



Relationship between proactive personality and marital satisfaction: A spillover-crossover perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted the spillover-crossover model to examine proactive personality as a potential antecedent of marital satisfaction among dual-earner couples in China. We collected data from 241 Chinese dual-earner couples, and found that proactive personality was positively associated with marital satisfaction through increased work-family facilitation and decreased work-family conflict for men. However, the effect of proactive personality on marital satisfaction was complex and overall negative for women. Specifically, proactive personality was positively related to work-family facilitation and work-family conflict, which in turn positively and negatively predicted marital satisfaction, respectively. Furthermore, our results showed a direct crossover effect of marital satisfaction between partners, suggesting that the effect of people's proactive personality on their own marital satisfaction might cross over to their spouses. This study contributes to a broader understanding of the effect of proactive personality.

1. Introduction

Proactive personality refers to an individual's tendency to initiate environmental changes (Bateman & Crant, 1993). A great deal of research has demonstrated that proactive personality might be a distinct and incremental predictor of job performance beyond Big Five personality traits (e.g. Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010). However, little is known about the potential effect of proactive personality on family-related outcomes. In order to fill this gap, the primary interest of this study is to examine “how” and “why” proactive personality is associated with marital satisfaction. Further, previous studies suggested that individuals' personality traits might predict not only their own marital satisfaction, but also their spouses' marital satisfaction (Lester, Haig, & Monello, 1989); thus, the second goal of this study is to explore the relationship between proactive personality and spousal marital satisfaction.

The current study employs the spillover-crossover perspective (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) as our theoretical framework. Spillover is an intra-individual process in which individuals' experiences from work (family) domain might transfer to their family (work) domain, and then influence their family-related (work-related) outcomes (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Job demands are often proposed to evoke negative experiences which would spill over to employees' family domain and interfere with their ability to fulfill family responsibilities, causing

work-family conflict; in contrast, job resources are proposed to foster positive experiences which would spill over to people's family domain and promote family-related outcomes, leading to work-family facilitation. On the other hand, crossover is an inter-individual phenomenon in which people's experiences might affect others closely related to them (Westman, 2001).

The spillover-crossover model combines the spillover and crossover literature, and theorizes that individuals' experiences of job demands and resources will first spill over to their family domain and then cross over to their partners (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). This model delineates the process through which individuals' work conditions might influence their and their partners' well-being such as marital satisfaction, and this process has been empirically supported (e.g. Bakker, Shimazu, Demerouti, Shimada, & Kawakami, 2013; Ma, Xie, Tang, Shen, & Zhang, 2016). Thus we apply this spillover-crossover model as our theoretical framework to develop hypotheses on effects of individuals' proactive personality on their and their partners' marital satisfaction.

According to the spillover-crossover model, positive experiences of job resources might be positively associated with work-family facilitation, and then positively influences people's marriage life (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). Proactive personality is often valued as a key resource in working life (e.g. Dikkers, Jansen, de Lange, Vinkenburgh, & Kooij, 2010; Hirschi, 2012). Proactive people usually have the

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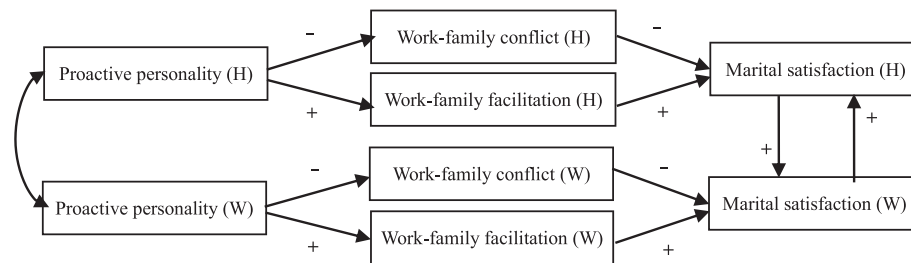


Fig. 1. The hypothesis model.

