

EVERYDAY COMPLAINING VERSUS RETAIL COMPLAINING: PREVALENCE, PERCEPTIONS, AND PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT

Complaining is ubiquitous in everyday life. However, most complaining research has examined only retail complaining. To expand research on everyday complaining, and to compare it to retail complaining, and using the online platform Prolific, participants in two studies answered questions about their experiences with complaining. Study 1 (n = 215) examined respondents' experiences with both everyday and retail complaining, and Study 2 (n = 238) focused on everyday complaining, including individual difference predictors of complaining propensity. In Study 1, participants engaged in everyday complaining more frequently than retail complaining. Across studies, participants perceived they complained less than others and perceived their own complaints more positively than others. Motives for complaining were instrumental and expressive, but motives for not complaining reflected self-presentational concerns. In Study 2, complaining propensity correlated positively with private self-consciousness, chance locus of control, and neuroticism, and negatively with internal locus of control, mindfulness, agreeableness, and optimism. Implications for relationships and customer relations are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Although complaints are often viewed negatively, many people complain on a regular basis, albeit to different degrees. People complain about their health, the weather, other people, traffic, and unsatisfying products or services, to name a few. Despite the prevalence of complaining in everyday life, and with the exception of research focusing on the linguistic nature of people's complaints (e.g., Dersley & Wootton, 2000; Laforest, 2002; Mandelbaum, 1991) and specific functions served by complaining such as venting (e.g., Wendorf & Yang, 2015), most complaining research to date has examined complaints about products and services – retail complaining (e.g., Stephens & Gwinner, 1998; Thøgersen et al., 2009). Indeed, the *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Complaining Behavior* was created in 1988 to focus specifically on retail complaining (Dahl & Peltier, 2015; Nowak et al., 2023). Given that most research has focused on

retail complaining, one purpose of the current research is to extend complaining research to include complaints about sources of dissatisfaction in everyday life and to demonstrate that everyday complaining, while sharing some characteristics with retail complaining, also has unique features that distinguish it from retail complaining. The attention to retail over everyday complaining is particularly interesting given that research suggests most people refrain from complaining in retail settings (Best & Anderson, 1977; Day et al., 1981; Francken, 1983), leading to the following hypothesis:

H1: *The frequency of everyday complaining, complaining about things that bother people in everyday life, will be greater than the frequency of retail complaining, complaining about products or services that people pay for.*

Despite its frequency, complaining has negative associations attached to it. People tire of listening to others' complaining, particularly if they appear unwilling to do anything about the source of their dissatisfaction. Yet, complainers often appear unaware of the impact of their own complaining on others. Consistent with the egocentric bias, they often view and interpret others' thoughts and interpretations through the lens of their own (Epley & Gilovich, 2004). Consistent with the actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1971), people tend to make situational attributions for their own behaviors, likely including complaining, perhaps expecting others to make the same attributions when observing their behavior. Although we are not aware of research that has expressly compared perceptions of complaining by oneself and others, anecdotal evidence leads us to the following hypotheses:

H2: *For both everyday and retail complaining, people are expected to perceive that they complain less than other people and to evaluate their own complaining more positively than that of other people.*

H3: *Complaining by others will have a negative effect on participants, but complaining by oneself will result in more positive emotions, such as relief.*

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF COMPLAINING

Kowalski (1996) defined complaining as an expression of dissatisfaction, whether a person feels dissatisfied or not, to achieve intrapersonal or interpersonal goals. According to Laforest (2002, p. 1596), "failure to meet expectations is a precondition for the implementation of the act of complaining". However, people may complain even when their expectations have been met and there is no discrepancy between desired and actual expectations, highlighting a distinction between dissatisfaction and complaining thresholds (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017; Kowalski, 1996). Even though a person's dissatisfaction threshold may not have been reached, a person may still choose to complain (the complaining threshold has been reached) if they perceive that complaining will be useful in achieving intrapersonal and interpersonal goals (i.e., the perceived utility of complaining is high; Kowalski, 1996). For example, research on consumer complaining suggests that complaining may be dependent on satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the retailer's response to the initial redress-seeking episode, rather than the initial dissatisfaction itself (Blodgett & Granbois, 1992; Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). Although initial levels of dissatisfaction may prompt

redress-seeking, complaining will follow only if this dissatisfaction is amplified through an unsatisfactory response from the retailer.

Once the complaining threshold has been reached, the complaints may be expressed directly or indirectly. Direct complaints are expressed to the offender whereas indirect complaints are expressed to a third party (Balaji et al., 2015; Kowalski, 1996; Saglam, 2024; Singh, 1988). Social media has emerged as an outlet for people to vent their frustrations and dissatisfaction, directly and indirectly (Střiteský & Stránská, 2015; Wendorf & Yang, 2015; Yen, 2016). The decision to complain indirectly or directly through social media is influenced by various factors such as perceived unfairness, the response of the retailer, blame (cause of the problem), personal identity, face concerns associated with complaining, and need for retaliation (Balaji et al., 2015). Because retail complaints are designed to bring about a very specific outcome, we advance the following hypotheses:

H4: *Everyday complaints are hypothesized to be more likely to be expressed indirectly to people who are not the sources of the dissatisfaction motivating the complaint than directly to the source. Retail complaints are expected to be expressed directly to the retailer more than indirectly to friends or relatives.*

H5: *For everyday complaining, people will complain more to someone with whom they have an established relationship, such as a friend, parent, or spouse, than to strangers. For retail complaining, they are expected to complain more to the retailer or other consumers than friends and family.*

Why Do People Complain or Choose Not to Complain?

To achieve their intrapersonal and interpersonal goals, people may express their complaints for several different reasons. Like other behaviors, such as gossip (Cruz et al., 2021) and venting (Parlamiš, 2016; Wendorf & Yang, 2015), complaining may be used as an emotion regulation strategy to vent frustrations and dissatisfactions (Alicke et al., 1992; Kowalski, 1996). Complaining also serves a number of other functions including seeking redress for perceived injustices (Alicke et al., 1992), calling others to account for their behavior (Kowalski, 1996), eliciting sympathy and social comparison information from audience members (Alicke et al., 1992; Kowalski, 1996), adding humor to an interaction (McGraw et al., 2015), receiving attention, absolving oneself of responsibility from one's own actions, and excusing poor performance (Bowen, 2013). Complaining may also be used for self-presentational reasons to influence the impressions that other people form of the complainer (Kowalski, 1996). Complaining for self-presentational reasons may also be used as a means for people to complain about positive events in their lives that others may not also be experiencing – for example, complaining about an engagement, induction into a sorority, or a new job offer (Kowalski, 1996). Self-presentationally, complaining may also be used to influence the impressions of other people toward a person, product, or company with whom the complainer is dissatisfied (Alicke et al., 1992).

