., Le et al., 2016), same-day associations between daily fluctuations in couples’ relationship feelings and coparenting quality within person and across partners were also found in McDaniel et al. (2017). However, no prior work has examined whether these covariations persist into the next day – that is, whether effects of parents’ daily experiences in coparenting on couples’ feelings about their romantic relationship carry over to the next day and vice versa. Thus, the first paper of this dissertation is to determine the cross-day influences between coparenting support and couple closeness during the first year postpartum.

**Capitalizing on Daily Positive Events**

Given the important implications of couple relationships for the adaptation of new parents and their children (Proulx et al., 2007; Robles et al., 2014; Schulz et al., 2010; Taraban, & Shaw, 2018), it is important to identify ways to help couples bond and foster closeness through relatively easy strategies, as this may provide opportunities to potentiate couples’ daily relational experiences. One such strategy is encouraging couples to capitalize on daily positive events. Positive events occur more frequently than negative ones in everyday life (e.g., Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000) and present important opportunities for couples to accumulate “emotional capital” that protects them from future relationship threats (Feeney & Lemay, 2012; Gottman, 1999; Walsh, Neff, & Gleason, 2017). When positive events occur, it is common for people to share those with close others, a phenomenon called capitalization (Gable & Reis, 2010; Gable,
Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Peters, Reis, & Gable, 2018). Capitalization typically involves two people: (1) the one who shares the personal good news (i.e., capitalizer), and (2) the one who receives the news (i.e., responder). Capitalization consists of two components: (1) capitalization attempt – the act of sharing personal good news with another person; and (2) perceived partner responsiveness – the extent to which the capitalizer perceives the recipient of the news to be responsive to the disclosure of the good news.

To date, studies have shown benefits of capitalization across a wide range of close relationships, including committed couples, for both the mere act of sharing as well as the perception of how it is received (see Gable & Reis, 2010; Peters et al., 2018 for reviews). Moreover, among couples in committed relationships, there is evidence of daily relational benefits for couples on days when one shares a positive event and additional benefits when one perceives the partner to be responsive to the disclosure (Otto, Laurenceau, Siegel, Belcher, 2015). However, it is unknown whether the relational benefits extend to couples transitioning to parenthood, when couples are experiencing relatively high levels of stress such as lack of sleep. If so, whether these benefits persist into the next day remain unknown. Moreover, no prior work has examined how couples’ coparenting relationship may benefit from capitalization. Despite its close relation with parents’ romantic relationship, it remains unknown whether coparenting benefits from capitalization in a similar manner given its domain specificity (Feinberg, 2003).

The Role of Sleep

One common experience for new parents during the postpartum period and beyond is sleep disturbance, including sleep disruption and deprivation (Insana, & Montgomery-Downs, 2013; Montgomery-Downs, Stremler, & Insan, 2013; Richter, Krämer, Tang, Montgomery-Downs, & Lemola, 2019). Lack of sleep can impair one’s cognitive and affective functioning,
which may in turn impair one’s ability to cope with stress and, thus, strain couples’ relationship (Watling, Pawlik, Scott, Booth, & Short, 2017). Prior work has demonstrated daily positive associations between the amount of sleep couples had in the past 24 hours and their relationship satisfaction (Maranges & McNulty, 2017; Yorgason, Godfrey, Call, Erickson, Gustafson, & Bond, 2016). In a sample of first-time parents within the first year postpartum, Feinberg et al. (2019) also demonstrated a positive association between fathers’ sleep and mothers’ relationship closeness at the daily level. Lack of sleep may also exert negative impacts on couples’ coparenting relationship by directly impairing one’s ability to function as a supportive coparent or indirectly through its impact on couples’ individual or relationship functioning. For example, it was found that, for both mothers and fathers during the first three months postpartum, their sleep quality on the prior night was indirectly associated with their daily perceived coparenting quality through their own depressive symptoms (McDaniel & Teti, 2012).

The transition to parenthood model proposed by Kluwer (2010) highlights the importance of considering both couples’ vulnerabilities and resources when examining couples’ relational adaptations during this critical life transition. In light of the negative impact of lack of sleep on couples’ daily relational experiences demonstrated in prior work (Maranges & McNulty, 2017; Yorgason et al., 2016), it could be that on days when partners did not have enough sleep, they are less likely to engage in positive interactions such as capitalization or that, when they do, the relational benefits are attenuated. Thus, when examining the relational benefits of capitalization for first-time parents within the first year, it is important to consider the role of sleep. Accordingly, the second paper of this dissertation examined same-day and cross-day relational benefits of capitalization on couples’ relationship experiences (closeness and perceived coparenting support), in the context of each partner’s prior-night sleep. Specifically, the role of
sleep was taken into account in threefold. First, I examined the extent to which each partner’s prior-night sleep was associated with partners’ likelihood of engaging in capitalization attempts on a daily basis. Second, the direct impacts of each partner’s prior-night sleep on couples’ daily relational experiences were controlled for when examining the daily relational benefits of capitalization. Lastly, I also explored whether the daily relational benefits of capitalization differed as a function of each partner’s prior-night sleep.

**Primary Research Questions**

This dissertation capitalized on a dyadic daily diary design to examine two daily relational processes in new parents during the first year of parenthood to better characterize couples’ day-to-day experiences during this family transitional period. A dyadic daily diary approach is beneficial for several reasons. First, collecting data at the daily level reduces retrospection bias and, thus, provides more reliable person-level information (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Second, it permits a direct examination of individuals’ day-to-day experiences, including temporal processes that occur within individuals (Curran & Bauer, 2011). As such, this may help to identify intervention targets and strategies couples can use in everyday life to boost their daily relational experiences and decrease the likelihood that couples will develop entrenched dysfunctional relationship patterns through the accumulation of daily negative experiences and behavior exchanges. Third, having data from both partners allows for direct examinations of actor (i.e., the effects of one’s predictor variable on one’s own outcome variable) and partner effects (i.e., the effects of one’s partner’s predictor variable on one’s own outcome variable) simultaneously. Lastly, gender differences can be directly tested to further substantiate the differential experiences reported in prior work between mothers and fathers transitioning to parenthood (e.g., Feinberg et al., 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2010).
Data for this dissertation were drawn from 141 heterosexual couples who participated in a daily diary study for eight consecutive days at 10 months postpartum as a supplement to a randomized controlled trial of Family Foundations (Feinberg et al., 2016). Across two studies, cross-day influences between couple closeness and perceived coparenting support (Study 1) and same-day and cross-day effects of capitalization on couple closeness and perceived coparenting support accounting for each partner’s prior-night sleep (Study 2) were examined, respectively.

**Study 1: Cross-Day Influences between Couple Closeness and Coparenting Support among New Parents**

The couple and coparenting relationships are prospectively and bidirectionally associated over months to years during the early parenting years (Le et al., 2016). However, little is known about these associations at the daily level within the first year of parenthood, when coparenting first emerges. In Study 1, I examined the association between couples’ daily feelings of relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support among first-time parents using a dyadic daily diary design (Le, Fredman, McDaniel, Laurenceau, & Feinberg, 2019). An autoregressive cross-lagged model was incorporated within an Actor Partner Interdependence Modeling framework to examine at the daily level: (a) within-person, cross-day associations between relationship closeness and coparenting support, (b) cross-partner, cross-day associations within relationship closeness and coparenting support, (c) cross-partner, cross-day associations between relationship closeness and coparenting support, and (d) gender differences in these associations. For both mothers and fathers, I hypothesized that (1a) a parent’s prior-day feelings of closeness would predict that parent’s next-day perceived coparenting support and that (1b) a parent’s prior-day perceived coparenting support would predict that parent’s next-day feelings of closeness. I also hypothesized that (2a) a parent’s prior-day feelings of closeness would predict the other
parent’s next-day feelings of closeness and that (2b) that a parent’s prior-day perceived coparenting support would predict the other parent’s next-day perceived coparenting support. Finally, I hypothesized that (3a) a parent’s prior-day feelings of closeness would predict the other parent’s next-day perceived coparenting support and that (3b) a parent’s prior-day perceived coparenting support would predict the other parent’s next-day feelings of closeness. I also examined how these associations differ across gender.

**Study 2: Relational Impacts of Capitalization among New Parents**

Capitalization is a positive relationship process that has been shown to yield relational benefits across a wide range of dyads, including committed couples (see Peters et al., 2018 for a review). However, it is unknown whether such benefits extend to couples transitioning to parenthood. Moreover, during the postpartum period, new parents often experience sleep deprivation, which may attenuate the relational benefits of capitalization (Richter et al., 2019).

In Study 2, I investigated the same-day and cross-day relational impacts of capitalization on couples’ relationship experiences (closeness and perceived coparenting support) in the context of each partner’s prior-night sleep. Specifically, I examined (1) the extent to which each partner’s prior-night sleep predicted one’s own and the partner’s likelihood of engaging in daily capitalization attempts and (2) relational impacts of capitalization (i.e., capitalization attempt and perceived partner responsiveness) above and beyond the impact of each partner’s prior-night sleep. I also explored (3) whether each partner’s prior-night sleep moderated the same-day and cross-day impact of capitalization on couples’ relationship experiences. Multilevel models for dyadic diary data (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2012) were used. For both mothers and fathers, I hypothesized that (1) daily fluctuations in a parent’s prior-night sleep would be negatively associated with both one’s own (actor effects) and the partner’s likelihood of daily capitalization...
attempt (partner effects). I also hypothesized that after taking into account each partner’s prior-night sleep, (2a) on days when one partner engages in a capitalization attempt (i.e., shares a positive event with the partner), both the capitalizer (actor effect) and the responder (partner effect) would report higher levels of relationship closeness that day, and (2b) on days when one shares, both the capitalizer (actor effect) and the responder (partner effect) would report higher levels of relationship closeness when the capitalizer perceives the partner to be more responsive than an average day. The relational impact of capitalization on coparenting support and the cross-day link between capitalization and daily relationship experiences (closeness and coparenting) were examined as research questions, as were the moderating effect of each partner’s prior-night sleep. Gender differences for these effects were also examined.
Study 1:

Cross-Day Influences between Couple Closeness and Coparenting Support among New Parents

Introduction

Coparenting is defined as the extent to which parents work together in rearing their children and support each other in fulfilling their roles as parents (Feinberg, 2003). Among two-parent families, coparenting quality is associated with parent mental health and adjustment, parenting quality, and child adjustment even after taking into account couple romantic relationship functioning (e.g., Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Morrill, Hines, Mahmood, & Córdova, 2010; Pedro, Ribeiro, & Shelton, 2012; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Both conceptually and empirically, coparenting quality is associated with, but distinct from, other aspects of couples’ romantic relationships (Feinberg, 2003; Van Egeren, 2004). Although a body of emerging work has begun to delineate the links among couple functioning, coparenting, and parent and child outcomes, much remains unknown about how coparenting emerges and develops during the first year of parenthood, a period of rapidly shifting roles and identities for partners in a co-parental dyad. Specifically, most research to date has investigated these constructs on the macro time scale of months and years. However, with couple relations and coparenting dynamics emerging in the context of specific daily experiences, relationships develop and unfold on micro time scales. It is likely the patterning of these dynamics over time that gives rise to global (and more stable) macro factors such as expectations, attitudes, parental mental health, and ongoing or repeated family behaviors.

Prior theory and research suggest a bidirectional association between coparenting and couple functioning across the parenting years (e.g., Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Feinberg, 2003;
Minuchin, 1988; Van Egeren, 2004). Two studies have directly examined this theorized bidirectional link during the early years of parenthood and in a dyadic context, both of which were conducted on macro time scales (i.e., months to years; Le, McDaniel, Leavitt, & Feinberg, 2016; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004). Investigating these associations on shorter time scales, McDaniel and colleagues (McDaniel, Teti, & Feinberg, 2017, 2018) demonstrated same-day associations between couple relationship functioning and coparenting among parents with at least one child under five in a daily diary study. However, the extent to which the relation between these two constructs persists into the next day (i.e., daily lagged effects), and specifically during the first year of parenthood, has not been addressed. Better understanding of how these constructs relate from one day to the next would inform both our understanding of patterns observed on macro time scales and ways to intervene to encourage positive changes at the more micro level. The current study utilized a dyadic daily diary design to examine the bidirectional associations between couples’ daily feelings about their romantic relationships and coparenting support for first-time parents. We focused on daily patterns during the first year of parenthood, as these factors may be most malleable during this early family stage.