Note. (H) and (W) represent husbands' and wives' variables, respectively.

forseeability to identify opportunities, demands, and risks in the environment; meanwhile, they tend to perceive the demands and risks as personal challenges (Bateman & Crant, 1993). When they face stressors, they arm themselves with more proactive coping behaviors that can help them gain positive emotions, resources, and opportunities for growth and thus are less likely to experience increased stress. Previous studies showed that more proactive people could cope well with job demands, and succeed at work (Fuller & Marler, 2009).

As Greenhaus and Powell (2006) argued, proactive employee might be particularly more likely to receive social support, develop skills, seek flexibility, get a higher salary, and apply resources of the work domain to their family roles. In line with this rationale, proactive personality as a key resource in working life might help employees experience more work-family facilitation and subsequent higher marital satisfaction. Existing empirical evidence supported both parts of this argument by finding that proactive personality positively predicted work-family facilitation (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005), and that work-family facilitation positively predicted marital satisfaction (Ma et al., 2016; Xie, Ma, Tang, & Jiang, 2017). Taken together, we hypothesize the following relationship.

Hypothesis 1. Proactive personality will be positively associated with marital satisfaction through increased work-family facilitation (spillover effect 1).

Although the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) doesn't highlight the relationship between job resources and work-family conflict, several empirical studies found that job resources have important implications for work-family conflict (e.g. Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013). Specifically, job resources might promote high work efficiency, and allow employees to have more time, energy, and flexibility to fulfill responsibilities from the family domain (Demerouti, 2012; Ferguson, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2015), thus negatively relating to work-family conflict.

The conservation of resource theory posits that people with more resources are more capable of gaining additional resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, proactive employees might gain more other resources in the work domain. Supporting this argument, proactive personality has been found to positively associate with job resources such as job control (Parker & Sprigg, 1999), leader-member exchange (Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012), and supervisor support (Kim, Hon, & Lee, 2010). Thus, proactive employees might benefit from these resources and experience less work-family conflict. Previous studies have found evidence for the negative association between proactive personality and work-family conflict (e.g. Aryee et al., 2005). Moreover, the negative association between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction has been well established in previous studies (e.g. Ma et al., 2016; van Steenbergen, Kluwer, & Karney, 2014). Taken together, we hypothesize the following relationship.

Hypothesis 2. Proactive personality will be positively associated with marital satisfaction through decreased work-family conflict (spillover effect 2).

Based on the spillover-crossover model, we also predict that

individuals' proactive personality will also have implications for their spouses' marital satisfaction through the direct crossover of marital satisfaction between partners. Direct crossover is an important mechanism to explain the crossover process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). It refers to a phenomenon that experiences of one partner can promote the other partner to generate similar experiences through empathy and/or emotion contagion (Westman, 2001; Westman, Vinokur, Hamilton, & Roziner, 2004). Empathy refers to the attempt to understand the subjective experiences of others (Wispé, 1986), while emotion contagion refers to a reciprocal emotional reaction toward the other person in a close relationship (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000).

In marriage life, people often exchange feelings and try to understand each other. When people perceive that the level of marital satisfaction is high/low, they might express their feelings to their spouses, and then promote their spouses to experience the same level of marital satisfaction via empathy and or emotion contagion. The direct crossover of well-being between two partners is highlighted in the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), and the direct crossover of marital satisfaction has been empirically supported (e.g. van Steenbergen et al., 2014). Thus, building on the aforementioned discussion and the above hypotheses, we hypothesize the following relationship.

Hypothesis 3. Proactive personality will positively predict spousal marital satisfaction through the direct crossover of marital satisfaction between two partners (crossover effect).

Fig. 1 summarizes the relationships tested in the current study.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Our participants were 241 full-time dual-earner couples from Mainland China. They were recruited by 15 undergraduate students majored in psychology. Each student approached 20 dual-earner couples among their family members or friends, resulting in a convenience sample. These couples volunteered to independently fill out two identical anonymous questionnaires in their homes. The questionnaires were in Chinese and coded to match the partners.

