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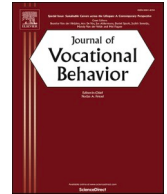
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Blurred lines: The spillover and crossover effects of interpersonal experiences at work on family behaviors and well-being

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the spillover-crossover model, we examine both the enriching and conflicting effects of interpersonal experiences at work on the family domain using experience sampling methodology with 567 daily observations from 70 couples. As a positive spillover-crossover process, we find that employees' help provision at work indirectly and positively influences couples' relationship satisfaction, employees' life satisfaction, and spouses' life satisfaction via support provision to the spouse at home. As a negative spillover-crossover process, employees' experiences of interpersonal conflict at work indirectly and negatively influence couples' relationship satisfaction and employees' life satisfaction via undermining behaviors toward the spouse at home. We further theorize and find that the negative spillover-crossover process is less pronounced when spouses are more responsive to employees' disclosures of negative work experiences. Overall, this study provides new insights regarding behavioral pathways underlying interpersonal models of the work-family interface, with important practical implications for working couples and the organizations employing them.

Work plays an essential role in our daily life. With a relatively large proportion of most individuals' daily time spent at work, it is not surprising that researchers have shown a growing interest in understanding how behaviors and experiences at work affect nonwork life. Many of those experiences are interpersonal in nature and related to social characteristics of the job (Humphrey et al., 2007). Linking work and family domains, Pluut et al. (2022) proposed an interpersonal model of work-family spillover by which interpersonal aspects of employees' work experiences are related to their interpersonal behaviors as part of family life. General theories on the work-family interface suggest that experiences at work can influence the family domain through two mechanisms—spillover and crossover (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). Spillover is essentially an *intraindividual* process, in which one's experiences in one domain (e.g., work) transfer to, or influence, one's own experiences in another domain (e.g., family; Eby et al., 2005; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Crossover entails an *interindividual* process, in which one's experiences in one domain influence the experiences of other closely related individuals in the same domain (Bolger et al., 1989; Westman, 2001).

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In this study, we integrate the spillover and crossover perspectives to investigate the consequences of two interpersonal experiences at work—help provision and interpersonal conflict—for the family domain. Notably, we look at both positively and negatively valenced interpersonal experiences at work to develop a comprehensive understanding of interpersonal work-family spillover. By jointly examining positive and negative spillover processes, we go beyond earlier research that has predominantly studied negative work-family spillover (e.g., [Pluut et al., 2022](#) focused on the spillover of social stressors at work and the resulting experience of social-based work-family conflict). Although research on negative spillover phenomena advances our understanding of which job stressors are to be minimized in the workplace or how to buffer the effects of job stressors on family life, negligence of positive spillover phenomena may lead to a missed opportunity to design a work environment that is conducive to achieving work-family enrichment ([Greenhaus & Powell, 2006](#)). We aim to build on a growing body of research that investigates how experiences at work can enrich family life (e.g., [Carlson et al., 2019](#); [Lin et al., 2017](#)) by studying both enriching and conflicting work-family spillover processes as a result of interpersonal experiences at work. We expect that help provision at work can enrich family life by making it more likely that employees provide support to the spouse at home, while interpersonal conflict at work may interfere with family life when it results in employees displaying undermining behaviors toward the spouse at home. Drawing on the spillover-crossover model ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2013](#)), we propose that help provision and interpersonal conflict at work not only spill over to the family domain to affect employees' behaviors at home, but within the family domain they also cross over to influence the spouse's well-being ([Westman, 2002](#)). In addition, we build on prior research that has examined the role of talking about work during after-work hours in spillover processes ([Ilies et al., 2011](#); [Tremmel et al., 2019](#)). Our study attends to a neglected topic—that is, spousal reactions to sharing attempts of employees—that can enrich theorizing on the work-family interface. Specifically, we propose that negative spillover can be buffered by how responsive the spouse is when an employee shares negative work experiences.

Our proposed model, shown in [Fig. 1](#)—which we test using experience sampling methodology with 567 daily observations collected from 70 couples—advances our understanding of interpersonal models of the work-family interface (see [Pluut et al., 2022](#)). First, by examining both positive and negative spillover-crossover processes, we explore the mechanisms through which help provision at work leads to positive family outcomes and interpersonal conflict at work leads to negative family outcomes. In doing so, we respond to the call for a more comprehensive approach to investigating the intraindividual and interindividual processes that link the work and family domains ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2013](#)). Second, we focus on behavioral pathways linking work and family, modeling marital behaviors as outcomes of spillover and as starting points for crossover between spouses. Researchers have proposed three pathways—attitudes, behaviors, and moods—for the spillover between work and family ([Edwards & Rothbard, 2000](#); [Lambert, 1990](#)). While existing studies have yielded a wealth of knowledge concerning affective and attitudinal spillover processes, behavioral spillover remains largely unexplored ([Byron, 2005](#); [McNall et al., 2010](#)).