**Bidirectional Associations between the Couple Relationship and Coparenting**

According to family systems theory, which posits that all parts of the family system are interconnected (Minuchin, 1988), parents’ romantic relationship and the coparenting relationship are related. Moreover, this relation is expected to be bidirectional and recursive as suggested in the ecological model of coparenting (Feinberg, 2003). That is, parents’ prenatal relationship quality sets the stage for the emergent coparenting process such that couples who are well-adjusted prenatally are more likely to function as an effective coparental unit after the birth of the
child (e.g., Le et al., 2016; McHale et al., 2004); as time passes, the ups and downs of the parents’ relationship as a couple are then continuously reflected in the way they interact as coparents (e.g., Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). As the coparenting relationship emerges and takes on a somewhat stable pattern, couples’ experiences as coparents influence other domains of the parents’ relationship. As early parenting is highly time-consuming and of enormous psychological importance to new parents’ identities and life goals, it is not surprising that coparenting relations serve as a central foundation of the parenting experience and come to influence other aspects of parents’ adjustment and relationships. Empirical research is consistent with this theoretical perspective, as coparenting and couple functioning are significantly associated both concurrently and prospectively (e.g., Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Le et al., 2016; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001; McDaniel et al., 2017, 2018; McHale et al., 2004; Morrill et al., 2010; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004; Van Egeren, 2004). For example, couples’ prenatal relationship quality and interactions predict their coparenting quality and experiences in early parenthood (e.g., Le et al., 2016; McHale et al., 2004; Van Egeren, 2004). In turn, coparenting predicts couples’ subsequent relationship quality and marital behaviors (e.g., Durtschi, Soloski, & Kimmès, 2017; Fagan & Lee, 2014; Le et al., 2016; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004) as well as parent adjustment and parenting quality (e.g., Pedro et al., 2012; Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011).

Nonetheless, there are significant gaps in the empirical literature on the relation between couple functioning and coparenting. For example, in prior longitudinal studies, autoregressive paths (i.e., prior levels of the dependent variable) were typically not included when modeling the prospective associations between coparenting and couple functioning, making it difficult to fully discern the directionality and magnitude of those effects. Only two studies in the literature have directly examined the bidirectional association between the two constructs while controlling for
earlier levels of the dependent variables, and findings are inconsistent. Le et al. (2016) found mixed evidence supporting a bidirectional association between these constructs across the transition to parenthood with a sample of 164 primiparous married or cohabiting couples with self-report data. In that study, prenatal relationship quality predicted 6-month postpartum coparenting quality, and 6-month postpartum relationship quality predicted 36-month postpartum coparenting quality for both mothers and fathers. However, coparenting quality at 6 months predicted relationship quality at 3 years for mothers but not for fathers. In Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2004), with coparenting and marital behaviors observationally coded at the dyadic level based on laboratory tasks in a sample of 46 families at 6 months and 3 years postpartum, the bidirectional association was not supported. Specifically, coparenting at 6 months predicted marital behaviors at 3 years but not vice versa. The inconsistency in findings across studies could be due to the use of different methods, sample differences, and/or reduced power to detect effects due to relatively small sample size in the Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2004) study.

Daily Diary Designs

In addition to inconsistent findings across investigations, most longitudinal studies investigate these associations across macro time intervals such as months or years (e.g., Le et al., 2016; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). However, relational processes may operate differently across different time scales. For example, relational processes assessed at the daily level or on other short time scales may reflect the ebbs and flows in couples’ daily interactions and behavior exchanges, whereas relational processes assessed over months or years may be a representation of the cumulative effects of day-to-day experiences that create more stable internal (e.g., expectations, attitudes) and external (e.g., repeated relationship behaviors) processes. Researchers have generally examined across the more stable macro time scale because of the
availability of conceptual frameworks, measures, psychometric theory, and analytic methods that supported macro level inquiry. However, daily experiences can be highly salient and subsequently affect same-day or subsequent-day processes. Not only do daily experiences accumulate into more stable global factors, but, even when stable global relations are established, a great deal of daily fluctuation in emotion, mood, behavior, and relationships has been found in investigations of daily stress processes (Liu, Bangerter, Rovine, Zarit, & Almeida, 2016; Mroczek & Almeida, 2004; Qian, Yarnal, & Almeida, 2014; Totenhagen, Butler, & Ridley, 2012). This presents opportunities for intervention to enhance functioning on days that are relatively more challenging. For example, encouraging partners to engage in self-care behaviors (e.g., exercise) or share positive events with each other may benefit both partners at the daily level (Feinberg, Jones, McDaniel, Liu, & Almeida, 2019; Peters, Reis, & Gable, 2018). Thus, a more nuanced understanding of the day-to-day family relational processes may offer insights that can then inform prevention and intervention by including more targeted strategies that couples can use in everyday life during this period of the family life cycle.

One way to better understand these micro processes is to employ daily diary methods. As discussed in Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli (2003), a diary design is ideal because, with appropriate assessment intervals, it provides reliable person-level information by reducing retrospection bias and allowing for direct examinations of within-person change over time as well as causal processes in within-person changes. Daily diary designs have been employed in prior studies of relational processes and demonstrated daily fluctuations in couples’ feelings about their romantic relationships (e.g., Totenhagen, Butler, Curran, & Serido, 2015). Moreover, among couples with at least one child age five or younger, daily fluctuations in coparenting as well as contemporaneous (i.e., same-day) associations between couples’ daily fluctuations in
relationship feelings and coparenting have been observed (McDaniel et al., 2017, 2018). However, it is not known whether these observed covariations would persist into the next day during the first year of parenthood, specifically.

**A Dyadic Daily Approach**

Relational processes are inherently dyadic; thus, experiences of daily couple interactions may not only predict next-day experiences of the individual (actor effects) but also those of the partner (partner effects). For example, on days when one parent perceives more spousal support in coparenting, he or she may reciprocate the positive behaviors the following day, resulting in the other parent’s perceiving more coparenting support (within-construct partner effects). Indeed, *reciprocity* in couples’ relationship quality has been demonstrated longitudinally on a macro time scale (e.g., Le et al., 2016). Recently, McDaniel et al. (2018) have shown same-day associations between partners’ daily perceptions of coparenting quality among parents with young children. In that study, daily partner effects were also observed between one’s feelings about the couple relationship and the partner’s feelings about coparenting quality on the same day. However, no prior study has investigated these partner effects from one day to the next.

**Current Study**

In the present investigation, we combined the dyadic approach with the daily diary design to examine bidirectional lagged (i.e., next-day) effects between daily feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support in a sample of first time parents during the first year after birth among primiparous couples. We focus on positive dimensions of the couple relationship, specifically feelings of closeness and coparenting support, for the following reasons: (1) this virtuous cycle exists on a macro time scale during the early parenting years (Le et al., 2016); (2) there are within-person fluctuations in both daily relationship feelings and coparenting as well as
within-person same-day associations between the two (McDaniel et al., 2017; Totenhagen et al., 2015); and (3) there is emerging evidence of same-day cross-partner associations between daily relationship feelings and daily coparenting among parents of young children (McDaniel et al., 2018).

We proposed three sets of hypotheses. First, we hypothesized within-person bidirectional lagged effects between daily feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support (i.e., cross-construct actor effects). Hypothesis 1a: Specifically, for both mothers and fathers, we anticipated that one parent’s prior-day feelings of closeness would predict the same parent’s next-day perceived coparenting support (e.g., mother’s closeness_{t-1} \rightarrow \text{mother’s coparenting}_t). Hypothesis 1b: We also anticipated that, for both mothers and fathers, one parent’s prior-day perceived coparenting support would predict the same parent’s next-day feelings of closeness (e.g., mother’s coparenting_{t-1} \rightarrow \text{mother’s closeness}_t). Our second set of hypotheses concerned cross-day reciprocity within each construct (i.e., within-construct partner effects). Hypothesis 2a: For both mothers and fathers, we expected that one parent’s prior-day feelings of closeness would predict the other parent’s next-day feelings of closeness (e.g., mother’s closeness_{t-1} \rightarrow \text{father’s closeness}_t). Hypothesis 2b: We also expected that one parent’s prior-day perceived coparenting support would predict the other parent’s next-day perceived coparenting support (e.g., mother’s coparenting_{t-1} \rightarrow \text{father’s coparenting}_t). Our third set of hypotheses concerned the cross-partner lagged effects between closeness and coparenting support (i.e., cross-construct partner effects). Hypothesis 3a: For both mothers and fathers, we expected that one parent’s prior-day feelings of closeness would predict the other parent’s next-day perceived coparenting support (e.g., mother’s closeness_{t-1} \rightarrow \text{father’s coparenting}_t). Hypothesis 3b: We also expected that one parent’s prior-day perceived coparenting support would predict the other parent’s next-
day feelings of closeness (e.g., mother’s coparenting(t-1) → father’s closeness).

Exploratory analyses were also conducted to examine potential gender differences for all lagged effects. On one hand, one might expect daily experiences in coparenting to be more salient for mothers because they often devote more time than do fathers in parenting (Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015). On the other hand, daily coparenting experiences may actually be more salient for fathers because their roles as parents are typically less prescribed. The existing research did not strongly support one over the other, thus, we did not have a priori hypotheses.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants for the current study were a subsample (N = 141 dyads) of co-resident heterosexual couples who participated in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Family Foundations recruited in three Mid-Atlantic states and one southern state (Feinberg et al., 2016). FF is a universal, couple-based psychoeducational transition to parenthood program that helps couples maintain a healthy and strong coparenting relationship after the birth of their first child and consists of five prenatal and four postnatal sessions. Couples were assessed for eight consecutive days at 10 months postpartum, as sufficient time would have elapsed for the coparenting relationship to become established and for the relational dynamics of coparenting and couple closeness to become more stable. Mothers and fathers were interviewed separately over the phone every evening at times that were convenient for them in a room by themselves. In total, mothers and fathers provided 1,114 and 1,110 days of diary data on daily coparenting support, and 1,115 and 1,111 days of diary data on daily relationship closeness, respectively. Thus, for mothers and fathers, respectively, 1.2% and 1.6% of data were missing for daily
coparenting support, and 1.2% and 1.5% of data were missing for daily relationship closeness. Within the subsample, 76 couples had been assigned to the intervention condition and 65 to the control condition (which consisted of antenatal services as usual, plus the provision of information about how to choose quality child care). At the time of the current investigation (10 months postpartum), participants were 18 years old or older with an average age of 30.30 years ($SD = 4.18$) for mothers and 32.16 years ($SD = 5.22$) for fathers. On average, participants completed 15.55 years ($SD = 1.59$) of education, and the median family income was $87,500. Ninety-one percent of couples were married, and 88% of participants self-identified as non-Hispanic White. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at The Pennsylvania State University (protocol # PRAMS00041839, “Family Foundations 2 continued beyond year 5”), and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

**Measures**

**Closeness.** Partners’ daily feelings of closeness were assessed with two items for eight consecutive days (i.e., “How intimate or connected did you feel to your partner today?” and “How emotionally close did you feel to your partner today?”). Each item was rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ($1 = Not at All, 5 = Extremely$), with higher scores indicating higher levels of daily feelings of relationship closeness. Daily feelings of closeness assessed by single items have been demonstrated to be valid in the context of daily diary studies (e.g., Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). Repeated measures correlations (rmcorr; Bakdash & Marusich, 2017) were used to assess intra-individual associations between the two items and indicated that these two items were highly correlated within individuals at the daily level for both mothers and fathers ($r_{mother} = .76; r_{father} = .70$). Thus, these two items were averaged to create a composite daily closeness score for mothers and fathers, respectively.
Coparenting support. Daily perceived coparenting support from the partner was assessed with the item “In the past 24 hours, how much did your partner support you as a parent?” every day for eight consecutive days. Because there was no extant measure of daily coparenting experiences, this item was created specifically for the current study. The item was rated on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = Not at All, 4 = A Lot), with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived coparenting support.

Statistical Analyses

Multilevel modeling for dyadic longitudinal data (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2012) was conducted using Mplus 8 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2017). Robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimation was used, as this generates standard maximum likelihood estimates and standard errors that are robust to missing data (Yuan & Bentler, 2000). To examine the bidirectional lagged associations between couples’ daily feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support at 10 months postpartum, an autoregressive cross-lagged model was incorporated within an Actor Partner Interdependence Modeling framework (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Modeling both members of a couple in the same model also allows for direct examination of gender differences in this relational process.