Of the 300 packages of questionnaires that had been distributed, 241 valid packages were returned, leading to a response rate of 80.33%. About 84% of the couples were married for > 3 years, 12% were married for 1 to 3 years, and 4% were married for less than one year. About 69% of the couples had at least one child under the age of 18. About 56% of the couples had elderly domestic helpers. The mean age was 39.22 years ($SD = 7.61$) for men and 37.14 years ($SD = 7.37$) for women. For both men and women, the most common level of education was university education (39% for men and 37% for women), followed by junior college education (33% for men and 31% for women).

2.2. Measures

All the instruments used in the present study were well-developed

scales in previous studies and were translated into Chinese by translation and back-translation method.

Proactive personality was assessed with a 6-item scale developed by Parker (1998). A sample item was “I excel at identifying opportunities”. Participants responded using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity in Chinese employees (Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010). In this study, Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.75 and 0.76 for men and women, respectively.

Work-family conflict was assessed with a 9-item scale developed by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000). A sample item was “My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like”. All items were rated on a 5-point scale with endpoints of “1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree”. This scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity in Chinese samples (Ma et al., 2016). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.88 and 0.87 for men and women, respectively.

Work-family facilitation was assessed with a 4-item scale developed by Wayne, Musisca, and Fleeson (2004). An example item was “The things you do at work make you a more interesting person at home”. All items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from “totally disagree” to “totally agree.” This instrument has demonstrated good reliability and validity in Chinese dual-earner couples (Xie, Ma, et al., 2017; Xie, Shi, & Ma, 2017). In this study, Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.79 both for men and women.

Marital satisfaction was measured with the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993). Previous studies conducted in Chinese context showed that the item about religious beliefs is not suitable (Ma et al., 2016), so we removed this item. The 9-item version has demonstrated good reliability and validity in Chinese dual-earner couples (Xie, Ma, et al., 2017; Xie, Shi, et al., 2017). All items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In this study, Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.81 and 0.85 for men and women, respectively.

Control variables including having elderly domestic helpers (yes = 1; no = 0), having children under the age of 18 (yes = 1; no = 0), and years of marriage (within first year = 1; one year to three years = 2; above three years = 3) were measured because previous studies showed that these family characteristics are potential antecedents of work-family interactions and marital satisfaction (Lu, Siu, Spector, & Shi, 2009; Xie, Shi, et al., 2017).

2.3. Data analysis

Following practices in previous studies examining spillover and crossover effects (Bakker et al., 2013; Ferguson et al., 2015), we employed path analysis, a subset of structural equation modeling, to test study hypotheses. All variables in the model were included as manifest variables. In order to evaluate the hypothesis model (full mediation model), four alternative models (partial mediation models) were fitted to the data consecutively.

We then applied the chi-square difference test (Bentler & Bonett, 1980) to compare these different nested models and determine the best-fitting model. A significant Chi-square difference indicated that the competing model fitted the data better and the added path was necessary. Finally, the significance of the total and indirect effects were assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with unbiased estimators, and the bootstrap-based bias corrected confidence intervals (95%) were generated using 5000 iterations of bootstrapping.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive analyses

According to Table 1, men's proactive personality was positively related to both their own ($r = 0.32, p < .001$) and their wives' ($r = 0.14, p < .05$) marital satisfaction; women's proactive personality

was negatively related to both their own ($r = -0.13, p < .05$) and their husbands' ($r = -0.13, p < .05$) marital satisfaction. Proactive personality was positively related to work-family facilitation, for both men ($r = 0.29, p < .001$) and women ($r = 0.22, p < .01$). The relationship between proactive personality and work-family conflict was negative for men ($r = -0.18, p < .01$) but positive for women ($r = 0.16, p < .05$).