Equally important as the reasons for complaining are the reasons people choose not to complain even when they are dissatisfied (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). People's unwillingness to complain has been examined most extensively in the consumer complaining literature, as complaints can be opportunities for companies to improve their products or services (Chebat et al., 2005; Mousavi & Esfidani, 2013; Nimako & Mensh, 2012; Plymire, 1991). Despite the benefit of complaining to companies, in one study, 42% of dissatisfied consumers did not complain to the

company (Su & Bowen, 2001). In the absence of people expressing their dissatisfaction directly to the company, the retailer risks losing customers, important product knowledge, and the ability to improve their services. Kwok (2019) classified consumers' reasons for not complaining within the hospitality industry into five categories (see also Iram et al., 2023), but these five factors apply equally well to everyday complaining. Situational factors leading to consumer silence include the extent of product failure, costs and benefits associated with complaining, the importance of the product to the consumer, and whether the consumer blames the retailer for the product failure (Iram et al., 2023; Kwok, 2019; Thøgersen et al., 2009). Individual factors include demographic and personality characteristics as well as prior experience with complaining that may inhibit a person's willingness to complain. Individual factors also include self-presentational concerns with saving face (Strommel & van der Houwen, 2014). Service providers and market factors focus on the company's reputation and responsiveness in addressing consumer complaints, market competition, and the extent to which they make it easy for consumers to complain (Kwok, 2019). Social factors reflect the extent to which family and friends support or discourage the complaining behavior (Iram et al., 2023; Kwok, 2019). Finally, resource factors relate to whether the individual has the skill and time to invest in complaining behavior (Didow & Barksdale, 1982; Kolodinsky, 1995; Kwok, 2019). Across factors, Thøgersen et al. (2009) found that consumers are more likely to complain when dissatisfaction is strong, when a defect/deficiency in a product is more serious, when the consumer has a more positive attitude toward complaining, and when consumers have a higher inclination to experience dissatisfaction. Considering research examining motives to and not to complain, we advance the following hypothesis and research question:

H6: *The motives for engaging in everyday complaining will be more expressive in nature compared to more instrumental motives for retail complaining.*

Research Question 1: *What motivates people to choose not to engage in everyday and retail complaining?*

STUDY 1: EVERYDAY VERSUS RETAIL COMPLAINING

Method

Participants. Data were collected using the online crowd-sourced platform Prolific. Two hundred thirty-three respondents clicked on the Qualtrics link to the survey provided within the platform. However, 18 respondents were omitted from further data analysis because they failed to complete the survey or responded incorrectly to attention-check questions. The median time for completion was 23 minutes, 6 seconds. The final sample consisted of 215 respondents (59.4% female; 68.4% White; Mage = 38.88; SD = 11.32). An a priori power analysis using G-power found that 68 participants were needed to reach .80 power, alpha = .05, with a moderate effect size in the population. Participants were paid \$5.00 for their participation. Materials and data for these studies are available at https://osf.io/ptdnr/?view_only=6c3c88e4f834411c8ec6c02e53050304. An exempt determination was made for the study by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB2024-0725).

Procedure. After reading a consent document, participants indicated their willingness to complete the survey. After being provided with a definition of complaining (i.e., "the expression of dissatisfaction, whether you actually feel dissatisfied or not, for the purpose of achieving desired personal or interpersonal goals"), participants answered two general questions about complaining. First, they listed the top five complaints that they have. Second, they indicated how they are most

affected when others complain to them using a 4-point response scale (1 = my mood is brought down; 2 = I start to complain; 3 = my mood is lifted; 4 = I am not affected).

Respondents then received questions about everyday complaining and retail complaining presented in counterbalanced order. Everyday complaining was defined as complaining about things that bother you in everyday life, and retail complaining was defined as complaining about products or services that you pay for. To examine the frequency with which people engage in everyday versus retail complaining, participants were asked “How many times a week would you estimate that you engage in everyday (retail) complaining?”. They also indicated how often they engaged in everyday (retail) complaining compared to other people (1 = much less than most other people; 5 = much more than most other people).

Seven questions examined participants’ perceptions of both everyday and retail complaints by themselves and by other people. All questions were answered using a 5-point response format (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). Representative items include “How annoying do you perceive your complaints to be to others?” / “How annoying are others' complaints to you?” and “How useful in accomplishing personal or interpersonal goals are your complaints?” / “How useful in accomplishing personal or interpersonal goals are others’ complaints?”.

To examine the direct versus indirect nature of people’s everyday and retail complaints, participants completed four questions using a 5-point response format (1 = Not at all likely; 5 = Extremely likely): “If you are dissatisfied with something in your everyday life (dissatisfied with a product or service), how likely are you to complain about your dissatisfaction directly to the source of that dissatisfaction?”, “If you are dissatisfied with something in your everyday life (dissatisfied with a product or service), how likely are you to complain about your dissatisfaction indirectly to someone else?”, “If you are dissatisfied with something in your everyday life (dissatisfied with a product or service), how likely are you to complain about your dissatisfaction directly to the source online via social media, a website, or email?”, and “If you are dissatisfied with something in your everyday life (dissatisfied with a product or service), how likely are you to complain about your dissatisfaction indirectly online via social media, a website, or email?”

Separate questions examined reasons to and reasons not to engage in both everyday and retail complaining. Participants rated the frequency with which their everyday and retail complaining were motivated by each of 12 motives (to influence the impressions other people form of me, to excuse my own behavior, to vent, to break the ice, to get an explanation, to demonstrate closeness with the person I’m complaining to, to change a situation, to promote fairness, to invoke sympathy, to get attention, to reduce boredom, to lighten the mood of an interaction) using a 5-point response scale (1 = never; 5 = frequently). The same response format was used to determine the frequency with which 9 motives (concern with being labeled a complainer or pessimist, concern that relationships with other people might be damaged, nothing is gained by complaining, complaining causes me embarrassment, complaining takes too much time and effort, I feel worse after complaining, I want to be optimistic, to protect others’ feelings, concern with being a burden) influenced participants to choose not to engage in everyday or retail complaining.

The audience to whom people direct their everyday and retail complaints was assessed with two questions. The first asked participants to indicate the number one person to whom they complain when they engage in everyday (retail) complaining. Fourteen response options were presented including mother, father, sibling, significant other, another family member, retailer, other service providers, co-worker, friend, roommate, other consumers, stranger, mentor/teacher/professor, and other. Respondents then completed an open-ended question asking why they are more likely to express their everyday (retail) complaints to this person.

Emotions before and after complaining were assessed with two questions for both everyday and retail complaining. Using a 5-point response scale (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely), respondents indicated the extent to which they felt anger, disgust, relief, and dissatisfaction immediately before and immediately after they engaged in both everyday and retail complaining.

Five questions examined the extent to which expectations as well as dissatisfaction and complaining thresholds differ between everyday and retail complaining. Before completing the questions, participants were asked to think about a complaint that they expressed in their normal, everyday/retail interactions. They then rated how they would describe their expectations for the situation (1 = very low; 5 = very high) and the extent to which these expectations were met (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). Participants rated how dissatisfied they were with the situation before they complained (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely) and how useful it was for them to complain in this situation (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). Finally, they indicated how frequently they had complained about the situation (1 = never; 5 = frequently).