Two separate models were examined, with daily feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support as the respective outcome variables. In each model, there were four primary components: 1) within-construct actor effects (e.g., fathers’ daily feelings of closeness on Day 1 predicting fathers’ daily feelings of closeness on Day 2, etc.) to control for construct stability within individuals (i.e., autoregressive effects), 2) cross-construct actor effects (Hypothesis 1; e.g., fathers’ perceived coparenting support on Day 1 predicting fathers’ daily feelings of closeness on Day 2, etc.), 3) within-construct partner effects/reciprocity (Hypothesis 2; e.g.,
fathers’ daily feelings of closeness on Day 1 predicting mothers’ daily feelings of closeness on Day 2, etc.), and 4) **cross-construct partner effects** (Hypothesis 3; e.g., fathers’ daily perceived coparenting support on Day 1 predicting mothers’ daily feelings of closeness on Day 2, etc.). Residuals were allowed to correlate between partners to account for the interdependent nature of the dyadic data at the daily level. Following Barr, Levy, Scheepers, and Tily’s (2013) recommendation, a maximal random effects structure was specified, and model convergence was achieved with random intercepts and slopes for cross-construct actor effects, within-construct partner effects, and cross-construct partner effects for both mothers and fathers. To conserve power and enhance parsimony, models were subsequently simplified by setting the covariances between the random effects to zero and constraining the fixed and random effects to be the same across mothers and fathers when deviance tests (adjusted for the use of MLR) suggested that the more parsimonious model did not result in a significant degradation of model fit. Thus, in the final models, the variance and covariance of mothers’ and fathers’ intercepts were included at both levels, and the random effects were modeled for the three hypothesized effects (i.e., cross-construct actor effects, within-construct partner effects, and cross-construct partner effects) and constrained to be the same across mothers and fathers, with the covariances among these random effects set to zero (statistics available upon request). Intervention status (0 = control, 1 = intervention) was explored as a moderator but was not significant, nor was it a significant predictor of daily fluctuations in perceived coparenting support and couple closeness. Nevertheless, it was retained in the final models as a control given that the data used in the current study were collected in the context of an intervention study. Lastly, day was also included to account for any linear effects of time.
Results

The intraclass correlations (proportion of between-person variance) for daily feelings of closeness was .50 for mothers and .48 for fathers and was .44 for mothers and .52 for fathers for daily perceived coparenting support. Intra- and inter-individual associations among study variables were assessed with repeated measures correlations and are presented in Table 1 (rmcorr; Bakdash & Marusich, 2017). Specifically, mothers’ and fathers’ daily feelings of closeness were positively and significantly correlated. Daily feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support were positively and significantly correlated within each individual for both mothers and fathers. Mothers’ and fathers’ daily perceived coparenting support were positively and marginally correlated within dyad.

**H1: Within-Person Lagged Effects between Couple Closeness and Coparenting Support**

As predicted, after controlling for the stability in feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support from the prior day to the next day (i.e., autoregressive effects), there were significant cross-construct actor effects for both mothers and fathers. That is, prior day feelings of closeness significantly predicted next-day perceived coparenting support (Hypothesis 1a), and prior day perceived coparenting support significantly predicted next-day feelings of closeness (Hypothesis 1b). As displayed in Figure 1, a 1-unit increase in prior day feelings of closeness predicted a .04-unit ($p = .04$, 95% CI = .002, .080) increase in a parent’s own perceived coparenting support the next day, which is equal to a .11 SD and .12 SD increase for mothers and fathers, respectively (calculated using the within-couple SDs reported in Table 1). A 1-unit increase in prior day perceived coparenting support predicted a .09-unit ($p = .04$, 95% CI = .006, .174) increase in a parent’s own feelings of closeness the next day, which is equal to a .13 SD and .14 SD increase for mothers and fathers, respectively. No gender differences were found in these lagged effects ($\Delta \chi^2_{\text{Closeness}} (1) = 1.17, p = .28$; $\Delta \chi^2_{\text{Coparenting}} (1) = .35, p = .55$) or the
autoregressive effects of daily closeness and perceived coparenting support ($\Delta \chi^2_{\text{Closeness}} (1) = .05, p = .82; \Delta \chi^2_{\text{Coparenting}} (1) = .33, p = .56$).

**H2: Cross-Partner Lagged Effects within Couple Closeness and Coparenting Support**

We did not find evidence of reciprocity in daily couple closeness (Hypothesis 2a) but did find evidence of reciprocity in coparenting from mothers to fathers (Hypothesis 2b). That is, mothers’ prior-day perceived coparenting support significantly predicted fathers’ next-day perceived coparenting support but not vice versa, and a significant chi-square difference test confirmed this gender difference ($\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 6.90, p = .01$). As displayed in Figure 1, a 1-unit increase in mothers’ prior-day perceived coparenting support predicted a .13-unit ($p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI} = .018, .249$) increase in fathers’ next-day perceived coparenting support, which is equal to a .38 $SD$ increase for fathers.

**H3: Cross-Partner Lagged Effects between Closeness and Coparenting Support**

There were no significant direct partner effects from one parent’s feelings of closeness to the other parent’s next-day perceived coparenting support or vice-versa. However, in light of the reciprocity found in coparenting support from mothers to fathers and the cross-construct actor effects for fathers from coparenting support to couple closeness, post hoc analyses were conducted to formally test the indirect partner effect from mothers’ coparenting support at time $t-1$ to fathers’ relationship closeness at time $t+1$ through fathers’ coparenting support at time $t$. The joint significance test confirmed the significance of this indirect effect (Cole & Maxwell, 2003; MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Specifically, mothers’ and fathers’ perceived coparenting support and relationship closeness at time $t-1$ and $t$, respectively, were modeled to predict fathers’ relationship closeness at time $t+1$, while simultaneously controlling for all the within- and cross-construct actor and partner effects modeled in the two
separate models reported above, as well as intervention status and day. Consistent with findings reported above, the effect from mothers’ perceived coparenting support at time $t-1$ to fathers’ perceived coparenting support at time $t$ ($p = .04$) and the effect from fathers’ perceived coparenting support at time $t$ to fathers’ relationship closeness at $t+1$ ($p = .03$) were both significant.

**Discussion**

The current investigation is the first to examine the daily bidirectional associations between first-time parents’ relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support from one day to the next in a dyadic context during the first year of parenting. Results confirmed our hypotheses concerning the prospective and bidirectional link between daily couple closeness and perceived coparenting support within person and provided evidence for reciprocity in daily perceived coparenting support from mothers to fathers. Findings also provided support for an indirect partner effect from mothers’ perceived coparenting support to fathers’ couple closeness through fathers’ perceived coparenting support in first-time parents’ day-to-day lives.

**Daily Bidirectional Link between Couple Closeness and Coparenting Support**

Prior work demonstrated a contemporaneous association between fluctuations in daily relationship feelings and coparenting among couples with at least one child age five or younger (McDaniel et al., 2018). The current study extends previous findings by demonstrating the prospective and bidirectional nature of these associations for first time parents during the first year of parenthood, when the coparenting relationship first emerges. Specifically, for both mothers and fathers, on days when they perceive their partners to be more supportive of them in their role as a parent, they tend to feel closer to their partners the next day; similarly, on days when they feel closer to their partners, they are more likely to experience more coparenting
support the following day, suggesting a virtuous cycle operating from one day to the next early in the coparenting relationship.

However, when examined over the first three years of parenting with longer time intervals, this bidirectional association between couple relations and coparenting was found for mothers only (Le et al., 2016). The concept of identity salience in the identity theory (Stryker & Serpe, 1982) may help in interpreting the difference in findings across micro and macro time scales. Identity theory posits that an individual holds a variety of roles or social identities (e.g., spouse, parent, friend, or worker) that differ from each other in their salience or importance. It may be that the experience of coparenting is highly salient early on for both first-time mothers and fathers given the newness of the parenting roles. However, because the parenting role is typically more central to women’s identities than to men’s and parents tend to become more traditional in their gender-role attitudes and behaviors across the transition to parenthood (Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010), men’s identities as coparents may become less salient to them over time compared with their other roles (e.g., worker, spouse), such that this impact persists over time for mothers only.

**Reciprocity in Daily Couple Closeness and Coparenting Support**

Prior work assessing first time parents across the first three years of parenthood has demonstrated reciprocity in couple relationship quality for both mothers and fathers (Le et al., 2016), though we did not observe this reciprocity at the daily level. In contrast, we did find reciprocity in perceived coparenting support from mothers to fathers, which was not observed in the prior macro level work. The absence of reciprocity in daily relationship closeness during the first year of parenthood suggests that parents’ identities as romantic partners may be relatively less salient at the daily level than their roles as coparents when they are still adapting to their new
roles as parent and coparent. During the early parenting period, couples’ daily interactions may thus be more rapidly shaped by their daily experience in coparenting than their feelings about the relationship. Future studies that employ a burst design (e.g., Ram et al., 2014) over the first several years of new parenthood may help to clarify the daily versus accumulative effects of each partner’s feeling about the relationship on the other one.

With respect to reciprocity of perceived coparenting support, we found evidence of a gender difference: mothers’ prior-day perceived coparenting support positively predicted fathers’ next-day perceived coparenting support but not vice versa. It may be that, on days when mothers feel their partners are being more supportive of them in their parenting role, mothers engage in more “gate-opening” behaviors that encourage and support father involvement in parenting the next day. Prior studies conducted over macro time intervals have found evidence of an association between coparenting quality and maternal gate-opening, as well as between maternal gate-opening/closing and fathers’ perceived coparenting support (Olsavsky, 2017; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). During the first year of parenthood, in particular, mothers are more involved in childcare responsibilities and assume the primary caregiver role in most families despite an ongoing trend towards greater father involvement in parenting (e.g., Kotila, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Kamp Dush, 2013). Thus, “opening the gate” may occur naturally when mothers find their partners to be a supportive coparent as a way to reciprocate the support. However, it is not likely that fathers will be able to do the same for mothers given that fathers’ involvement tends to depend on mothers’ gate-opening when children are young. For example, during 25-minute triadic family interactions when children were 24 months old, mothers’ coparenting support was found to be positively associated with fathers’ involvement in parenting decisions but not vice versa (Murphy, Gallegos, Jacobvitz, &
Moreover, although fathers may be more involved in parenting following mothers’ gate-opening, there is some evidence suggesting that, depending on the type of father involvement, it does not necessarily result in mothers feeling more supported (Jia & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011).

**Cross-Partner Lagged Effects between Couple Closeness and Coparenting Support**

In contrast to the prospective and bidirectional associations observed between daily feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support within person, we did not find evidence of direct cross-construct associations across partners. This finding is consistent with prior work examining partner effects of coparenting on marital conflict and relationship quality across longer time intervals, which also failed to observe associations in relational processes that are theorized to operate across partners across relationship domains (Christopher, Umemura, Mann, Jacobvitz, & Hazen, 2015; Le et al., 2016). Additionally, although prior daily diary work has shown partner effects between daily relationship quality and coparenting quality on the same day (McDaniel et al., 2018), the current work suggests that these direct partner effects may not be strong enough to persist into the next day. However, given the indirect pathway observed from mothers’ perceived coparenting support to fathers’ feelings of closeness through fathers’ perceived coparenting support across days, there do seem to be partner influences at the daily level from one parent to the other across relationship domains that take somewhat longer to unfold. Future studies that include more couples and more observations may help to clarify the extent to which these domains are related across partners across days among new parents.

**Key Role of Mothers’ Daily Perception of Coparenting Support**

Taken together, the findings from the current study, interpreted in the context of the existing literature, help to construct a picture of the daily relational processes that first-time
parents experience during the infancy period. It appears that, in the early development of the coparenting relationship, it is critical for mothers to feel supported in coparenting on a daily basis because mothers’ daily experience of coparenting is directly reflected in the way they feel about their relationship the next day and indirectly affects fathers’ feelings about the relationship through fathers’ coparenting experiences. Over the long run, it is likely that the accumulative effect of mothers’ everyday experience in coparenting then contribute directly to mothers’ and indirectly to fathers’ global perception of the quality of their couple relationship. These findings suggest that if mothers feel supported in coparenting on a daily basis in the early stage of coparenting, a virtuous cycle may unfold over the course of the first few years of parenthood.

Implications for Intervention

As noted by others (e.g., Doss & Rhoades, 2017), the transition to parenthood is a unique window of opportunity for prevention efforts designed to enhance the coparenting relationship and/or prevent relationship declines. Indeed, prior work has demonstrated positive intervention effects of coparenting-focused psychoeducational programs on couple dynamics during the transition to parenthood (e.g., Feinberg & Kan, 2008; McHale, Salman-Engin, & Coovert, 2015). Specifically, in the randomized controlled trial from which data for the current study were drawn, positive intervention effects were found for both coparenting and couple functioning at 10 months postpartum (Feinberg et al., 2016). However, intervention status was not a significant predictor of daily perceived coparenting support or couple closeness in the current study, suggesting that the positive intervention effects were not reflected in couples’ everyday experiences. Given that the current study demonstrated a cross-day bidirectional link between closeness and coparenting within individual, reciprocity in coparenting from mothers to fathers, and an indirect partner effect from mothers’ coparenting to fathers’ closeness, providing ways to
enhance couples’ daily experiences in one or both of these two relational domains within the first year of parenthood is likely to be beneficial. For instance, it may be valuable to educate couples about individual differences in preferences for giving and receiving support in coparenting in the context of couple-based psychoeducational transition to parenthood programs. Providing couples with skills that facilitate their having explicit and more regular sharing and decision-making conversations before and after birth about how both parents would like to be supported and ways each will be able to support one another as a coparent in the first year of parenthood may be helpful. Additionally, providing couples with strategies to implement on a daily basis that facilitate positive interactions may directly boost couples’ daily experiences in the coparenting domain, the romantic relationship domain, or both. One example of a potentially low cost, high yield strategy is encouraging couples to implement capitalization on a daily basis – that is, sharing with partners any good things that have happened to them during the day (Peters et al., 2018). Prior work has demonstrated benefits of capitalization on daily relationship intimacy during high stress contexts (e.g., Otto, Laurenceau, Siegel, & Belcher, 2015), as well as on coparenting when the positive events being shared concerned the child (Le, Fredman, & Feinberg, 2018).