3.2. Hypothesis testing

At step one, we estimated the proposed full-mediation model. Results from path analysis suggested that the overall fit of the model was good in general ($\chi^2 = 32.02, df = 14, \chi^2/df = 2.29, IFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.76, CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.073$). We then compared the hypothesized full-mediation model with four alternative models (partial-mediation models) (see Table 2). First, we added paths from work-family conflict to spousal marital satisfaction (M_1) because individuals' resource distribution (e.g. attention and time distribution) in work-family conflict situations might not meet spousal expectations, and then negatively predict spousal marital satisfaction (Ma et al., 2016). Results of nested model comparisons generated a non-significant χ^2 difference value ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.41, \Delta df = 2, ns$).

Then, we added paths from work-family facilitation to spousal marital satisfaction (M_2). The comparison also showed a non-significant χ^2 difference value ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.41, \Delta df = 2, ns$). Next, we added paths from proactive personality to spousal marital satisfaction (M_3). The comparisons generated again a non-significant improvement of model fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 5.84, \Delta df = 2, ns$). A non-significant Chi-square difference indicated that the alternative model didn't fit the data better than the hypothesized model. Based on the relatively simple principle, the model with fewer paths is superior to the model with more paths when the results of nested model comparisons generated a non-significant χ^2 difference value (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). Thus, the proposed full mediation model was superior to the three alternative models.

Lastly, we added paths from proactive personality to marital satisfaction (M_4). This model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 15.41, df = 12, \chi^2/df = 1.28, IFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.95, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.034$) and showed a significant improvement of model fit over the full mediation model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 16.61, \Delta df = 2, p < .01$). Moreover, the added paths were significant. Thus, the fourth alternative model (M_4) was retained as the final model. Fig. 2 illustrates the final model and presents its non-standardized parameter estimates.

The joint significance test (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002) was used to identify significant mediation effect. According to Fig. 2, proactive personality was positively related to work-family facilitation both for men ($B = 0.27, p < .001$) and women ($B = 0.17, p < .001$), and work-family facilitation was also positively associated with marital satisfaction both for men ($B = 0.21, p < .001$) and women ($B = 0.29, p < .001$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. Specifically, the mediating effect of work-family facilitation in the relationship between proactive personality and marital satisfaction was 0.06 and 0.05 for men and women, respectively.

Proactive personality was negatively related to work-family conflict ($B = -0.16, p < .01$) and work-family conflict was negatively associated with marital satisfaction ($B = -0.28, p < .001$) for men, supporting Hypothesis 2 (mediating effect = 0.04). However, for women, although work-family conflict was also negatively related to marital satisfaction ($B = -0.42, p < .001$), proactive personality was positively associated with work-family conflict ($B = 0.12, p < .05$), generating a negative mediating effect (-0.05) and failing to support Hypothesis 2.

Men's marital satisfaction positively predicted their wives' marital satisfaction ($B = 0.43, p < .001$), and vice versa ($B = 0.47, p < .001$). The stability index for this reciprocal relationships was 0.20, and below the maximum value of 1 (Arbuckle, 2013). Taken together, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Years of marriage	–	–										
2. Children under the age of 18	–	–	.21***									
3. Elderly domestic helpers	–	–	–0.12	.18**								
4. Proactive personality (H)	4.92	0.80	–.14*	–0.01	0.03							
5. Work-family conflict (H)	2.69	0.78	–0.10	–0.05	0.00	–.18**						
6. Work-family facilitation (H)	3.18	0.77	–0.09	0.06	0.02	.29***	–.14*					
7. Marital satisfaction (H)	5.21	1.06	–0.03	0.01	0.02	.32***	–.36***	.32***				
8. Proactive personality (W)	4.68	0.84	–.14*	0.00	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.02	–.13*			
9. Work-family conflict (W)	2.59	0.72	–0.10	–0.04	0.05	–0.08	.35***	–0.06	–.25***	.16*		
10. Work-family facilitation (W)	3.30	0.68	–0.08	0.07	–0.11	0.02	0.08	.18**	0.11	.22**	–0.03	
11. Marital satisfaction (W)	4.99	1.09	–0.07	0.00	–0.10	.14*	–.31***	.16*	.51***	–.13*	–.43***	.23***

Note. (H) and (W) represent husbands' and wives' variables, respectively.