Statistical Analysis. The open-ended question asking participants to list their top five complaints was coded by examining common themes among the responses. Once the categories were established, the responses were coded by nine teams of two raters each. Discrepancies between raters was resolved by a third rater. This same procedure was followed for the coding of the single complaint that participants expressed in everyday/retail settings for which we assessed expectations, as well as dissatisfaction and complaining thresholds. The procedure was utilized again with the two open-ended responses asking participants why they chose a particular person to whom to express their everyday/retail complaints.

Descriptive statistics are reported for many of the variables examined. Where needed, inferential statistics were conducted to determine significance. SPSS version 29 was used for data analysis.

Results

As shown in Table 1, participants' top five complaints were each coded into one of 17 categories. Interrater reliability ranged from .73 to .86. As shown in the table, the most frequent complaints focused on socio-political topics, actions of others, and financial issues.

Participants estimated that they engaged in everyday complaining an average of 7.82 (SD = 10.51) times a week (see Table 2). Estimates for how much other people engage in everyday complaining were significantly higher ($M = 13.04$; $SD = 16.22$), $F(1, 206) = 36.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$. Estimates for the frequency with which participants said that they ($M = 1.85$; $SD = 2.97$) or others ($M = 5.68$; $SD = 9.34$) engaged in retail complaining were much lower, but estimates for retail complaining were significantly higher for other people, $F(1, 208) = 45.09$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .18$. In response to the question asking participants how often they thought they engaged in everyday/retail complaining compared to other people, participants perceived themselves to be somewhat less likely to engage in both everyday ($M = 2.40$; $SD = 1.01$) and retail complaining ($M = 1.80$; $SD = .88$), the two means differing significantly from one another, $F(1, 214) = 60.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. These findings support Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2.

Participants' ratings of complaints by themselves compared to other people were examined using repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with type of complaining and self-other as the repeated measures factors. As shown in Table 3, for both everyday and retail complaints, participants perceived their own complaints to reflect more genuine dissatisfaction, to be less damaging to relationships, and to be expressed less frequently, $ps < .05$. However, others' everyday and retail complaints were perceived to be a more normal part of social interaction than

Table 1
Percentages of Categories of General Complaints

Category	Definition	Examples	(Study 1)	(Study 2)
Transportation	Public or private transport, movement/commute	“Traffic”	2.2%	1.9%
Environment	Weather, nearby noise/light, surrounding area	“Cold weather”	5.7%	4.7%
Food	Food quality/taste, eating habits	“Salty Food”	9.4%	0.5%
Socio-political	Social and political issues, nationally or locally	“Inflation”	16.1%	14.1%
Lifestyle	Personal choices, diet, home repairs, etc	“Work-life balance”	4.8%	4.1%
Work	Job has long hours, poor management / employees	“Coworkers”	4.0%	6.0%
Time	Either given too much or too little time	“Not enough time to do things”	4.3%	3.6%
Responsibilities	Tasks that have to be done / managed	“Workload and Stress”	3.6%	3.7%
Financials	Lack of money or pay, taxes	“High price of food”	11.6%	12.5%

Physical appearance	Issues with weight, height, looks, etc.	“My body is too large”	1.1%	1.1%
Physical state	Poor state of bodily functions (health, sleeping habits)	“My back aches”	6.7%	6.4%
Emotions/feelings	Feeling dissatisfaction, anger, sadness, etc.	“Feeling tired”	3.2%	4.4%
Characteristics of others	Unsatisfactory, disappointing qualities of other people	“Dishonest management”	6.8%	8.4%
Actions of others	Unsatisfactory, disappointing actions of other people	“A bad driver cut me off”	12.5%	16.4%
Relationships	Dissatisfaction or problems with significant other	“My marriage is on rocky ground”	2.4%	3.7%
Retail	Lack of satisfactory service	“Poor service”	11.0%	2.3%
Other	Complaints that do not fit into other categories	“Reporting”	3.0%	6.1%

Note. Percentages in Study 1 are based on a total of 1067 complaints across all categories. Percentages in Study 2 are based on a total of 1401 complaints across all categories, allowing for a few respondents who did not list a total of five complaints.

Table 2
Descriptives for Everyday and Retail Complaining

Variable	Study 1		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Study 2
	Everyday	Complaining Type Retail			Everyday
<i>Frequency</i>					
Estimated Frequency Complaining by Self	7.82 (10.51)	1.85 (2.97)	72.73	.001	6.12 (8.13)
Estimated Frequency Complaining by Others	13.04 (16.22)	5.68 (9.34)	38.06	.001	N/A
<i>Directness of Complaining</i>					
Directly to the source of dissatisfaction	2.55 (1.06)	2.56 (1.17)	.01	.91	2.43 (1.07)
Indirectly to someone else	3.08 (1.00)	3.07 (1.04)	.03	.86	2.83 (1.17)
Directly to the source online	1.90 (1.05)	2.53 (1.21)	52.45	.001	1.71 (.99)
Indirectly online	1.90 (1.08)	2.108(1.12)	6.95	.009	1.71 (1.02)
<i>Motives to Complain</i>					
To influence others' impressions	1.84 (.88)	1.72 (.96)	2.50	.12	1.85 (.95)
To excuse my own behavior	2.34 (.91)	1.62 (.89)	104.14	.001	2.37 (1.04)
To vent	3.75 (.98)	3.13 (1.13)	63.63	.001	3.56 (1.07)
To break the ice	2.12 (.99)	1.81 (.94)	19.93	.001	2.21 (1.03)
To get an explanation	2.95 (1.00)	3.13 (1.06)	4.71	.03	2.91 (1.06)
To demonstrate closeness	2.50 (1.07)	2.00 (1.01)	46.53	.001	2.71 (1.12)
To change a situation	3.00 (1.07)	3.04 (1.25)	.25	.62	3.00 (1.04)
To promote fairness	2.91 (1.09)	2.97 (1.21)	.64	.42	2.91 (1.13)
To invoke sympathy	2.46 (1.09)	2.05 (1.05)	44.24	.001	2.30 (1.03)
To get attention	2.05 (1.05)	1.66 (.96)	45.47	.001	1.82 (.99)
To reduce boredom	1.99 (1.08)	1.68 (.97)	19.25	.001	1.99 (1.12)
To lighten the mood of an interaction	2.36 (1.01)	1.93 (1.02)	33.35	.001	2.40 (1.08)

Motives not to Complain

Concern with being labeled a complainer	3.38 (1.20)	3.00 (1.33)	20.97	.001	3.37 (1.28)
Concern with damaging relationships	3.21 (1.21)	2.49 (1.27)	59.90	.001	3.37 (1.24)
Nothing gained by complaining	3.19 (1.17)	3.01 (1.26)	4.00	.05	3.45 (1.15)
Complaining causes me embarrassment	2.71 (1.15)	2.74 (1.22)	.21	.65	2.86 (1.22)
Complaining takes too much time/effort	2.94 (1.04)	3.04 (1.18)	1.95	.17	2.86 (1.21)
I feel worse after complaining	2.75 (1.07)	2.58 (1.09)	5.39	.02	2.84 (1.19)
I want to be optimistic	3.59 (1.10)	3.35 (1.18)	12.95	.001	3.65 (1.17)
To protect others' feelings	3.29 (1.10)	2.85 (1.24)	32.45	.001	3.48 (1.09)
Concern with being a burden	3.21 (1.16)	2.88 (1.27)	17.09	.001	3.49 (1.16)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standard deviations.