**Limitations and Future Directions**

There are several limitations associated with the current study. First, our sample was relatively homogeneous with respect to ethnicity and education in that most of the sample was non-Hispanic white and relatively well-educated. Moreover, although our sample demonstrated variability with respect to socioeconomic status and risk characteristics, it was overall relatively high functioning in terms of coparenting quality. Future studies that include a sample more diverse with respect to demographic characteristics and family functioning are needed to
determine whether the pattern of findings observed in this sample generalizes to samples that consist of first time parents that are higher risk and/or more ethnically diverse. Second, in the current study, the assessment scale used to measure daily coparenting utilized a single item on a 1 – 4 scale, which likely resulted in a restricted range. Additionally, the use of a single item did not allow us to examine the reliability of our coparenting measurement. Future studies should employ multiple item measures of daily coparenting with a wider scale range (e.g., 1 – 7); one such measure that has recently been developed and tested in daily diary work with couples with young children is the *Daily Coparenting Scale* (McDaniel et al., 2017).

Findings from the current study suggest that helping mothers feel supported in coparenting on a daily basis may help fathers feel supported in their coparenting role and both parents to experience greater couple closeness. Future studies that replicate the indirect partner effect from mothers’ daily perceived coparenting support to fathers’ closeness would further substantiate these findings given that this indirect association was not hypothesized a priori in the present study. The theorized mediation chain of mothers’ perceived coparenting support to maternal gate-opening to fathers’ perception of coparenting support should also be formally tested at the daily level to add additional nuance to the current findings. Future studies should also clarify which aspects of couples’ interactions contribute to mothers’ feeling supported by their partners early in the development of the coparenting relationship by expanding assessment to other aspects of daily coparenting and parenting, such as division of labor, and father involvement. In addition, future studies should take into account whether it is the mother or father who assumes the primary versus secondary caretaking role and responsibility in the family to see if the pattern of findings differs. Finally, the current study and two previous studies examining the bidirectional link between couple relationship and coparenting focused on the
early parenting years. Future investigations of the association between couple closeness and perceived coparenting should be conducted during other developmental stages of the family life cycle, such as when the first child transitions to adolescence, to determine if the same or different pattern of findings is observed.

The current study adds to the couple and transition to parenthood literature by demonstrating, at the daily level, a within-person prospective and bidirectional association between couple closeness and perceived coparenting support for both mothers and fathers, a prospective association between mothers’ prior-day perceived coparenting support and fathers’ next-day perceived coparenting support, and an indirect effect from mothers’ experiences of coparenting support to fathers’ feelings of couple closeness through fathers’ experiences of coparenting support among first-time parents during the first year of parenthood. These findings highlight the interdependent nature of the couple and coparenting relationship for both partners at the daily level during the first year of parenthood. Potentiating both parents’ feeling supported in their everyday co-parenting experiences may help to prevent or mitigate relationship declines across the transition to parenthood and help to sustain couples’ successful adaptation to the co-parenting and parenting roles across the family life cycle.
References


Table 1.
*Correlations between mothers and fathers’ daily relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support (N = 141 dyads)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Mothers’ daily relationship closeness</td>
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<td>2. Fathers’ daily relationship closeness</td>
<td>.40***</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Mothers’ daily perceived coparenting support</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.13***</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Fathers’ daily perceived coparenting support</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.06†</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Grand mean* |
3.20 3.20 3.68 3.66

*Within-couple SD* |
.69  .64  .36  .34

*Between-couple SD* |
.76  .72  .47  .51

*Note. SD = standard deviation. † p = .05; *** p < .001.*
Figure 1. Lagged associations between daily feelings of closeness and perceived coparenting support at 10 months postpartum. Standardized parameter estimates calculated using within-couple SDs are presented. N = 141 couples. Dashed lines represent paths modeled that are non-significant. * p < .05.
Study 2:
Relational Impacts of Capitalization among New Parents

Introduction

The transition to parenthood is a normative, yet stressful, life transition for many couples (Doss & Rhoades, 2017; Matthey, Barnett, Ungerer, & Waters, 2000). Although some couples fare relatively well after the birth of the first child (Holmes, Sasaki, & Hazen, 2013), many experience sudden declines in relationship satisfaction that can persist through the early parenting years (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Don & Mickelson, 2014; Keizer, Dykstra, & Poortman, 2010; Mitnick, Heyman, Slep, 2009). Within the first year postpartum, it is common for couples to experience increases in negative aspects of the relationship and decreases in positives. For example, studies have shown that, after the birth of the first child, couples fight more frequently (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007) and engage in more demand/withdraw interactions during conflicts (Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 2002). Furthermore, couples often spend less leisure time together as a pair, engage in fewer relationship maintaining behaviors, experience declines in intimacy, and report greater sexual concerns (Curran, Hazen, Jacobvitz, & Feldman, 2005; Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Schlagintweit, Bailey, & Rosen, 2016; Pacey, 2004; Sydsjö, Wadsby, Kjellberg, & Sydsjö, 2002).

Given the central role that the couple relationship plays in family functioning and its long-term implications for parenting and child well-being (Pedro, Ribeiro, & Shelton, 2012; Schulz, Pruett, Kerig, & Parke, 2010), a number of universal interventions have been developed for new parents with the goal of easing the transition and enhancing outcomes for couples’ romantic relationships, parenting, and child adjustment. Unfortunately, these programs have limited impacts on couples’ romantic relationship adjustment. A meta-analysis indicates that,
across studies, there is a small effect on couples’ communication (Cohen’s $d = .28$) and a very small impact on couples’ relationship adjustment (Cohen’s $d = .09$; Pinquart & Teubert, 2010). There are also other studies that either failed to find significant intervention effects on couples’ relationship functioning (e.g., Trillingsgaard, Baucom, Heyman, & Elklit, 2012) or found intervention effects to be significant only for high-risk parents (e.g., Petch, Halford, Creedy, & Gamble, 2012). Given that global relationship patterns likely reflect the accumulation of couples’ day-to-day interactions over time, identifying ways to promote couples’ daily relationship experiences during the transition to parenthood may help further advance intervention effects of existing programs.

**Capitalization as a Positive Relational Process**

One positive relational process that has received increasing attention within the field of relationship science is capitalization, defined as one’s effort to enhance the benefits of one’s personal good news by sharing with another person (Gable & Reis, 2010; Gable et al., 2004; Peters et al., 2018). It typically occurs between two people: “the capitalizer,” the one who shares the news with another person, and “the responder,” the one who receives the news. It consists of two primary components: (1) *capitalization attempt* – the act of sharing personal good news with another person; and (2) *perceived partner responsiveness* – the extent to which the capitalizer perceives the responder to be responsive (i.e., enthusiastic, excited and genuinely concerned about the event being shared) to the disclosure of the good news. Positive events occur more frequently than negative ones in everyday life (e.g., Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000), and sharing positive experiences with another person fosters positive social interactions, thereby strengthening the relationship between the capitalizer and the responder (Gable & Reis, 2001).
The benefits can be further enhanced when the responder reacts in a way that makes the capitalizer feel understood, validated, and cared for (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004).

Prior work has consistently found evidence of relational benefits of both the capitalization attempt and the perception of how the attempt was received by the responder across a wide range of relationships, including committed couples (see Gable & Reis, 2010; Peters et al., 2018 for reviews). In general, the mere act of sharing a positive event with another person is positively associated with feelings of closeness and intimacy (Gable et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2013; Otto, Laurenceau, Siegel, Belcher, 2015), and perceiving the partner to be responsive further enhances the relationship between the capitalizer and the responder (Donato, Pagani, Parise, Bertoni, & Iafrate, 2014; Gable et al., 2004; Gable, Gonzaga, Strachman, 2006; Gable & Reis, 2010; Lambert et al., 2013; Logan & Cobb, 2016; Otto et al., 2015). Moreover, two daily diary studies have examined daily relational impacts of capitalization among committed couples, both of which suggest a beneficial role of capitalization (Pagani et al., 2015; Otto et al., 2015). Specifically, Pagani et al. (2015) found that one’s daily feelings of intimacy were higher on days when one explicitly shared a positive event with the partner. In Otto et al. (2015), couples’ relationships were found to benefit from the mere disclosure of the positive event, and the relational benefit was greater on days when the responder was perceived to be more responsive.

Positive events present important opportunities for couples to accumulate “emotional capital” (Gottman, 1999), a construct documented to protect couples from relationship threats (Feeney & Lemay, 2012; Walsh, Neff, & Gleason, 2017). Sharing personal good news requires relatively minimal efforts, and emerging evidence suggests that individuals can be trained to react more responsively to the sharing of good news (Lambert et al., 2013; Wood, Lambert,
Brown, Fincham, & May, 2015). Thus, encouraging couples to share positive events with each other more frequently and teaching couples skills to be more responsive when partners share personal good news may be one way to potentiate couples’ daily relationship functioning during the transition to parenthood. However, it is unknown whether its relational benefits extend to first-time parents during the first year of parenthood, when the levels of ambient stress couples may be grappling with are relatively high.

**Coparenting**

When examining the relational impact of capitalization during this critical phase of the family life cycle, it is also important to consider impacts that go beyond the romantic relationship. With the birth of the first baby, a new aspect of couples’ relationships emerges, namely the coparenting relationship, defined as the extent to which parents work together as a team to fulfill their parenting responsibilities and meet the needs of their children (Feinberg, 2003). Coparenting involves issues related to parenting and caregiving and is conceptually different from the romantic aspect of the couple relationship. Empirically, it is a more proximal predictor of parenting and child outcomes (Baril, Crouter, & McHale, 2007; Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). As suggested in the ecological model of coparenting (Feinberg, 2003), it is expected to be bidirectionally linked to couples’ relationship functioning such that the couple relationship before birth sets the stage for the development of the coparenting relationship; once coparenting is established, how well couples function as a coparental team subsequently alters the trajectory of the couple relationship in the future (e.g., Don & Mickelson, 2014; Feinberg, 2003; McHale et al., 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004). Within two-parent families, this bidirectional link has been shown from one day to the next for both mothers and fathers within the first year of parenthood (Le,
Fredman, McDaniel, Laurenceau, & Feinberg, 2019) as well as longitudinally across the first three years of parenthood for mothers (Le, McDaniel, Leavitt, & Feinberg, 2016). Given the bidirectional link between the two and the important implications each has in predicting parent and child well-being (Baril et al., 2007; Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Margolin et al., 2001), it is also important to examine how capitalization may benefit the coparenting relationship for one or both members of a couple.

The Role of Sleep

There are also questions about the robustness of the effects of capitalization. For example, do the relational benefits of capitalization persist even in the face of chronic stressors, such as sleep disturbance? Given the extensive demands of childcare at this time, first-time parents often experience sleep disturbance such as sleep disruption and deprivation during the postpartum period and beyond (Insana, & Montgomery-Downs, 2013; Montgomery-Downs, Stremler, & Insan, 2013; Richter, Krämer, Tang, Montgomery-Downs, & Lemola, 2019). Lack of sleep can impair couples’ self-regulatory abilities and lead to negative mood, which can, in turn, strain their relationships. Prior work has shown daily associations between sleep and perceived couple relationship quality such that individuals report being more satisfied with their marital relationship and their interactions with the partner on days after they had slept more in the past 24 hours (Maranges & McNulty, 2017; Yorgason et al., 2016). A similar finding was also found in a sample of first-time parents within the first year postpartum such that the amount of sleep fathers had the night before are positively associated with mothers’ reported daily couple intimacy (Feinberg et al., 2019). This is consistent with findings which suggest that couples transitioning to parenthood often have little time and energy left to attend to each other’s needs and engage in mutually reinforcing joint activities to promote bonding and foster intimacy.
(Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). Thus, it is possible that, when good things happen to them, they may not have the energy to share with their partners if they are sleep-deprived. Additionally, when they do share, it is unclear whether the relational benefits of capitalization will persist into the next day. Thus, it is important to consider the role of sleep when investigating whether capitalization can be a viable intervention target for relationship maintenance/enhancement given that sleep disruption is so prevalent among new parents. Specifically, it is important to investigate the extent to which sleep is associated with couples’ likelihood of engaging in capitalization attempts and, when examining the relational benefits of capitalization, the direct impact of sleep on couples’ relationship experiences should be controlled for and the moderating effect of sleep should be explored.