* $p < .05$.
 ** $p < .01$.
 *** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Model comparison results.

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
M ₀ : the hypothesis model	32.02	14	2.29	0.95	0.76	0.94	0.073	–	–
Alternative models									
M ₁ : M ₀ + “WFC(H) → MS(W)” + “WFC(W) → MS(H)”	29.61	12	2.47	0.95	0.73	0.94	0.078	2.41	2
M ₂ : M ₀ + “WFF(H) → MS(W)” + “WFF(W) → MS(H)”	29.61	12	2.47	0.95	0.73	0.94	0.078	2.41	2
M ₃ : M ₀ + “PP(H) → MS(W)” + “PP(W) → MS(H)”	26.18	12	2.18	0.96	0.78	0.95	0.070	5.84	2
M ₄ : M ₀ + “PP(H) → MS(H)” + “PP(W) → MS(W)”	15.41	12	1.28	0.99	0.95	0.99	0.034	16.61**	2

Note. WFC represents work-family conflict, WFF represents work-family facilitation, MS represents marital satisfaction, PP represents proactive personality, (H) and (W) represent husbands' and wives' variables, respectively.

** $p < .01$.

Further analyses with a bootstrapping procedure with unbiased estimators (5000 iterations) showed that the indirect effect of proactive personality on marital satisfaction was significantly positive ($effect = 0.18$, 95% CI = [0.11, 0.26]) for men (explaining 46.15% of the total effect), but non-significant for women. In addition, the total effect of men's proactive personality on their marital satisfaction ($effect = 0.39$, 95% CI = [0.24, 0.53]) and their partners' marital satisfaction ($effect = 0.19$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.29]) were both significantly positive, whereas the total effect of women's proactive personality on their marital satisfaction ($effect = -0.18$, 95% CI = [–0.35, –0.006]) and their partners' marital satisfaction ($effect = -0.08$, 95% CI = [–0.20, –0.003]) were both significantly negative.

4. Discussion

Previous studies showed that individuals' personality traits are important predictors of marriage quality (e.g. Lester et al., 1989; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010). Based on these findings, we proposed a spillover-crossover model to examine ‘how’ and ‘why’ proactive personality might be associated with couples' marital satisfaction. We found that the relationship between proactive personality and marital satisfaction is positive for men, but negative for women. To our knowledge, no other study has examined the relationship between proactive personality and marital satisfaction, thus we contributed to a broader understanding of the effect of proactive personality and revealed the gender differences in the effect of proactive personality on marital satisfaction.

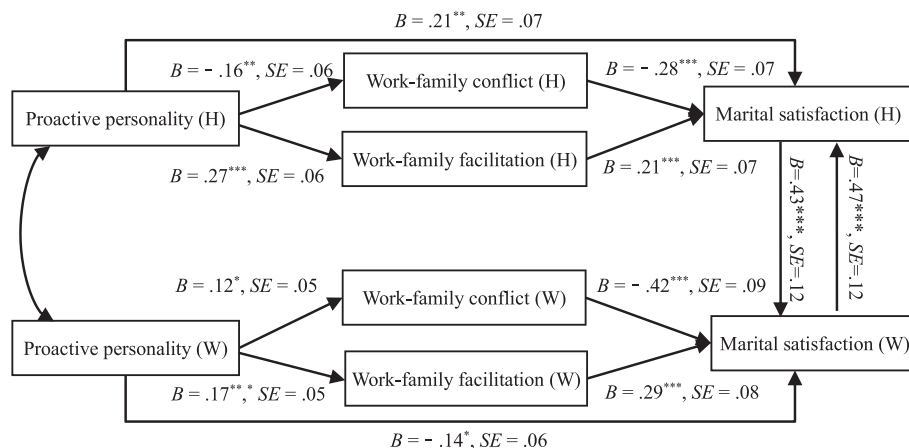


Fig. 2. Results of path analysis.