Table 3
(a) Self Versus Other Comparisons in Everyday and Retail Complaining–Study 1

Variable	Everyday Complaining		Retail Complaining		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Self	Other	Self	Other		
Annoyance of complaints	2.68 _a (.90)	2.56 (.96)	2.60 (1.00)	2.44 _a (1.00)	3.86	.009
Negative tone of complaints	2.72 _{abc} (.91)	2.88 _{ade} (.94)	2.50 _{bdf} (.95)	3.05 _{cef} (.91)	21.09	.001
Complaints reflect dissatisfaction	3.47 _{abc} (.93)	3.21 _{ade} (.89)	3.71 _{bdf} (.93)	3.33 _{cef} (.93)	20.08	.001
Utility of complaints to reach goals	2.44 (.91)	2.34 (.88)	2.42 (1.05)	2.36 (.96)	.89	.44
Complaints damage relationships	1.85 _a (.85)	1.88 _b (.89)	1.62 _{abc} (.85)	1.79 _c (.96)	7.21	.001
Frequency of complaints	2.57 _{abc} (.86)	2.99 _{ade} (.85)	2.12 _{bdf} (.77)	2.79 _{cef} (.93)	57.33	.001
Normal part of social interaction	2.37 _{abc} (.92)	2.92 _{ade} (.89)	1.95 _{bdf} (.89)	2.66 _{cef} (.93)	66.34	.001

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standard deviations. Means in a single row with a common subscript differ significantly, $p < .05$.

(b) Self Versus Other Comparisons in Everyday Complaining–Study 2

Variable	Everyday Complaining		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Self	Other		
Annoyance of complaints	2.82 _a (1.09)	2.50 _a (1.10)	14.32	.001
Negative tone of complaints	2.72 (0.97)	2.87 (0.92)	3.56	.06
Complaints reflect dissatisfaction	3.40 _a (0.99)	3.11 _a (0.92)	16.07	.001
Utility of complaints to reach goals	2.40 (1.05)	2.37 (0.99)	.18	.67
Complaints damage relationships	1.99 (0.96)	1.99 (1.04)	.012	.91
Frequency of complaints	2.55 _a (0.93)	2.87 _a (0.88)	18.34	.001
Normal part of social interaction	2.26 _a (1.00)	2.91 _a (0.99)	74.38	.001

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standard deviations. Means in a single row with a common subscript differ significantly, $p < .05$.

respondents' own complaints, $ps < .05$. In addition, looking only at participants' perceptions of their own complaints, compared to retail complaints, respondents perceived that their everyday complaints were more negative in tone, more damaging to relationships, more frequent, and a greater part of normal social interaction, $ps < .05$. However, they thought that their own retail complaints reflected more genuine dissatisfaction than their everyday complaints, $p < .05$. Compared to retail complaints, other peoples' everyday complaints were perceived as a more normal part of social interaction, as more frequent, as less negative in tone, and as less reflective of genuine dissatisfaction, $ps < .05$. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 2.

Over half of all respondents (58.6%) indicated that their mood was brought down when others complained to them, supporting Hypothesis 3. A quarter (25.6%) stated that they start to complain when others complain to them. About 15% (14.6%) stated that they were unaffected by others' complaining, whereas virtually no one (0.9%) indicated that their mood was lifted.

As shown in Table 4, the amount of anger, disgust, dissatisfaction, and relief did not differ between everyday and retail complaining either before or after complaining, $ps > .05$. However, after complaining, ratings of anger, disgust, and dissatisfaction decreased whereas ratings of relief increased for both everyday and retail complaining, supporting Hypothesis 3. Notably, except for dissatisfaction, mean ratings of negative emotions surrounding complaining were relatively low.

As shown in Table 2, for both everyday and retail complaining, participants were not particularly likely to express their complaints directly to the source of their dissatisfaction. They were moderately likely to express their dissatisfaction indirectly to someone else, partially supporting Hypothesis 4. Although not used frequently as an outlet for expressing dissatisfaction directly or indirectly, social media provided a more useful outlet for retail complaining than for everyday complaining. Consistent with these findings, for both everyday and retail complaints, participants most often expressed their complaints to their significant other (44.2% everyday; 40.5% retail), followed by a friend (21.9% everyday; 15.3% retail), partially supporting Hypothesis 5. Only 14% of respondents expressed their retail complaints to the retailer, with even fewer (0.9%) expressing these complaints to other consumers, disconfirming this part of the hypothesis. Mothers were also common complaint audiences (11.2% everyday, 12.1% retail).

Twelve categories were constructed from the open-ended responses regarding why individuals elected to complain to their particular audience (see Table 5). For both everyday and retail complaining, the most common reasons why this individual was selected were having a close personal relationship, the proximity of the individual, and the person's knowledge of the situation.

The motives for everyday and retail complaining and their relative differences are reported in Table 2. The most frequently endorsed motives for engaging in both everyday and retail complaining were to vent, to change a situation, and to get an explanation. Most common motives for not engaging in everyday complaining centered around wanting to be optimistic, concern with being labeled a complainer, concern with damaging relationships, and the perception that nothing is gained by complaining. For retail complaining, the most common reasons for not complaining included wanting to be optimistic, the perception that complaining takes too much time and effort, the perception that nothing is gained by complaining, and concern with being labeled a complainer. These results only partially support Hypothesis 6 as the common motives for both everyday and retail complaining appear to reflect a combination of expressive and instrumental goals. However, they answer the research question by suggesting that self-presentational motives may discourage both everyday and retail complaining.

Participants were asked to think about a specific everyday (or retail) complaint and answer a series of questions about that specific complaint. Using the 17 categories generated from the

Table 4
Self Versus Other Comparisons in Everyday and Retail Complaining–Study 1

Variable	Everyday Complaining		Retail Complaining		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Before	After	Before	After		
Anger	2.66 _{ab} (1.03)	2.08 _{ac} (.93)	2.72 _{cd} (1.06)	2.13 _{bd} (.90)	45.69	.001
Disgust	2.41 _{ab} (1.07)	2.00 _{ac} (.93)	2.33 _{cd} (1.08)	2.04 _{bd} (.98)	19.21	.001
Dissatisfaction	3.35 _{abc} (1.01)	2.53 _{ad} (1.04)	3.63 _{bde} (1.05)	2.66 _{ce} (1.05)	92.65	.001
Relief	1.51 _{ab} (.79)	2.82 _{ac} (1.17)	1.46 _{cd} (.84)	2.80 _{bd} (1.16)	107.98	.001

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standard deviations. Means in a single row with a common subscript differ significantly, $p < .05$.