**Dyadic Context**

Lastly, the interpersonal model of capitalization (InterCAP; Peters et al., 2018) highlights the interpersonal nature of this relational process. Capitalization attempts are often directed towards close others (Gable & Reis, 2010), and, as dyads in close relationships tend to “include others in the self” (Aron & Aron, 1986, p. 19), it is expected that the responder would also benefit when hearing about the good news. However, prior work has primarily focused on the capitalizer, and few studies have included both the capitalizer and the responder (e.g., Gable & Reis, 2010). Moreover, when they do, the relational benefits are rarely examined from the perspective of the responder (e.g., Donato et al., 2014). To date, only three studies have examined the relational outcomes of the responding partner, in addition to the capitalizer, and findings were inconsistent, perhaps due to different study designs (Hershenberg, Mavandadi, Baddeley, & Libet, 2016; Kashdan, Fersszidis, Farmer, Adams, & McKnight, 2013; Otto et al., 2015). In Hershenberg et al. (2016) and Kashdan et al. (2013), partners were assessed at one
point in time, and those who reported reacting more enthusiastically to their partner’s capitalization attempts reported greater relationship satisfaction. In Otto et al. (2015), partners were assessed daily for seven days, and there was no evidence indicating any relational benefits on days when one heard about the partner’s best event or when one was perceived to be responsive to the partner’s capitalization attempt. Differences in the pattern of findings may indicate that different relational processes operate at the between- versus within-person level. In sum, the relational benefits of capitalization processes have consistently been found at both the between- and within-person level for the capitalizer, yet only one study has been conducted at the within-person level for the responder. Thus, future studies should continue to include both partners, and ideally with multiple assessments, to determine whether capitalization processes also benefit the couple relationship from the perspective of the responding partner at both the between- and within-person level.

**The Current Study**

For the present study, I used a dyadic daily diary design to answer three research questions: (1) whether fluctuations in each partner’s prior-night sleep are associated with their own and their partners’ likelihood of engaging in daily capitalization attempts; (2) daily impacts of capitalization processes (i.e., capitalization attempt and perceived partner responsiveness) on couples’ relationship experiences (i.e., closeness and perceived coparenting support), controlling for each partner’s prior-night sleep; and (3) the extent to which daily fluctuations in each partner’s prior-night sleep moderate the relational impacts of capitalization processes on couples’ daily relationship experiences.

For the first question, I examined the extent to which couples’ daily capitalization attempts were predicted by daily fluctuations in each partner’s prior-night sleep. I hypothesized
that couples would be more likely to engage in capitalization attempts on days when they (H1a) and their partners (H1b) had more sleep the night before than their average day.

For the second question, daily relational impacts of (a) capitalization attempts and (b) perceived partner responsiveness were examined for closeness and perceived coparenting support, accounting for each partner’s prior-night sleep and between-person differences in capitalization. I hypothesized that, for both mothers and fathers: on days when one partner engages in the capitalization attempt (i.e., shares the most positive event with the partner), both the capitalizer (actor effect) and the responder (partner effect) would report higher levels of relationship closeness that day (H2a); and, on days when one shares, both the capitalizer (actor effect) and the responder (partner effect) would report higher levels of relationship closeness when the capitalizer perceives the partner to be more responsive than an average day (H2b). Despite its close relation with parents’ romantic relationship, it is unclear whether coparenting would benefit from capitalization in a similar manner due to its domain specificity (Feinberg, 2003). Thus, the same effects were explored for couples’ perceived coparenting support as a research question rather than a hypothesis. When the relational impacts of capitalization were significant for either closeness or perceived coparenting support, the extent to which these differed as a function of the type of the relational outcome was examined to see if the relational benefits were more salient for one over the other.

Considering the new parenting and coparenting roles couples take on and babies’ rapid development within the first year of life, it is expected that some of the positive events that parents consider to be the best of the day would be about the child and that sharing those events with the partner might yield additional effects. Thus, on days when partners engage in capitalization, I examined whether there were additional relational benefits, in addition to
perceived partner responsiveness, when the event being shared concerned the child. The cross-day lagged effects were also explored to see whether the relational impacts of capitalization on couples’ relationship experiences persisted into the next day controlling for relationship experiences on the prior day.

For the third question, I explored whether the same-day associations between (a) capitalization attempts and couples’ relationship experiences (i.e., relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support) and (b) perceived partner responsiveness and couples’ relationship experiences differed as a function of daily fluctuations in each partner’s prior-night sleep. However, I did not have a priori hypotheses as to whether these same-day associations would be attenuated or strengthened by partners’ prior-night sleep for the following reasons. On one hand, couples are more likely to desire some time alone on days when they feel more overwhelmed (Sears, Repetti, Robles, & Reynolds, 2016). Thus, on days when they had less sleep, the relational benefits of capitalization may not be as salient for them if they already feel overwhelmed by the demands of childcare due to lack of sleep. On the other hand, capitalization may be a particularly uplifting experience for couples to have on those days, resulting in more relational benefits. The same moderating effects of sleep were also explored for the cross-day lagged effects.

Lastly, potential gender differences for these effects, as well as moderation by intervention status, were formally tested.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data from a subsample of 141 co-resident heterosexual couples who participated in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Family Foundations (FF; Feinberg et al., 2016) were used
in the current study. FF is a universal, couple-based psychoeducational transition to parenthood program consisting of five prenatal and four postnatal sessions designed to help couples maintain a healthy and strong coparenting relationship after the birth of their first child. Among the full sample, a total of 265 couples from the 399 who participated in the Family Foundations RCT were randomly selected and invited to participate in a daily diary component, and both partners in 202 couples agreed to participate (Feinberg et al., 2019). The daily diary component consisted of two eight-day bursts prenatally and postnatally, respectively. Every evening, mothers and fathers were interviewed separately in a room by themselves over the phone at times that were convenient for them. Among couples who agreed to participate in the daily diary component, both partners in 141 couples provided data at the post-test assessment, when the baby was 10 months old, and were included in the current study. Within the subsample, 76 couples had been assigned to the intervention condition and 65 to the control condition. Couples in the control condition were provided with information about how to choose quality childcare in addition to prenatal services as usual. At the time of the current investigation (10 months postpartum), mothers were on average 30.30 years old ($SD = 4.18$) and fathers were on average 32.16 years old ($SD = 5.22$). Participants completed an average of 15.55 years ($SD = 1.59$) of education, and the median family income was $87,500. The majority of the couples were married (91%), and self-identified as non-Hispanic White (88%). Based on pretest data (approximately 4 months prior to birth), the only difference between couples who participated in the daily diary study versus those who did not was maternal age. Those who did not participate were, on average, one year younger than those who did participate (Feinberg et al., 2019). Among daily diary study participants, fathers and mothers who completed the postnatal daily diary portion (completers) reported one more year of education than those who dropped out postpartum (attriters). Mothers
in the completer group were also slightly older than those who dropped out. The postnatal daily diary completers and attritors did not differ with respect to annual income, ethnicity, or proportions assigned to the intervention versus the control group ($p > .18$). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Pennsylvania State University, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

**Measures**

**Capitalization.** Participants were asked to think about the most positive thing that had happened to them in the past 24 hours (or since they spoke with the interviewer the day before) and to rate the positivity of that event or situation on a five-point Likert-type scale ($1 = \text{Not at All}, 5 = \text{Extremely}$), with higher scores indicating higher levels of positivity of the event being recalled. The participant’s daily capitalization attempt was assessed with the item “Did you tell your partner about this event?” ($1 = \text{Yes}, 0 = \text{No}$). For those who answered “yes,” two follow-up questions were asked to assess (1) the perceived responsiveness of the partner (i.e., “How enthusiastic and positive was your partner's reaction?”) on a five-point Likert-type scale ($1 = \text{Not at All}, 5 = \text{Extremely}$), with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived partner responsiveness; and (2) whether the event concerned the child (i.e., “Did this positive experience or event involve your child?”; $1 = \text{Yes}, 0 = \text{No}$).

**Closeness.** Two items were used to assess partners’ daily feelings of relationship closeness (i.e., “How emotionally close did you feel to your partner today?” and “How intimate or connected did you feel to your partner today?”) on a five-point Likert-type scale ($1 = \text{Not at All}, 5 = \text{Extremely}$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of daily feelings of relationship closeness. Prior daily diary studies support the validity of using single items to assess daily feelings of romantic relationship closeness (e.g., Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005).
Repeated measures correlations (rmcorr; Bakdash & Marusich, 2017) indicated that these two items were highly correlated within individuals at the daily level for both mothers and fathers ($r_m = .70; r_w = .76$; Le et al., 2018). Thus, a composite daily closeness score were used for mothers and fathers, respectively, by averaging the scores of these two items.

**Coparenting support.** A single item was used to assess the perception of daily perceived coparenting support from the partner (i.e., “In the past 24 hours, how much did your partner support you as a parent?”) on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = Not at All, 4 = A Lot). Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived coparenting support from the partner.

**Sleep.** Parents were asked to respond to the question “Since this time yesterday, how many hours of sleep did you get last night?” in hours and minutes and later converted to the unit in hours.

**Statistical Analyses**

For the examination of the associations between each partner’s daily fluctuations in prior-night sleep on both partners’ daily capitalization attempts (yes/no response), a multilevel logistic regression was conducted using PROC GLIMMIX in SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute, 2013). As depicted in Figure 2, each partner’s prior-day hours of sleep was centered within person before being entered into the model. The corresponding coefficients represent the average within-person actor and partner effects. The exponentiated value of these coefficients can be interpreted as the odds ratio of the likelihood of one’s daily capitalization attempts, or, in other words, the change in odds in the multiplicative scale when either partner slept one more hour the night before relative to their average day, holding other predictors constant. The moderating effects of intervention were directly examined by testing the interactions between one’s own or the partner’s, sleep and intervention status (0 = control, 1 = intervention). The effect of day was
included as a control variable. A two-intercept model was run in which random intercepts were modeled for mothers and fathers, respectively, as well as the covariance between these two random effects to account for the interdependence within dyad. An interaction model was followed to formally test the gender differences by creating two-way interaction terms between one’s own, or the partner’s, sleep and gender as well as three-way interaction terms between one’s own, or the partner’s, sleep, intervention status, and gender.

For the examination of the same-day and cross-day relational impacts of capitalization and the moderating effects of fluctuations in both partners’ prior-night sleep, multilevel models were run using multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). The total variances of the outcome variables were latently split at the between- and within-person levels. As depicted in Figure 3, daily impacts of capitalization attempts (H2a) and perceived partner responsiveness (H2b) were examined accounting for the positivity of the positive event, daily fluctuations in both partners’ prior-night sleep, and between-person variability in each partner’s daily sleep and capitalization. Additional actor and partner effects for when the positive event being shared concerned the child was examined, accounting for the effects of perceived partner responsiveness. For capitalization to occur, the event could not be experienced with the partner when it took place. Thus, all data pertaining to positive events experienced by both partners were excluded from the analyses. Capitalization attempts were modeled in a separate model from the perceived partner responsiveness because data are contingent upon one’s first engaging in the capitalization attempt (i.e., sharing the best event of the day with the partner). Interdependence within dyad was accounted for by modeling random intercepts for mothers’ and fathers’ closeness and perceived coparenting support and the covariances among these at both within and between levels.
The between-person effects of capitalization were estimated by entering the grand-mean centered person averages of capitalization attempts and perceived partner responsiveness across the 8 days into the model. The corresponding coefficients can be interpreted as the extent to which individuals differ in their average levels of daily relationship experiences among those who, on average, engage in daily capitalization more often than others (or who, on average, perceive their partner to be more responsive to their capitalization attempts relative to others). At the within-person level, capitalization attempts and child-relevancy of the best event were retained as binary predictors (0 = No; 1 = Yes) in the model for ease of interpretation. That is, the coefficients for capitalization attempts can be interpreted as the average within-person actor and partner effects on days when one shares the best event of the day in comparison to days when the best event was not shared. Similarly, the coefficients for child-relevancy can be interpreted as the average within-person actor and partner effects on days when the event shared concerns the child in comparison to days when the event shared does not concern the child. Daily perceived partner responsiveness on days when one shared was centered within person so that the corresponding coefficients can be interpreted as the average within-person actor and partner effects when one’s partner is perceived to be more or less responsive than an average day. Intervention status was initially explored as a moderator of these within-person effects but was not significant; thus, it was only modeled as a control in the final models. The effect of day was also included as a control variable. Gender differences in the effects of interest were directly tested by conducting likelihood ratio tests comparing models when effects were constrained to be the same across men and women versus freely estimated. The strength of the relational impacts of capitalization on closeness and perceived coparenting support when either
one was significant was also directly compared using the likelihood ratio tests. Effects remained constrained when the more parsimonious model did not degrade significantly.

Additionally, as depicted in Figure 4, the cross-day lagged effects of prior-day capitalization on couples’ subsequent day relationship experiences were explored, accounting for the influences of prior-day closeness and perceived coparenting support by including within-person and cross-partner lagged effects within closeness and coparenting as well as across the two relational outcomes.

Lastly, the moderating effects of daily fluctuations in each partner’s prior-night sleep on the same-day relational impacts of one’s own and the partner’s (3a) daily capitalization attempt and (3b) perceived partner responsiveness (i.e., paths a-h in Figure 3) were explored by entering the corresponding interaction terms. For example, the coefficient of the interaction term between mothers’ capitalization attempts and mothers’ within-person fluctuation in prior-night sleep represents the extent to which the effects of mothers’ capitalization attempts on mothers’ relationship experiences differ as a function of the amount sleep mothers had the night before compared to their average day. The moderating effects of sleep on the cross-day lagged effects of capitalization (i.e., path i-p in Figure 4) were examined in a similar manner. Significant interactions were probed at low (one within-person standard deviation below the mean) and high (one within-person standard deviation above mean) levels of prior-night sleep.