Note. (H) and (W) represent husbands' and wives' variables, respectively; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The second major finding of this study is the empirical confirmation of the parallel mediating roles of work-family facilitation and work-family conflict in the relationship between proactive personality and marital satisfaction. Specifically, men's proactive personality might promote their marital satisfaction through the increase of work-family facilitation and the decrease of work-family conflict. In contrast, women's proactive personality is a "double-egged sword" when it comes to marital satisfaction. Our results showed that women's proactive personality positively predicted both work-family facilitation and work-family conflict, which had opposite effects on their marital satisfaction. These findings helped unlock the "black-box" on how proactive personality is associated with marital satisfaction. Particularly, the empirical support of the mediating role of work-family conflict in the positive relationship between men's proactive personality and their marital satisfaction supported the notion that job recourse might also help to reduce work-family conflict and then have positively effect on marital satisfaction. This finding extended previous research on the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that the negative effect of women's proactive personality on their marital satisfaction is unexpected. One possible explanation is that the traditional gender expectations and gendered division of labor might be deep-rooted and remain dominant in today's Chinese society. A recent study showed that women still hold more household duties than their husbands in today's China (Oshio, Nozaki, & Kobayashi, 2013). Chinese women might internalize these expectations associated with gender, and center their activities on the family role. Thus, although proactive personality may help them succeed in the work domain (Fuller & Marler, 2009), Chinese women might feel less psychological rewarded. In addition, more proactive employees tend to have higher work engagement (Yang, Yan, Fan, & Luo, 2017), and work more hours per week (Bergeron, Schroeder, & Martinez, 2014). Thus, the distribution of time and energy for proactive Chinese women might violate their own and their husbands' expectations for marriage, cause more work-family conflict, and then impair their marital satisfaction. Previous study has found that active coping in work domain might be related to high levels of strain-based work-family conflict (Andreassi, 2011).

Finally, this study provided evidence about the crossover effect of proactive personality. Based on the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), our study found that the effect of proactive personality might cross over to spousal marital satisfaction through the direct crossover of marital satisfaction between partners. Specifically, men's proactive personality was positively associated with their spouses' marital satisfaction while women's proactive personality negatively predicted their husbands' marital satisfaction. Previous studies on proactive personality were mostly conducted at the within-individual level, and the potential crossover effects of proactive personality have been largely overlooked. The spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) provides us the unique opportunity to test the effects of proactive personality both intra-individuals and inter-individuals. By doing so, the present study might help facilitate theory development in research on proactive personality.

Future research can expand our study in several ways. First, this study is based on a cross-sectional design. We cannot rule out alternative causal directions such as marital satisfaction help cultivate proactive personality. Longitudinal research is needed to further expand our findings. Second, we only examined the direct and indirect effects of proactive personality on couple's marital satisfaction. Additional research is needed to further identify the potential boundary conditions of this association and explore the unique effect of proactive personality on marital satisfaction above and beyond other personality traits (e.g. extraversion and openness). Third, the present findings are specific to dual-earner couples. More research is needed to test whether the present results can replicate in other family situations. Finally, our findings were based on a Chinese sample and results need to be interpreted with caution when being generalized to other cultures. The

negative effect of women's proactive personality on couple's marital satisfaction might be more salient in Chinese culture than in some Western societies.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this study is a step forward in investigating the effect of proactive personality on couples' marital satisfaction. Our results showed that proactive personality had important implications for dual-earner couples' marital satisfaction. However, the benefit of proactive personality for marital satisfaction might only emerge for men such that their proactive personality might promote marital satisfaction through increased work-family facilitation and decreased work-family conflict. In contrast, the effect of women's proactive personality was mixed and negative overall. Although proactive women might experience more work-family facilitation that in turn promotes marital satisfaction, they might also experience more work-family conflict that in turn reduces marital satisfaction. Furthermore, the present study revealed that the influence of people's proactive personality on marital satisfaction could cross over to their spouses' marital satisfaction through the direct crossover of marital satisfaction between partners. These findings provide a deeper understanding of 'how' and 'why' proactive personality might affect dual-earner couple's marital satisfaction.

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