Table 5
Percentages of Categories Reflecting Why Person Chosen to Complain to

Category	Definition	Examples	Everyday	Retail
Source of complaint	The person complained to is the person complained about	“They are partially to blame in my mind”	1.9%	7.0%
Relationship type	Husband, sister, mother	“They’re my partner”	7.0%	5.6%
Accessibility	Proximity to person and frequency of interaction	“Proximity”	20.5%	17.8%
Closeness	Complainer has a close personal relationship with the person	“Because my mother is the closest to me.”	24.2%	15.9%
Trust	Person can be trusted	“I trust them”	6.0%	5.1%
Support	Person is nonjudgmental and provides empathy and sympathy	“They understand and are supportive”	6.0%	9.3%
Knowledge	Person complained to knows a lot about the complainer	“They know everything about me”	4.2%	3.7%
Ability to relate	Person understands and has Knowledge of the situation	“They share the same situations with me”	12.6%	15.0%
Good listener	Person complained to is a good listener	“They will listen without judgment”	10.2%	6.1%
Advice-giver	Person complained to is wise and gives good advice	“She often has solutions”	2.3%	4.2%
To make change	Person is chosen because they can facilitate change-making	“Because the retailer can do something about it”	0.9%	5.6%
Other	Reasons that do not fit other categories	“Most relatives has died”	4.2%	4.7%

thematic analysis of the five general complaints described earlier, the specific everyday complaints focused mostly on actions of others (26.2%) and environment (23.4%). The specific retail complaints, not surprisingly, focused primarily on retail (59.1%) followed by actions of others (27.0%). (See Table 6.)

Repeated measures ANOVAs showed that participants' expectations were higher in retail ($M = 3.57$; $SD = 1.48$) than everyday ($M = 2.71$; $SD = 1.24$) situations, $F(1, 214) = 60.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. They also perceived that their expectations as more likely to be met in the retail ($M = 2.47$; $SD = 1.35$) than everyday situation ($M = 2.19$; $SD = 1.24$), $F(1, 214) = 7.38$, $p < .007$, $\eta^2 = .03$, although only slightly so in both situations. Ratings of dissatisfaction did not differ significantly between everyday ($M = 3.91$; $SD = 1.09$) and retail ($M = 3.95$; $SD = .93$), $F(1, 213) = 0.14$, $p > .17$, with mean ratings showing that respondents were very dissatisfied. The utility of complaining was significantly higher in retail ($M = 3.15$; $SD = 1.42$) than everyday ($M = 2.31$; $SD = 1.22$) situations, $F(1, 214) = 58.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. However, the frequency of complaining about the situation was significantly higher in everyday ($M = 3.33$; $SD = .98$) than retail situations ($M = 2.76$; $SD = .98$), $F(1, 212) = 51.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$.

Table 6
Categories of Single Complaints

Category	Percentage (Study 1) Everyday	Percentage (Study 1) Retail	Percentage (Study 2) Everyday
Transportation	4.7	0	6.0
Environment	23.4	0.9	14.0
Food	0	3.7	1.3
Socio-political	3.7	1.9	3.0
Lifestyle	1.4	0	0.8
Work	10.7	0	14.9
Time	2.3	3.3	2.6
Responsibilities	2.3	0	1.7
Financial Issues	3.7	1.4	7.2
Physical appearance	0.9	0	0.4
Physical state	3.3	0.4	4.3
Emotions/feelings	0.4	0	1.7
Characteristics of others	4.7	1.4	5.1
Actions of others	26.2	27.0	29.8
Relationships	3.3	0	1.3
Retail	7.9	59.1	4.7
Other	0.9	0.9	1.3

DISCUSSION

Study 1 examined similarities and differences between everyday and retail complaining. Given that most research has focused on retail complaining, our purpose was to demonstrate that everyday complaining, while sharing some characteristics with retail complaining, also has unique features that distinguish it from retail complaining. The study expands the current body of research on complaining behavior by exploring people's dissatisfaction with things that occur in their everyday life and opens up a wealth of additional research ideas for researchers moving forward. The results supported the uniqueness and prevalence of everyday complaining relative to retail complaining, highlighting the need for additional research focused specifically on complaining that focuses on non-retail issues and concerns in everyday life.

Prevalence rates were significantly higher for everyday than retail complaining, highlighting the need for research on everyday complaining and supporting Hypothesis 1. These statistics are not surprising given that most people are involved in everyday interactions much more than interactions with retailers. More notable, however, is the relatively low frequency with which people perceive that they engage in everyday complaining, particularly relative to other people, supporting Hypothesis 2. Consistent with findings by Alicke et al. (1992), people may be (a) underestimating the frequency with which they complain, (b) failing to recognize that the behavior they are engaging in is actually complaining, perhaps reframing it as confiding, and/or (c) construing it in a more positive light. These findings are also consistent with the perception that others' complaints are a more normal part of social interaction than complaints by the respondent him- or herself.

These findings are reinforced by respondents' generally more positive perceptions of their own everyday and retail complaints compared to others, supporting Hypothesis 2. Relative to other people, participants perceived their own complaints as significantly less damaging to relationships, more reflective of genuine dissatisfaction, and less frequent. Again, this pattern may reflect a tendency to identify their own behavior as something other than complaining, perhaps indicative of the self-serving bias. It may also reflect the actor-observer bias. Because of the negative connotations that often surround complaining, people may be less likely to attribute the behavior to themselves than to other people.

The most common reported effects of others' complaining were that it brought down participants' mood or led them to start complaining, supporting Hypothesis 3. Hearing other people complain may make people aware of their own dissatisfaction with the topic of the complaint, heightening negative affect. Consistent with Kowalski's (1996) theory of complaining, this heightened negative affect may lower people's dissatisfaction threshold. The fact that the second most common effect of others' complaining is an increase in the respondent's own complaining suggests that the complaining threshold is also affected, lending support to the distinction between dissatisfaction and complaining thresholds (Kowalski, 1996).

Participants were most likely to express both their everyday and retail complaints indirectly to someone other than the source of the complaint, followed by direct complaints to the person (or company) with whom they were dissatisfied, partially supporting Hypothesis 4. Given that participants were concerned that complaining might damage their relationships with others and that they perceived relatively low utility in complaining, it is not surprising that they would favor indirect complaining in everyday interactions. However, the finding of more indirect complaining in retail was surprising, particularly given that the perceived utility of complaining was rated higher than in everyday complaining. Notably, however, respondents indicated that expectations were only slightly met, which might undermine the desire to complain directly to the retailer. This

finding is reinforced by the fact that both expressive and instrumental motives for complaining emerged for both everyday and retail complaining, providing partial support for Hypothesis 6. In both everyday and retail situations, people complain not just to rectify a situation but also to express frustrations (Alicke et al., 1992).

Notably, complaining both directly and indirectly via social media, although not used frequently, was more common with retail than everyday complaining. The convenience of social media as an outlet for expressing complaints may make it more popular with retail than everyday complaining, partly due to the anonymity online reviews provide, allowing the consumer to avoid confrontation with the company over their dissatisfaction. Additionally, consumers who are dissatisfied may feel they have a responsibility to “warn” others against said product or service. These results are consistent with the finding that people are most likely to complain about products and services to a significant other and to a friend, reflecting the indirect nature of their complaints. This finding is notable as companies do not receive information they need to improve unsatisfactory products and services which may lead clients to shift company loyalty (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998).

The people to whom respondents were most likely to express their everyday and retail complaints were those with whom they shared a close personal relationship, had close proximity, and/or who understood the situation. This may also explain the indirect nature of people’s complaining as they have their “go-to” people to whom they complain, whether that person is the source of the complaint.