**Results**

The means, within- and between-person standard deviations (SD), and intraclass correlations (proportion of between-person variance) for all study variables are presented in Table 2. Intra- and interindividual associations among study variables assessed with repeated measures correlations (rmcorr; Bakdash & Marusich, 2017) are displayed in Table 3.
Fluctuations in Prior-Night Sleep Predicting Daily Capitalization Attempt

Unstandardized estimates of the fixed effects in the two-intercept model are presented in Table 4. For both mothers and fathers, there were no significant actor (Hypothesis 1a) or partner effects (Hypothesis 1b) from fluctuations in new parents’ prior-night sleep to daily capitalization attempts. That is, on days when couples had fewer or more hours of sleep than their average day the night before, there was no evidence indicating any difference in the likelihood of their or their partners’ sharing the most positive event with each other that day. There was no evidence of moderation by intervention status. Moreover, as suggested by the results from the interaction model, there was no indication of gender differences in actor effects ($p = .38$), partner effects ($p = .09$), or moderation by intervention status for actor effects ($p = .07$) or partner effects ($p = .59$).

Daily Relational Impacts of Capitalization

**Capitalization attempt.** Unstandardized estimates of the fixed effects are presented in Table 5 for the same-day effects model and in Table 6 for the cross-day lagged effects model. The results of the same-day effects model are also presented in Figure 5 in standardized units (calculated using the within-person $SD$s reported in Table 2). At the between-person level, for both mothers and fathers, there were positive and significant associations between capitalization attempts and daily relationship experiences such that those who shared more often than others, in general, reported higher levels of daily closeness and perceived coparenting support, with no indication of gender differences ($\Delta \chi^2(2) = 3.23, p = .20$). Moreover, the effects were statistically stronger for closeness than perceived coparenting support ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 4.03, p = .045$).

At the within-person level, there was a significant and positive same-day within-person actor effect from mothers’ daily capitalization attempts to mothers’ daily closeness, controlling for the positivity of the event and the effects of both partners’ sleep on the prior night. That is,
on days when mothers shared the most positive event of the day with their partners, they also reported higher levels of closeness that day. The same effect was not found for fathers, with a significant $\chi^2$ difference test confirming this gender difference ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 4.70, p = .03$). There were also three positive and significant same-day within-person partner effects. For both mothers and fathers, one’s daily capitalization attempts predicted higher levels of the partner’s daily closeness, with no indication of a gender difference ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = .56, p = .46$). Fathers’ daily capitalization attempts also predicted higher levels of mothers’ perceived coparenting support that day. The same partner effect was not found from mothers’ capitalization attempt to fathers’ perceived coparenting support, with a significant $\chi^2$ difference test confirming the gender difference ($\Delta \chi^2(x) = 5.12, p = .02$). The three within-person partner effects did not differ from one another ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 1.10, p = .30$) and were statistically weaker than the significant within-person actor effects for mothers ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 6.54, p = .01$).

As presented in Table 6, after controlling for the effects of both partners’ prior-night sleep, between-person differences in daily capitalization attempts, and both partners’ prior-day closeness and perceived coparenting support, there was no evidence indicating any significant cross-day lagged effects of prior-day capitalization attempts on one’s own or the partner’s relational experiences the next day.

**Perceived partner responsiveness.** Unstandardized estimates of the fixed effects are presented in Table 7 for the same-day effects model and in Table 8 for the cross-day lagged effects model. The results of the same-day effects model are also presented in Figure 6 in standardized units. At the between-person level, for both mothers and fathers, there were positive and significant actor effects between perceived partner responsiveness and daily relational experiences such that those who, on average, perceived their partners to be more
responsive to their capitalization attempts reported higher levels of daily closeness and perceived coparenting support. There was no indication of gender differences for daily closeness ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 1.51, p = .22$) or coparenting support ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = .11, p = .74$), nor were there statistically significant differences across different relational outcomes ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 3.75, p = .053$). There was also a positive and significant partner effect from mothers’ perceived partner responsiveness to fathers’ daily closeness. That is, fathers reported higher levels of daily closeness if their partners, on average, perceived them to be more responsive to their daily capitalization attempts. The same effect was not found from fathers to mothers, with evidence of a gender difference ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 7.41, p = .007$). Moreover, the same effect was not found for either mothers’ ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 17.15, p < .001$) or fathers’ perceived daily coparenting support ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 5.59, p = .018$).

At the within-person level, there were positive and significant same-day actor effects for both mothers and fathers from perceived partner responsiveness to both perceived closeness and coparenting support, after controlling for the positivity of the event, the effects of both partners’ prior-night sleep, and between-person differences in perceived partner responsiveness. That is, couples reported higher levels of closeness and perceived coparenting support on days when they perceived their partners to be more responsive to their capitalization attempt than an average day. The effects did not differ by gender for closeness ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = .20, p = .66$) or perceived coparenting support ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 1.75, p = .19$), nor did it differ as a function of different relational outcomes (closeness versus perceived coparenting support; $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 1.25, p = .26$). For both mothers and fathers, there was no evidence of significant partner effects for closeness or perceived coparenting support.

As presented in Table 8, lagged effects of each partner’s prior-day perceived partner responsiveness on both partners’ daily closeness and perceived coparenting support were
examined, controlling for the effects of both partners’ prior day sleep, between-person differences in perceived partner responsiveness, and both partners’ prior-day perceived closeness and coparenting support. A significant, negative cross-day within-person lagged effect emerged from mothers’ prior-day perceived partner responsiveness to mothers’ next-day closeness. On days when mothers perceived their partners to be more responsive to their capitalization attempt than an average day, they reported lower levels of closeness the next day. There was no evidence of any other cross-day lagged actor or partner effects for daily closeness or perceived coparenting support.

Child Relevance of the Event. After controlling for the effects of both partners’ prior-night sleep and within-person fluctuations and between-person differences in daily perceived partner responsiveness, there was evidence indicating additional relational benefits when the event being shared concerned the child. There were three positive and significant partner effects ($b_s = .09, p_s = .004$). First, there was a significant partner effect on fathers’ daily closeness such that, on days when the positive event mothers shared concerned the child, fathers reported significantly higher levels of daily closeness. The same effect was not found for mothers, with a significant $\chi^2$ difference test confirming the gender difference ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 4.64, p = .03$). Positive and significant partner effects were also found for both mothers’ and fathers’ daily perceived coparenting support with no indication of a gender difference ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = .06, p = .81$). That is, on days when the positive event partners shared concerned the child, the other partner reported perceiving significantly greater levels of coparenting support that day. These partner effects did not differ as a function of relational outcome (perceived closeness versus coparenting support; $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 2.27, p = .13$).

The Moderating Effects of Daily Fluctuations in Prior-Night Sleep
Among all the interactions explored, two significant interactions emerged, indicating moderating effects of fathers’ prior-night sleep. First, the interaction between fluctuations in fathers’ prior-night sleep and fathers’ daily capitalization attempt negatively and significantly predicted mothers’ daily closeness ($b = -0.095, p = 0.03$). Post hoc probing at low (one within-person $SD$ below the mean) and high (one within-person $SD$ above the mean) levels of fathers’ prior-day sleep indicated that, on days when fathers had lower than average levels of sleep the night before, there was significant relational benefits on mothers’ daily closeness when fathers shared the most positive event that day ($b = 0.236, p = 0.003$). This association was not significant when fathers had higher than average levels of sleep on the prior-day ($b = 0.042, p = 0.608$).

Second, the interaction between fluctuations in fathers’ prior-night sleep and mothers’ prior-day perceived partner responsiveness negatively and significantly predicted mothers’ daily perceived coparenting support ($b = -0.06, p = 0.02$). Post hoc probing at low versus high levels of fathers’ prior-day sleep indicated that the effect of mothers’ prior-day perceived partner responsiveness on mothers’ perceived coparenting support was positive at low levels of fathers’ prior-day sleep ($b = 0.06, p = 0.21$) and negative at high levels ($b = -0.05, p = 0.24$). However, neither slope was significantly different from zero. Thus, I can only conclude that this lagged effect differed as a function of husbands’ prior-night sleep.

**Discussion**

The goal of the current study was to examine the daily relational benefits of capitalization processes in a dyadic context for first-time parents during the first year postpartum. The role of both partners’ prior-night sleep were taken into account by (1) examining the extent to which either partner’s prior-night sleep predicted the likelihood of one’s daily capitalization attempts, (2) accounting for the effects of both partner’s prior-night sleep on couples’ daily relational
experiences, and (3) examining the moderating effects of each partner’s prior-night sleep on the daily relational impacts of capitalization. I also examined potential gender differences in these associations and the extent to which these associations differ as a function of relational outcome.

There was no evidence that the likelihood of one’s engaging in daily capitalization attempts would be associated with the amount of sleep the individual or the partner had the night before. However, consistent with hypotheses, I did find evidence of daily relational benefits for both mothers and fathers on days when they or their partners shared the best event of the day. Although not hypothesized, I also observed gender differences in the relational benefits of capitalization attempts and differences with respect to relational outcomes. Specifically, mothers, but not fathers, reported higher levels of daily closeness on days when they engaged in capitalization attempts; and on days when mothers shared, fathers reported higher levels of daily closeness but not perceived coparenting support; and on days when fathers shared, mothers reported higher levels of daily closeness and perceived coparenting support. In addition, as hypothesized, mothers’ and fathers’ reported greater daily closeness and perceived coparenting support on days when they perceived their partners to be more responsive to their capitalization attempts than an average day. When the shared event concerned the child, both mothers and fathers reported greater daily perceived coparenting support and fathers also reported greater daily closeness. There was no evidence of cross-day lagged effects except for one: mothers’ prior-day perceived partner responsiveness was negatively associated with their subsequent day closeness. Lastly, fathers’ prior-night sleep moderated the links between mothers’ relationship experiences and their own and the partner’s daily capitalization. Taken together, these findings add to the literature by demonstrating that daily relational benefits of capitalization processes (a) exist in a sample of first-time parents within the first year after birth, (b) extend beyond the
romantic aspect of couples’ relationship, and (c) hold in the face of potential impacts of both partners’ prior-night sleep.

**The Role of Sleep in Predicting Capitalization Attempts**

Prior work examining the relational benefits of capitalization in interpersonal contexts has rarely examined factors that may lead to one’s engaging in capitalization in the first place. According to the InterCAP (Peters et al., 2018), it is expected that both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors contribute to the likelihood of one’s engaging in capitalization as well as one’s reaction when others share their own personal good news. To date, the only study that has examined capitalization attempts as an outcome was in the context of peer relationships (Altermatt, 2017). Specifically, in a sample of third- through seventh-grade students, it was found that students who perceived their peers to be more responsive when they shared academic success were more willing to share their future academic success with their peers. Indeed, there is much to be learned about factors that may contribute to ways in which the capitalization process unfolds in different relational contexts. In the current study, among committed couples during their first year postpartum, there was no evidence indicating either partner’s prior-night sleep predicted their engaging in sharing the following day. Given that it is not a function of how much either partner slept the night before, our findings support the notion that sharing personal good news may require relatively minimal effort. Thus, for first-time parents transitioning to parenthood, when the physical demands of childcare are relatively high, encouraging couples to share more often may be a viable intervention target.

**Replicating the Relational Benefits of Capitalization among New Parents**

Consistent with prior work on capitalization among couples in stable and committed relationships (i.e., not college students in dating relationships; Donato et al., 2014; Gable et al.,
2004; Logan et al., 2016), I found that, on average, couples who shared more often or perceived their partners to be more responsive reported higher levels of daily closeness. That is, couples who share more often or who, on average, are more responsive to their spouses’ capitalization attempts are more likely to have accumulated “emotional capital” over time, which is then reflected in the way they interact as romantic partners at the daily level.

At the within-person level, I found evidence suggesting daily relational benefits of capitalization for both mothers and fathers depending on different capitalization components, parent gender and different relational outcome. First, on days when one shared the most positive event of the day with the partner, mothers, but not fathers, reported higher levels of daily closeness. Given that women, compared to men, seek social support more often (Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002), it could be that the mere act of sharing is more relationally gratifying for women than men. Second, on days when one’s partner shared, both mothers and fathers reported higher levels of daily closeness. This is consistent with the idea that sharing positive experiences fosters positive interactions which, in turn, strengthen the relation between the capitalizer and the responder. Third, consistent with prior work among committed couples (e.g., Otto et al., 2015), there was evidence that, for both mothers and fathers, they reported greater relational experiences on days when they perceived their partners to be more responsive to their capitalization attempts.

There were also certain inconsistencies between findings from the current study and those from prior daily diary studies of the impact of capitalization among committed couples. Prior studies have either demonstrated the relational benefits only for the capitalizers but not the responders (Otto et al., 2015) or that the relational benefits were only found when capitalization attempts were communicated explicitly (Pagani et al., 2015). Differences in the pattern of
findings across studies may be attributable to differences in sample characteristics. For instance, couples in the current study and Otto et al. (2015) were coping with significant stressors (i.e., transition to parenthood and breast cancer), whereas couples in Pagani et al. (2015) were not. Across the three studies, relational benefits of the mere act of sharing among committed couples may be more salient among those under stress. The nature of the stressor may also account for the different patterns of findings in this study compared to Otto et al. (2015). Due to the nature of breast cancer, the effect of gender and patient status were confounded in Otto et al. (2015), which may be the reason of the lack of gender difference observed in their study. Overall, evidences suggest that, for committed couples, capitalization has the potential to boost their daily relational experiences, although the specific process may unfold differently depending on whether couples are under stress or not and the nature of the stressor.

**Extending the Relational Benefits of Capitalization to the Coparenting Domain**

This is the first study to directly examine the link between capitalization and the coparenting aspect of the couple relationship. Overall, findings suggest that the relational benefits of capitalization spill over to the coparenting domain. At the between-person level, similar linkages were found between capitalization attempts and partners’ daily perceived coparenting support as well as between perceived partner responsiveness and partners’ daily perceived coparenting support. This is consistent with existing work documenting a close relation between the couple relationship and coparenting (e.g., Le et al., 2016; Le et al., 2019). That is, the “emotional capital” accumulated over time not only shape the way couples interact as romantic partners, but also how they coparent on a daily basis. Although there was an association between capitalization attempts and both relational domains, the strength of the association was stronger for daily closeness than perceived coparenting support. This could be
an indication that the cumulative benefits of capitalization attempts becomes less pronounced as it spills over to other relational domains. This is in line with the conceptualization of coparenting being a unique aspect of the couple relationship that is related to but distinct from the romantic aspect (Feinberg, 2003).

At the within person level, it was found that, on days when fathers shared the most positive event with their partners, mothers reported perceiving greater levels of coparenting support that day. The same effect was not observed from mothers to fathers. No prior work has examined the daily impact of capitalization attempts on either partner’s coparenting functioning. However, it has been shown that, when good things happen, men are less likely to capitalize than women (Palmer, Ramsey, Morey, & Gentzler, 2016). Thus, it may be that, on days when fathers share, it is interpreted by their female partners as their being more relationally involved, leading to mothers’ feeling more supported as a coparent. Given the contemporaneous associations between couples’ relationship and coparenting at the daily level (McDaniel et al., 2018), it is also plausible that mothers feel more supported because they experience greater closeness in their romantic relationship that day when fathers share. This may also explain the additional benefits of perceived partner responsiveness found on both partners’ daily perceived coparenting support. That is, similar to couples’ daily closeness, for both mothers and fathers, on days when they share, they reported perceiving greater levels of coparenting support if they perceive the partner reacting in a more responsive manner. It is worth noting that these findings are all based on one’s own self-report. Thus, these associations across different relational constructs could also be due in part to reporter biases as a result of individuals’ daily affect.

On days when the event the partner shared concerned the child, mothers and fathers both reported greater levels of perceived coparenting support and fathers also reported greater levels
of daily closeness. The same effect was not found for mothers’ daily closeness. Coparenting deals with specific domains of couple’s relationship involving caregiving and parenting (Feinberg, 2003). Thus, it could be that partners’ sharing exciting moments about the child such as the infant’s making the first sound or the baby’s taking a step are perceived as a way of supporting their new parenting role. Sharing these moments also seem to potentiate fathers’ daily closeness, but not mothers. Within the first year after birth, mothers tend to assume the primary caregiving responsivities and are frequently seen as the gatekeepers to fathers’ involvement (e.g., Kotila, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Kamp Dush, 2013). Relatedly, studies have also shown that fathers report experiencing emotional distance from their partners during this period of time, as mothers’ focus of attention shifts from her spouse to the child (Ahlborg & Strandmark, 2001). Thus, mothers’ sharing things about the child may be particularly meaningful for fathers during this transitional period and serve as a way to foster emotional closeness for fathers.

**Exploratory Findings of Lagged Effects and Moderating Effects of Prior-Night Sleep**

I also explored whether the relational benefits of capitalization persist into the next day and the extent to which partners’ prior-night sleep moderates the relational impacts. Overall, relational benefits did not seem to persist into the next day. There was only one significant cross-day lagged effect: mothers’ daily closeness was lower on days when they perceived the partner to be more responsiveness to their capitalization attempts the day before. This iatrogenic effect of perceived partner responsiveness was contrary to my expectation. Replications with other samples and further investigations are warranted. My post hoc interpretation is that mothers may have raised their expectations following the positive experiences and are thus comparing to a higher standard the following day.
Overall, the relational impacts of capitalization did not seem to differ as a function of either partner’s prior-night sleep, with two exceptions suggesting moderating effects of fathers’ prior-night sleep. First, post hoc probing suggest that the relational benefits of fathers’ capitalization attempts on mothers’ daily closeness was only evident when fathers had lower levels of sleep than their average day. This suggests that the relational benefits may be particularly salient for mothers on days when fathers did not rest well the night before. Fathers are likely less involved in their parenting and coparenting roles on those days, which may contribute to mothers’ feeling less loved and supported. Engaging in capitalization may mitigate the potential relational impacts on mothers on those days. Second, despite the significant moderating effect of fathers’ prior-night sleep on the link between mothers’ prior-day perceived partner responsiveness and mothers’ next-day perceived coparenting support, post hoc probing did not suggest any significant relational impact to persist into the next day. Given the exploratory nature of these effects and the overall lack of findings, my interpretation should be viewed with caution and future studies should try to replicated these findings.

**Clinical Implications**

The transition to parenthood is a challenging developmental period for many couples (Doss & Rhoades, 2017). Despite the positive intervention effects of existing transition to parenthood programs on parenting and child outcomes, the impacts of these programs on couples’ relationship functioning remain limited (Pedro et al., 2012; Pinquart & Teubert, 2010; Schulz et al., 2010). Moreover, for intervention programs that have yielded positive effects on couples’ global relationship functioning and coparenting, these effects does not seem to be reflected in couples’ everyday experiences (Feinberg et al., 2016; Le et al., 2019). Findings in the current study shed light on the potential of capitalization serving as a low cost, high yield
intervention target to boost daily relational experiences for first-time parents. For example, it may be valuable to educate couples about the relational benefits of the capitalization process. Moreover, in light of the relational benefits of capitalization attempts, encouraging couples to share more often with each other when good things happen, especially when it involves the child, may help boost couples’ daily relational experiences. Prior work suggests that individuals can be taught to react to the partner’s capitalization attempts in a more responsive manner (Conoley, Vasquez, Bello, Oromendia, & Jeske, 2015; Wood et al., 2015). Thus, given the additional benefits of perceived partner responsiveness, another way to potentiate couples’ daily relational experiences may be to teach couples skills to be especially responsive when the other partner capitalizes.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a number of limitations of the current study. First, the majority of the couples in the current sample were non-Hispanic White and relatively well-educated. Couples’ relationship functioning was also relatively high, despite the variability with respect to their risk characteristics and socioeconomic status. Future studies should include more diverse samples to further determine the extent to which the relational benefits of capitalization are generalizable to new parents who are at higher risk and ethnically more diverse. Second, with respect to measurement, this study relied on mothers’ and fathers’ self-report data and are, thus, subject to reporter bias. Utilizing reports from both partners on their own behavior (e.g., both mothers and fathers report on their own support provision) may be one way to attenuate shared method variance resulting from the same reporter in future studies. Moreover, daily coparenting support was assessed with a single item ranging from 1 to 4, which may result in a restricted range. We were also not able to examine the reliability of our measurement of couples’ daily coparenting
due to the use of a single item. Future studies may benefit from using measures of daily coparenting that consists of multiple items with a wider scale range (e.g., 1-7), such as the *Daily Coparenting Scale* (McDaniel et al., 2017) that was recently developed and validated with parents of young children.

Prior study found the association between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction to be weaker among couples who have been in the relationship for a longer period of time (Logan & Cobb, 2016). Thus, future studies should examine whether capitalization would be a viable intervention target to enhance and/or maintain couples’ relationship functioning across other critical developmental stages of the family life cycle, such as when the first child transitions to toddlerhood or adolescence or when the family is expecting a second child. Future studies should also examine other individual, relational, or contextual factors that may influence the likelihood of couples’ engaging in capitalization to better substantiate the possibility of using capitalization to potentiate the daily relational functioning of couples with children at different developmental stages.

**Conclusion**

The current study adds to the couples and the transition to parenthood literature by demonstrating the relational benefits of capitalization for first-time parents within the first year postpartum, when the experience of sleep disturbance is often prevalent. The amount of sleep is not associated with one’s likelihood of engaging in capitalization. Couples who share more often and are more responsive to capitalization attempts, on average, reported higher levels of daily closeness and perceived coparenting support. On days when capitalization occurs, mothers and fathers reported better relational experiences. The relational experiences are further enhanced when partners are responsive to the capitalization attempts or when the event shared
concerned the child. Taken together, these findings suggest that potentiating capitalization processes among couples transitioning to parenthood may be a viable intervention target to consider, as it has the potential to serve as a low cost high, yield strategy that couples can implement on a daily basis.
References


Effects on coparenting, parenting, family violence, and parent and child adjustment.


Table 2.
*Means, Standard Deviations (SD), and Intraclass Correlations (ICCs) for Study Variables*

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Table 3.

*Correlations among Mothers’ and Fathers’ Study Variables*

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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mother’s PPR</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Father’s PPR</td>
<td>.17***</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, + = .05. PCS = Perceived coparenting support. CA = Capitalization attempt. PPR = Perceived partner responsiveness. Correlations between one’s CA and one’s PPR cannot be generated given that PPR is contingent upon one’s first engaging in a CA.
Table 4.
**Multilevel Logistic Model Predicting Daily Capitalization Attempts from One’s Own and the Partner’s Within-person Fluctuations in Prior-night Sleep**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed effects</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
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<th>Fathers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>.94***</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Status</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-night sleep X Intervention Status</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-night sleep X Intervention Status</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05. Intervention Status is coded 0 = control and 1 = intervention.*
Table 5.
Multilevel Model Predicting Daily Closeness and Perceived Coparenting Support from One’s Own and the Partner’s Daily Capitalization Attempt (CA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed effects (within)</th>
<th>Closeness</th>
<th>Perceived Coparenting Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>.022</td>
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<td>Positivity of the event</td>
<td>.084**</td>
<td>.029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.075**</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s daily CA</td>
<td>.265***</td>
<td>.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s daily CA</td>
<td>.147***</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fixed effects (between)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Status</td>
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<td>.111</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor’s average sleep/day</td>
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<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s average sleep/day</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>.075</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor’s average CA/day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner’s average CA/day</td>
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<td>.123</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05. Actors’ and partners’ prior-night sleep were person-mean-centered. Actors’ and partners’ average sleep/day and CA/day were grand-mean-centered person averages. Capitalization attempt (CA) was coded 0 = No and 1 = Yes.
Table 6.
Multilevel Model Predicting Daily Closeness and Perceived Coparenting Supporting from One’s Own and the Partner’s Prior-day Capitalization Attempt (CA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed effects (within)</th>
<th>Mothers Closeness</th>
<th>Fathers Closeness</th>
<th>Mothers Perceived Coparenting Support</th>
<th>Fathers Perceived Coparenting Support</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Estimate</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-day closeness</td>
<td>.253***</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.241**</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-day closeness</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-day coparenting</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.173*</td>
<td>.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-day coparenting</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.114*</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.064*</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-day CA</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-day CA</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Fixed effects (between)             |                |                   |                      |                      |
| Intervention Status                 | -.100          | .092             | -.083                | .079                |
| Actor’s average sleep/day           | -.041          | .064             | -.145                | .060                |
| Partner’s average sleep/day         | .020           | .065             | -.006                | .043                |
| Actor’s average CA/day              | .754***        | .200             | .480**               | .140                |
| Partner’s average CA/day            | .163           | .178             | .331*                | .150                |