The most common motives for engaging in everyday and retail complaining (venting, changing a situation, and getting an explanation) were both expressive and instrumental, partially supporting Hypothesis 6. These motives highlight the multi-functionality of complaining and coincide with some of the functions of complaining outlined by Kowalski (1996) – calling others to account for their behavior and catharsis. Notably, however, self-presentational motives did not appear to be salient in influencing motives for engaging in either everyday or retail complaining. However, the concern with being labeled a complainer and the desire to be perceived as an optimist were influences on not engaging in either everyday or retail complaining. Thus, self-presentational concerns may be related more to not complaining than to complaining.

In summary, prevalence rates of everyday complaining were greater than those for retail complaining. Compared to other people, respondents perceived themselves as less likely to engage in both everyday and retail complaining and viewed their own everyday and retail complaints less negatively. Although both everyday and retail complaints were more likely to be expressed indirectly as opposed to directly, social media was a more common outlet for retail complaining. Interestingly, the top motives for expressing everyday and retail complaints mirrored one another; however, motives for not expressing the two forms of complaints differed slightly from one another. These findings reinforce that, although both forms of complaining, everyday and retail complaints are not the same, highlighting the importance of examining everyday complaining as an independent construct.

STUDY 2: EVERYDAY COMPLAINING AND ITS CORRELATES

The findings from Study 1 highlight the need for increased attention to everyday complaining. Thus, a second study was conducted that focused only on complaining in everyday interactions. To replicate the findings from Study 1 with everyday complaining, we advance the following hypotheses:

H1: *People will perceive that they complain less than other people and will evaluate their own complaining more positively than that of other people.*

H2: *Complaining by others will have a negative effect on participants, but complaining by oneself will result in more positive emotions.*

H3: *Everyday complaining will be more indirect than direct.*

H4: *The motives for everyday complaining will be both expressive and instrumental in nature.*

H5: *Motives for not complaining will reflect self-presentational concerns.*

A second purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between relevant individual difference measures and complaining propensity. Specifically, based on theorizing by Kowalski (1996), the study examined the relationship between complaining propensity and private self-consciousness, locus of control (internal and chance), the Big Five (neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness), optimism, and mindfulness. Some people tend to complain more than others, raising questions about personality correlates of complaining. According to Kowalski (1996), variables that affect the dissatisfaction threshold and the complaining threshold moderate the frequency of complaining. Specifically, negative affectivity (often considered a proxy for neuroticism; Costa & McCrae, 1985), agreeableness (Kowalski & Cantrell, 1995), and locus of control may influence one's dissatisfaction threshold.

First, as Watson and Clark (1984, p. 466) observed, people who score higher in negative affectivity "are particularly sensitive to the minor failures, frustrations, and irritations of daily life." Similarly, neuroticism has also been shown to be related to symptom reporting, suggesting that people higher in neuroticism would have a lower complaining threshold. Rumination over life's irritations would be expected to lower the dissatisfaction threshold, but, importantly, individuals high in negative affect (i.e., high in neuroticism) also tend to discuss their negative feelings with other people (Watson & Pennebaker, 1989), lowering the complaining threshold.

Second, research has shown a relationship between private self-consciousness and symptom reporting (Pennebaker & Skelton, 1978), suggesting a lower complaining threshold. Because people who are higher in private self-consciousness direct attention inward more frequently, they would be expected to be more aware of discrepancies between current and desired states, leading to heightened dissatisfaction (lowered dissatisfaction threshold; Kowalski, 1996).

Third, people with an internal locus of control tend to feel more efficacious in controlling their outcomes which may mean they have a lower complaining threshold than people with an external (chance) locus of control, believing that complaining will allow them to achieve desired intrapersonal and interpersonal goals. At the same time, people with an external (chance) locus of control may feel frustrated with the inability to control their outcomes, so complain to alleviate this frustration (Kowalski, 1996).

Fourth, people higher in extraversion are expected to complain more simply because they are less reserved and more outgoing.

On the other hand, people who are optimistic, who are agreeable, who are open to new experiences, and who are higher in mindfulness are expected to be less likely to complain. Mindfulness is positively correlated with subjective well-being and negatively correlated with

negative affect (Kowalski et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, Kowalski et al. (2014) found a moderate negative correlation between mindfulness and the number of pet peeves that respondents expressed, a form of complaining. Considering the results of research on individual difference measures and complaining, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H6: *Private self-consciousness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, locus of control (both internal and chance), and extraversion, will be positively correlated with the propensity to complain.*

H7: *Optimism, mindfulness, openness, and agreeableness will be negatively correlated with the propensity to complain.*

METHOD

Participants

Workers on the online crowd-sourced platform Prolific participated. From an original sample of 260 respondents who clicked on the link, a final sample of 238 individuals was retained. Twenty-two individuals returned the survey, timed-out, failed attention check questions, or failed to complete the survey. Over half (60.1%) of the respondents were female, 38.2% male, 0.8% other (all nonbinary), and 0.8% preferred not to answer. Over 64.3% of the participants were White, 19.3% African American, 7.6% Hispanic, 6.3% Asian American, 1.3% Native American, and 1.3% other (all biracial). Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 78 ($M_{age} = 37.13$; $SD = 12.85$). Participants were paid \$4.00 for their participation. Median time for completion was 19 minutes, 35 seconds. Participants in Study 1 were unable to participate in Study 2.

Measures

For all measures, reverse-scoring was used where appropriate. Except for the Locus of Control Scale, the subscales of which were summed, all other scale scores were averaged across items with higher scores indicating more of the construct of interest.

Big Five Personality Inventory. A 44-item inventory measured the five facets of the Big Five: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (John et al., 1991). Participants indicated the degree to which each of the items described them using a 5-point response format (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly).

Complaining Propensity. Six items measured the propensity of participants to engage in complaining behavior (Kowalski & Cantrell, 1995). Because of the low item-total correlation of one of the items, it was omitted from further analysis, resulting in a 5-item scale. Participants indicated the frequency with which they engage in each of the behaviors using a 5-point response format (1 = never; 5 = frequently). A sample item is "State my dissatisfaction with the behavior of others".

Private Self-Consciousness. Private Self-Consciousness was measured with the 24-item Rumination-Reflection Scale developed by Trapnell and Campbell (1999). The scale consists of a Rumination subscale (e.g., "I always seem to be rehashing in my mind recent things I've said or done") and a Reflection subscale (e.g., "I'm very self-inquisitive by nature"), each of which contains 12 items to which participants respond using a 5-point response format (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). For the current study, scores were averaged across all 24 items.

Optimism. Optimism/pessimism was measured with the Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier et al., 1994). Participants respond to each of the 10 items using a 5-point scale (1 =

strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Scores were averaged across 6 items, with the remaining four items serving as filler items. A representative item is “In uncertain times, I usually expect the best”.

Locus of Control. Levenson’s (1972) Locus of Control (LOC) Scale consists of 24 items, evenly distributed into three subscales: internal LOC (“Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability”), powerful others LOC (“I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful people”), and chance LOC (“To a great extent my life is controlled by accidental happenings”). Participants indicate their agreement with the 8 items on the internal LOC scale and the chance LOC scale using a 6-point response format (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree).