Note. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05. Actors’ and partners’ prior-night sleep were person-mean-centered. Actors’ and partners’ average sleep/day and CA/day were grand-mean-centered person averages. Capitalization attempt (CA) was coded 0 = No and 1 = Yes.
Table 7.
Multilevel Model Predicting Daily Closeness and Perceived Coparenting Supporting from One’s Own and the Partner’s Daily Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed effects (within)</th>
<th>Mothers Closeness</th>
<th>Fathers Closeness</th>
<th>Perceived Coparenting Support Mothers</th>
<th>Perceived Coparenting Support Fathers</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
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<td>Estimate</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>.045**</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positivity of the event</td>
<td>.103**</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-night sleep</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s daily PPR</td>
<td>.079***</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.079***</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s daily PPR</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.015</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Fixed effects (between)</th>
<th>Mothers Closeness</th>
<th>Fathers Closeness</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Status</td>
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<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s average sleep/day</td>
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<td>.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s average sleep/day</td>
<td>-.058</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s average PPR/day</td>
<td>.141**</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s average PPR/day</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05. Actors’ and partners’ prior-night sleep and daily PPR were person-mean-centered. Actors’ and partners’ average sleep/day and PPR/day were grand-mean-centered person averages.
Table 8.
*Multilevel Model Predicting Daily Closeness and Perceived Coparenting Supporting from One’s Own and the Partner’s Prior-day Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed effects (within)</th>
<th>Mothers Closeness</th>
<th>Fathers Closeness</th>
<th>Perceived Coparenting Support Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.101</td>
<td>.319***</td>
<td>.068</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-day closeness</td>
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<td>.075</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
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<td>Actor’s prior-day coparenting</td>
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<td>.114</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.131</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-day coparenting</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.222+</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-night sleep</td>
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<td>.051</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>.045</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner’s prior-night sleep</td>
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<td>.042</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.043</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor’s prior-day PPR</td>
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<td>.061</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>.062</td>
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<td>Partner’s prior-day PPR</td>
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<td>.059</td>
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<table>
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<td>.109</td>
<td>.128</td>
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<td>-.076</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor’s average sleep/day</td>
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<td>.097</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s average sleep/day</td>
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<td>.070</td>
<td>-.205*</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.063</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor’s average PPR/day</td>
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<td>.101</td>
<td>.232*</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.072</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s average PPR/day</td>
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<td>.103</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.060</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, + p = .05. Actors’ and partners’ prior-night sleep and PPR were person-mean-centered. Actors’ and partners’ average sleep/day and PPR/day were grand-mean-centered person averages.*
Figure 2. Conceptual model of the extent to which daily fluctuations in prior-night sleep predict one’s own and the partner’s subsequent day engagement in capitalization attempts at 10 months postpartum.
Figure 3. Conceptual model of daily relational impacts of capitalization on closeness and perceived coparenting support at 10 months postpartum, accounting for influences of daily fluctuations in prior-night sleep and between-person differences in the average level of daily capitalization and sleep. The positivity of the positive event, the effect of day and intervention status as well as the covariances among outcome variables at both levels were also included in the model but not depicted for simplicity of presentation. Individuals’ capitalization attempts and perceived partner responsiveness on days when one shares were modeled as predictors in separate models.
Figure 4. Conceptual model of cross-day lagged associations between prior-day capitalization and subsequent day closeness and perceived coparenting support at 10 months postpartum, accounting for influences of prior-night sleep, closeness and perceived coparenting support. The effect of intervention status as well as the covariances among outcome variables at both levels were also included in the model but not depicted for simplicity of presentation. Individuals’ capitalization attempts and perceived partner responsiveness on days when one shares were modeled as predictors in separate models.
Figure 5. Daily relational impacts of capitalization attempts on closeness and perceived coparenting support at 10 months postpartum, accounting for influences of daily fluctuations in prior-night sleep and between-person differences in the average level of daily capitalization attempts and sleep. Standardized parameter estimates calculated using within-person SDs are presented. Nonsignificant paths are not presented. The effect of intervention status as well as the covariances among outcome variables at both levels were also included in the model but not depicted for simplicity of presentation. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * < .05.
Figure 6. Daily relational impacts of perceived partner responsiveness on closeness and perceived coparenting support at 10 months postpartum, accounting for influences of daily fluctuations in prior-night sleep and between-person differences in the average level of daily perceived partner responsiveness and sleep. Standardized parameter estimates calculated using within-person SDs are presented. Nonsignificant paths are not presented. The effect of intervention status as well as the covariances among outcome variables at both levels were also included in the model but not depicted for simplicity of presentation. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 

Mothers’ Average Sleep, Mothers’ Average Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Fathers’ Average Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Fathers’ Average Sleep, Mothers’ Daily Sleep, Mothers’ Daily Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Fathers’ Daily Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Fathers’ Daily Sleep.
General Discussion

This dissertation examined the daily relational experiences of couples within the first year of parenthood, with a focus on couples’ closeness and perceived coparenting support as the relational outcomes. The primary aims of the current dissertation were to: (1) examine cross-day associations between couple closeness and perceived coparenting support within and across partners, and (2) examine the effects of capitalization on couples’ daily closeness and perceived coparenting support in the context of parental sleep. The contribution of this dissertation to the existing transition to parenthood literature includes demonstrating (1) cross-day bidirectional links between daily relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support within mothers and fathers, (2) cross-day reciprocity in perceived coparenting support from mothers to fathers, and (3) positive links between capitalization and relational experiences (i.e., relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support) on a daily basis for both mothers and fathers. It also suggests potential intervention targets for new parents during this potentially challenging family developmental period.

The Interplay between New Parents’ Daily Closeness and Perceived Coparenting Support

In Study 1, I examined the daily bidirectional associations between couples’ relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support among new parents within the first year postpartum. For both mothers and fathers, there was evidence suggesting a bidirectional link between couple closeness and perceived coparenting support at the daily level. That is, on days when new parents feel closer to their partners, they tend to perceive their partners as more supportive of them as coparents the next day. Similarly, on days when new parents perceive their partners to be more supportive in the coparenting role, they tend to feel more connected to their partners the next day. This daily bidirectional link indicates a virtuous cycle whereby the romantic aspect of
couples’ relationship and the emerging coparenting relationship mutually influence each other within the first year postpartum.

This finding is consistent with the Ecological Model of Coparenting, in which coparenting is theorized to be bidirectionally linked to the overall relationship between the two parents (Feinberg, 2003). Prior work that has directly examined this bidirectional link among two-parent families during the early parenting years was conducted across longer time intervals, such as months and years (Le et al., 2016; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). In both studies, couples’ marital love and behaviors as well as coparenting were assessed at 6 months postpartum and not again until 3 years after birth. Given the amount of time elapsed between the two assessments, the relational patterns observed in these two studies likely represent the accumulative impacts of the ebbs and flows in couples’ everyday lives over time rather than a direct reflection of couples’ day-to-day interactions. To date, there is only one prior study that has examined coparenting on a daily basis among two-parent families (McDaniel et al., 2018). Contemporaneous associations between daily fluctuations in couples’ relationship feelings and coparenting were demonstrated both within and across partners. This dissertation’s Study 1 is the first attempt to discern the directionality between couples’ daily relationship feelings and coparenting at the daily level and in new parents specifically. Le et al. (2016) demonstrated a bidirectional link for mothers from 6 months to 3 years but not for fathers, suggesting that, over longer period of time, the cumulative impacts of coparenting is only present for mothers. In contrast, in Study 1, I found evidence supporting this bidirectional link for both mothers and fathers at the daily level within the first year postpartum. This finding suggests that the experience of coparenting may be of equal importance for both mothers and fathers when they are both still adapting to their new roles as parents.
In Study 1, I also found evidence of an indirect path from mothers’ perceived coparenting support to fathers’ relationship closeness through fathers’ perceived coparenting support. That is, on days when mothers perceive their partners to be more supportive of them in their parenting role, fathers tend to perceive greater coparenting support from their partners on the subsequent day, which, in turn, predicts fathers’ feeling closer to their partners the day after. It is unclear how exactly mothers’ feeling supported in the coparenting role gives rise to fathers’ perceived coparenting support on a daily basis. Mothers tend to be the primary caregiver and are often perceived as the gatekeepers to fathers’ involvement in parenting (Kotila, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Kamp Dush, 2013). It may be that, on days when mothers feel more supported in coparenting, they engage in more gate-opening behaviors to facilitate fathers’ involvement, which is perceived by fathers as a form of coparenting support. Indeed, prior studies have shown positive associations between coparenting quality and maternal gate-opening and between maternal gate-opening/closing and fathers’ perceived coparenting support over longer time intervals (Olsavsky, 2017; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). Future studies should directly test this theorized mediation chain in a daily diary study and investigate other possible mechanisms that may explain this link.

Study 1’s findings suggest that it may be beneficial for intervention programs targeting parents transitioning to parenthood to provide ways to enhance couples’ everyday experiences in one or both of these two relational domains. Moreover, identifying ways to potentiate mothers’ daily feelings of coparenting support may potentiate a virtuous cycle of positive relational experiences for both mothers and fathers on a daily basis.

**Capitalization as a Potentially Low Cost, High Yield Intervention Target**
In Study 2, I examined the links between daily capitalization processes (i.e., capitalization attempts and perceived partner responsiveness) and new parents’ daily relational experiences within the first year postpartum. The potential impact of sleep was also taken into account when examining these links, as couples are often sleep deprived during this developmental stage and may be less likely to benefit from capitalization if psychological resources are low due to sleeping less. Findings suggest that couples’ likelihood of engaging in capitalization attempts on a daily basis is not associated with the amount of sleep they had the night before. In addition, capitalization processes are associated with greater experiences in both the romantic aspect of the couple relationship and the coparenting relationship at the daily level, even after taking into account the amount of sleep each partners had the night before.

There was evidence of gender differences and differences across different relational outcome regarding the relational benefits of capitalization. With respect to couples’ daily feelings of closeness, I found that, on days when mothers shared the most positive event of the day, they and their partners reported higher levels of relationship closeness that day. On days when fathers shared, mothers’ daily feelings of closeness were also higher that day. Moreover, for both mothers and fathers, on days when they shared, they felt closer to their partners on days when they perceived their partners’ reaction to be more responsive (i.e., enthusiastic, excited and genuinely concerned). These findings are consistent with the broader literature on capitalization demonstrating that both the act of sharing positive events and the perception of the partner’s being responsive are relationally beneficial across a wide range of interpersonal relationships (Peters, Reis, Gable, 2018).

Among committed couples, this is the first study that examined whether capitalization is associated with greater relational experiences among couples during the transition to parenthood,
when couples are under relatively high levels of stress. The observation that prior-night’s sleep was not associated with one’s next-day capitalization attempts supports the notion that sharing requires relatively minimal efforts. Thus, encouraging couples to share more often may be a viable intervention strategy to consider for couples during the transition to parenthood, as it has the potential to boost couples’ daily feelings of closeness in their relationship as a couple regardless of how much one has slept the night before. Additionally, helping couples learn how to respond in a manner that enables their partners to feel understood, validated, and cared for may further enhance the relational benefits of capitalization attempts. There has been some demonstrated success in teaching individuals to react to others’ capitalization attempts in a more responsive manner (Conoley, Vasquez, Bello, Oromendia, & Jeske, 2015; Wood, Lambert, Brown, Fincham, & May, 2015). Future studies should evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of incorporating capitalization processes into existing relationship education programs and couple therapies.

In Study 2, I also found evidence that the relational benefits of capitalization spill over to the coparenting domain. Specifically, I found that, on days when fathers shared, mothers reported perceiving higher levels of coparenting support that day. Moreover, for both mothers and fathers, on days when the positive event shared concerned the child (e.g., child taking the first step), the other partner perceived greater coparenting support that day. Similar to the findings with respect to couples’ feelings of closeness, on days when their partners reacted more responsively, both mothers and fathers reported perceiving greater coparenting support that day. This is the first study that examined the link between capitalization and relational experiences beyond the romantic aspect of the relationship. As theorized in the Ecological Model of Coparenting (Feinber, 2003), coparenting plays a central role in family functioning given its
direct and indirect implications for parent and child adjustment. Empirically, there is a well-documented link between coparenting and children’ psychological adjustment (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). There is also evidence of a reciprocal association between couples’ relationship feelings and coparenting both at the daily level for both parents and longitudinally across the early parenting years for mothers (e.g., Le et al., 2016; Le et al., 2019). Thus, potentiating the capitalization processes among couples transitioning to parenthood has the potential to boost couples’ daily relational experiences in both relational domains.

Findings in Study 1 highlighted the importance of mothers’ feeling supported in their coparenting relationship during this developmental period. In Study 2, I found that mothers reported perceiving greater levels of coparenting support on days when fathers shared and that mothers’ perceived even greater levels of coparenting support when the event fathers shared concerned the child. Generally speaking, men, compared to women, are less likely to engage in capitalization attempts when something good happens to them (Palmer, Ramsey, Morey, & Gentzler, 2016). Thus, it may be especially helpful to encourage fathers to share during this developmental period.

Conclusions

This dissertation examined daily relational experiences of new parents within the first year postpartum. In Study 1, I demonstrated bidirectional cross-day associations between daily relationship closeness and perceived coparenting support for both mothers and fathers and a cross-day partner effect from mothers’ prior-day perceived coparenting support to fathers’ next-day perceived coparenting support. In Study 2, I demonstrated greater relational experiences for both mothers and fathers on days when they engage in capitalization processes and that the link is robust to the potential influence of parental sleep. Taken together, this dissertation provides
evidence that couples’ daily feelings about the romantic aspect of their relationships are bidirectionally linked to the emerging coparenting relationship from one day to the next within the first year of parenthood and highlights the important role of mothers’ feeling supported by their partners in coparenting during this developmental period. It also suggests the potential for capitalization to serve as a low cost, high yield strategy that couples can implement in their everyday lives to help boost their daily relational experiences with respect to both the romantic aspect of the relationship as well as the coparenting aspect. Given the important role played by couple functioning and coparenting in both parent and child adjustment, future studies should investigate the impact of formal instructions on capitalization for new parents as well as other strategies that may simultaneously potentiate couples’ daily relational experiences as a way to ease couples’ transitional experiences during this important family developmental period.
General Introduction and Discussion References


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