Mindfulness. Mindfulness was assessed with the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Participants indicate the frequency with which they have experienced each of the 14 items using a 6-point scale (1 = almost always; 6 = almost never). A sample item is “I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way”.

Procedure

After reading a consent document and agreeing to participate, respondents were provided with a definition of complaining (i.e., “the expression of dissatisfaction, whether you actually feel dissatisfied or not, for the purpose of achieving desired personal or interpersonal goals”). They then completed two general questions about complaining. First, they listed the top three complaints they have, followed by rating how they are most affected when others complain to them using a 4-point response scale (1 = my mood is brought down; 2 = I start to complain; 3 = my mood is lifted; 4 = I am not affected).

Following this, respondents received questions about everyday complaining. First, they estimated how many times a week they engaged in everyday complaining. They also indicated how often they engaged in everyday complaining compared to other people (1 = much less than most other people; 5 = much more than most other people).

Seven questions examined perceptions of everyday complaining by the participant and by others. All questions were answered using a 5-point response format (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). Representative items include “How annoying do you perceive your complaints to be to others?” and “How annoying are others' complaints to you?”.

Using a 5-point response format (1 = Not at all likely; 5 = Extremely likely), participants completed the same four questions used in Study 1 to determine the direct versus indirect nature of their complaints. Participants then rated the frequency of 12 possible motives for their complaining (e.g., to influence the impressions other people form of me, to change a situation) using a 5-point response scale (1 = never; 5 = frequently). The same response format was used to determine the frequency with which nine motives (e.g., nothing is gained by complaining; to protect others' feelings) influenced them to choose not to engage in everyday complaining.

As in Study 1, participants again were asked to think about a complaint that they expressed in their normal, everyday interactions. They then answered the same five questions about their expectations regarding this complaint and the situation motivating their dissatisfaction.

Statistical Analysis

The same 17 categories generated in Study 1 were used for coding the top three everyday complaints that participants listed. As in Study 1, the responses were coded by nine teams of two

raters each. Discrepancies between raters were resolved by a third rater. This same procedure was followed for the coding of the single complaint that participants expressed in everyday settings for which we assessed expectations, as well as dissatisfaction and complaining thresholds. Descriptive statistics are reported for many of the variables examined. Where needed, inferential statistics were conducted to determine significance. Regression analyses were used to predict complaining propensity. SPSS version 29 was used for data analysis.

RESULTS

Using the complaint categories from Study 1, respondents' top three complaints in Study 2 focused on actions of others, socio-political issues, and financial issues (see Table 1). Interrater reliability for coding of the top three complaints was 77%, 84%, and 80%, respectively.

Participants estimated that they engaged in everyday complaining an average of 6.12 (SD = 8.13) times a week (see Table 2). Although they were not asked to estimate how much other people complain, responses to the question "Compared to other people, how often do you think you engage in everyday complaining?" showed that respondents perceived that they engaged in everyday complaining less than others ($M = 2.46$; $SD = 1.09$), with 23.9% saying that they complained much less than others and 26.9% saying they complained somewhat less than others, supporting Hypothesis 1. Only 2.5% stated that they complained much more than others, with 15.5% saying they complained somewhat more than others.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, respondents were negatively affected by other people's complaining. Almost half of respondents (44.1%) indicated that their mood is brought down by others' complaining. A fourth (25.6%) stated that they start to complain when others complain. Another quarter (25.6%) said they are unaffected by others' complaints with few (4.6%) reporting that their mood is lifted.

As shown in Table 2, participants were unlikely to express their everyday complaints, either directly or indirectly via social media. Respondents were moderately likely to express their everyday complaints indirectly to someone else ($M = 2.83$; $SD = 1.17$) and even less likely to express them directly to the source of their dissatisfaction ($M = 2.43$; $SD = 1.07$), supporting Hypothesis 3.

Mirroring Study 1, the most frequent motives for engaging in complaining were to vent, to change a situation, and to get an explanation. These results partially support Hypothesis 4. The most common reasons for not complaining in Study 2 were wanting to be optimistic, wanting to protect others' feelings, and the perception that nothing is gained by complaining, supporting Hypothesis 5. Means are reported in Table 2.

Using the 17 categories to code general complaints, participants' specific complaints focused primarily on actions of others, work, and the environment (see Table 6). Using these situations as a backdrop, respondents then answered five questions regarding expectations, dissatisfaction, and complaining. On average, they described their expectations for this situation as neutral ($M = 2.88$; $SD = 1.17$) and indicated that these expectations were only slightly met ($M = 2.11$; $SD = 1.14$). Although they were very dissatisfied ($M = 3.69$; $SD = 1.14$) before they complained, they perceived little utility in complaining ($M = 2.36$; $SD = 1.31$). Despite the low utility, however, they still sometimes complained ($M = 3.08$; $SD = .97$).

Correlations between the individual difference measures are reported in Table 7. As shown in the table, complaining propensity correlated positively with private self-consciousness, chance locus of control, and neuroticism (Hypothesis 6). An inverse relationship was observed between

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations between Individual Difference Measures

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Comp. Prop	2.53	.73	.83										
2 Private SC	3.65	.63	.22**	.92									
3 Int LOC	57.83	5.68	-.15*	-.16*	.69								
4 ChanceLOC	49.58	6.70	.27**	.20**	-.35**	.77							
5 Mindfulness	5.69	1.06	-.34**	-.36**	.31**	-.36**	.90						
6 Extraversion	2.96	.87	-.08	-.13*	.26**	-.25**	.16*	.87					
7 Agreeable	3.81	.69	-.43**	-.05	.35**	-.33**	.34**	.34**	.82				
8 Conscien	3.71	.73	-.28**	-.09	.47**	-.44**	.48**	.25**	.53**	.85			
9 Neurotic	3.00	.93	.38**	.41**	-.38**	.37**	-.51**	-.39**	-.43**	-.48**	.89		
10 Openness	3.72	.63	.004	.46**	.002	-.10	.07	.18**	.11	.15*	-.09	.79	
11 Optimism	3.15	.90	-.18**	-.21**	.39**	-.46**	.33**	.41**	.26**	.41**	-.59**	.21**	.79

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$. Scale reliabilities are reported on the diagonal.

complaining propensity and internal locus of control, mindfulness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and optimism (Hypothesis 7). No significant relationship was obtained with either extraversion or openness. The results of a stepwise regression analysis entering all individual difference measures as predictors of complaining propensity are shown in Table 8. Agreeableness accounted for the greatest percentage of variance in complaining propensity, followed by neuroticism, extraversion, and private self-consciousness.

Table 8
Stepwise Regression Results
Predicting Complaining Propensity

		b	SE b	Beta	p
1	(Constant)	4.278	0.242		<.001
	Agreeableness	-0.458	0.063	-0.43	<.001
2	(Constant)	3.291	0.352		<.001
	Agreeableness	-0.347	0.068	-0.327	<.001
	Neuroticism	0.189	0.05	0.239	<.001
3	(Constant)	2.936	0.379		<.001
	Agreeableness	-0.381	0.068	-0.359	<.001
	Neuroticism	0.224	0.052	0.284	<.001
	Extraversion	0.128	0.053	0.152	0.016
4	(Constant)	2.612	0.406		<.001
	Agreeableness	-0.404	0.069	-0.38	<.001
	Neuroticism	0.175	0.056	0.222	0.002
	Extraversion	0.128	0.052	0.152	0.016
	PrivateSC	0.153	0.073	0.131	0.037

Note. R² for Step 1 = .19; ΔR² for step 2 = .05; ΔR² for step 3 = .02; ΔR² for step 4 = .014 (all p's < .05)

DISCUSSION

The results of Study 2 closely replicated those obtained in Study 1 with everyday complaining. Participants again perceived that they complained less frequently than other people, and they generally held more positive perceptions of their own complaining relative to others, supporting Hypothesis 1. The most negative effects of others' complaining were again to bring down the participant's mood and to instigate complaining in the respondent him- or herself, supporting Hypothesis 2. Also consistent with Study 1 and supporting Hypothesis 3, participants' complaints were more often indirect than direct. Replicating Study 1 and partially supporting

Hypothesis 4, the motives for complaining were both expressive and instrumental. Supporting the findings from Study 1 and Hypothesis 5, motives for not engaging in everyday complaining primarily focused on self-presentational concerns.

Partial support was obtained for Hypotheses 6 and 7. Positive correlations were obtained between private self-consciousness, chance LOC, and neuroticism. Extraversion and openness did not significantly correlate with complaining propensity, contrary to our hypotheses. Negative relationships were observed between complaining propensity and internal LOC, mindfulness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and optimism. Consistent with previous research (Gursoy et al., 2007; Kowalski, 1996), internal LOC was inversely related to complaining propensity. As noted by Alicke et al. (1992) and Gursoy et al. (2007), complaining can serve as a secondary control mechanism. Viewed this way, people with an internal LOC are likely to believe that complaining will be instrumental in regaining control over situations in which expectations have been unfulfilled and conditions are dissatisfying. Consistent with research showing a relationship between neuroticism and symptom reporting (Denovan et al., 2019; Johnson, 2003), neuroticism correlated positively with complaining propensity. Importantly, rumination (one subset of private self-consciousness in the current study) is a correlate of neuroticism (Denovan et al., 2019), so it is hardly surprising that private self-consciousness also correlated positively with complaining propensity. No significant relationship was obtained between complaining propensity and extraversion in the Pearson correlation analysis. However, extraversion did emerge as a significant predictor in the regression analysis once variance due to agreeableness and neuroticism was accounted for. Although the emergence of agreeableness on Step 1 of the regression is not that surprising, it is surprising that internal LOC, in particular, did not account for a significant percentage of variance.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of the two studies highlight the frequency with which everyday complaining occurs (particularly relative to retail complaining), reinforcing the call for additional research in this area. Although everyday complaining can include retail complaining (and, indeed, did in 11 of the complaints respondents expressed in Study 1 and 2.3% in Study 2), most complaints that people express on a daily basis have nothing to do with retail. The higher percentage in Study 1 was likely cued by respondents who received the retail portion of the survey first.

Importantly, however, although most research has examined retail complaining, the form that this complaining takes and the motives behind it resemble everyday complaining. Specifically, rather than dissatisfied consumers complaining directly to retailers, they appear to be more likely to express their dissatisfaction indirectly to people with whom they share some type of relationship. This is the same pattern for everyday complaining. This pattern also reflects the self-presentational motives behind not complaining for both everyday and retail complaining, specifically the desire to be seen as an optimist and to not be viewed as a complainer.

Although we had hypothesized that the motives for engaging in retail complaining would be more instrumental compared to the hypothesized expressive motives for everyday complaining, both instrumental and expressive motives were at play. This finding also fits with the more indirect nature of respondents' complaining, as one might expect indirect complaining to serve a more expressive function than direct complaining. Indeed, consistent with previous research (e.g., Alicke et al., 1992), the most common reason for respondents to complain in the current studies was to vent their frustrations and dissatisfactions.

Of particular interest in the current two studies is respondents' seeming lack of awareness of the frequency of their own complaining or a reappraisal of their own complaining behavior as something other than complaining. This same distortion also appeared in the generally more positive ratings of their own complaints, particularly everyday complaints, relative to those of others. Alicke et al. (1992) suggested that people "may not be highly attuned to the things they actually complain about or may have a poor conception of the frequency with which they complain about specific issues" (p. 293). Others have suggested that "interactants refrain from characterizing what they are doing as "complaining" and instead name their activity with less negatively valenced labels such as "criticizing", "troubles-telling" or even "factually reporting" (Heinemann & Traverso, 2009, p. 2381; see also, Edwards, 2005). Given that respondents perceived other people's complaints as having a negative effect on them in terms of lowering their mood or triggering them to complain, it may be difficult for people to imagine having the same effect on others, necessitating a reappraisal of their own complaining behavior.

In line with findings by Alicke et al. (1992), our respondents were more likely to complain about other people's actions (such as rude actions) as opposed to their personal characteristics (such as labeling someone as a rude person). Alicke et al. suggested that this difference may reflect the fact that complaints about a person's actions reflect a higher probability of change compared to those regarding a person's character.

The relationships between complaining propensity and the individual difference measures were as expected except for extraversion and openness. However, extraversion did emerge as a significant predictor in the regression analysis following agreeableness and neuroticism. People who are agreeable would be expected to complain less both because they see the world more positively and because they are less likely to express dissatisfaction to others in a desire to maintain harmony in close relationships.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although these studies provide valuable insights into the dimensions of retail and everyday complaining, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the two studies were conducted in close temporal proximity to the US Presidential election and immediately following a natural disaster in the United States. These local history effects could have affected the types of complaints, particularly everyday complaints, that people expressed. Second, the data were collected exclusively through self-report questionnaires, perhaps leading to common method variance. However, the fact that the results of the two studies mirror one another so closely suggests that this is not likely the case.

It is also possible that the coding categories may not capture the full range of complaint categories. Different researchers and different coders may generate slightly different categories based on their interpretations of the complaints. Relatedly, although interrater reliabilities were acceptable, participant complaints were, at times, phrased in ways that made them difficult to code. For example, "comfort", "feelings", "smoothless".

Given the prevalence of complaining, additional research is needed. Future research should explore additional individual difference measures that may moderate complaining propensity. Research could also investigate how particular personality variables moderate the frequency with which a person engages in instrumental versus expressive complaining. For example, one would expect people with an internal LOC to engage in more instrumental than expressive complaining. Additional research is also needed regarding people's concerns about complaining directly to the

source of their dissatisfaction. Although this is particularly important in a retail setting, it may also be important for personal relationships as not expressing complaints directly to the source may allow frustrations to build up with concomitant damage to the relationship over time. Finally, additional research into the functions that complaining serves and the relationship of complaining to existing constructs, such as gossip, is needed. Although complaining and gossip, for example, are unique constructs with different underlying motives, future research could investigate the extent to which people, particularly listeners to complaints, evaluate complaints as gossip.

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