Conceptually aligned with interpersonal models of the work-family interface, we investigate how specific work experiences that involve interpersonal behaviors influence employees' marital behaviors at home. Thus, our research provides new insights into the intraindividual work-family linkages through an underexamined behavioral lens. Third, we take a dyadic perspective by investigating the spouse's responsiveness as a factor that may mitigate negative work-family spillover and by studying how help provision and interpersonal conflict at work affect the well-being of the spouse and the marital relationship. Thus, we go beyond the focal employee in studying nonwork consequences of interpersonal work experiences. All in all, with our three-fold focus on interpersonal experiences and behaviors (i.e., help provision and interpersonal conflict at work, supportive and undermining behaviors at home, responsiveness to sharing attempts), we seek to contribute to work-family interface theory.

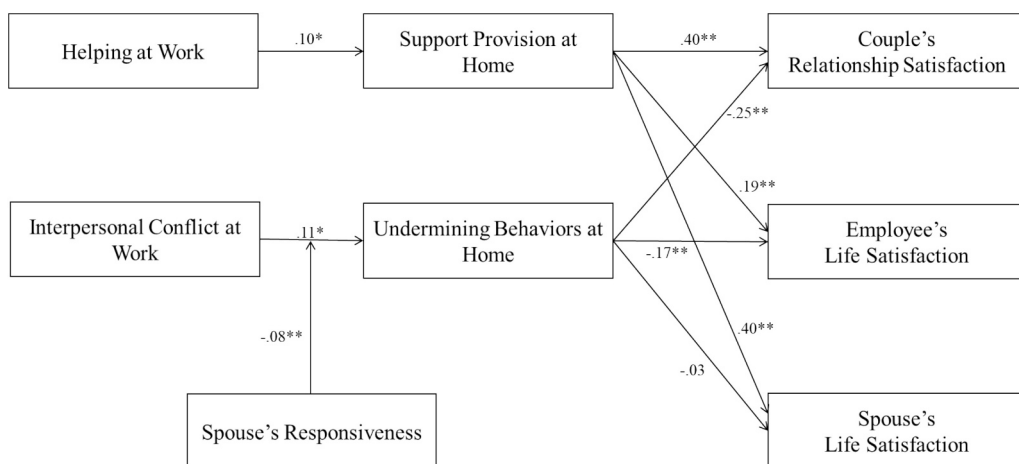


Fig. 1. Conceptual model and path-analytic results.

Note. Standardized coefficients are reported. For visual clarity, paths concerning control variables are not shown in the figure.

1. Theory and hypotheses

We draw on the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) and interpersonal models of the work-family interface (Pluut et al., 2022) to examine the impact of employees' interpersonal experiences at work on their family life, their spouse's well-being, and their marital relationship. We focus on behavioral spillover in this study, looking at marital behaviors as the "linking pin" between intraindividual spillover processes and interindividual crossover processes. Behavioral spillover has been traditionally viewed as a long-term process, in which behaviors developed in one domain become so ingrained that they influence behaviors across domains (Champoux, 1978; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Zedeck, 1992). Yet more recent studies show that behavioral spillover can also occur daily, whereby what employees do at work influences what they do later at home (e.g., Lin et al., 2017; Sanz-Vergel et al., 2012). These findings are consistent with Edwards and Rothbard's (2000) argument that behaviors at work may affect those at home "without being generalized as habits or scripts" (p. 187). Accordingly, we will look at how employees' daily interpersonal behaviors and experiences at work spill over to the family domain and influence their interpersonal behaviors in the evening, which then have an immediate crossover effect on the spouse through social interaction (see Westman, 2002).

1.1. Positive spillover-crossover: the effect of help provision at work on family life

Providing help to others at work can be a resource-generating experience for helpers themselves, providing the basis for a work-family enrichment process (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Through helping others, helpers experience higher levels of positive affect (Conway et al., 2009; Glomb et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Grant, 2012) and feel that they matter (Zeijen et al., 2023). According to the broaden-and-build theory, such positive emotions broaden individuals' awareness and encourage thoughts and actions that will be beneficial for themselves as well as others within their social space (Fredrickson, 2001); an example would be when helpful co-workers continue to display helping behaviors in the family domain. It has been empirically demonstrated that prosocial behavior and positive affect reinforce each other in daily life (Snippe et al., 2018). Applying this notion to the work-family interface, Lin et al. (2017) found that positive affect explained why helping colleagues during the workday led employees to provide more support to their spouse in the evening. We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1. On days when employees provide more help at work, they provide more support to their spouse at home.

Support provision in the family plays an important role in preventing work-family conflict and enhancing well-being (Drummond et al., 2017; Luk & Shaffer, 2005; Michel et al., 2010; Pluut et al., 2018). For support providers, giving support is important for their own relational well-being as they tend to find themselves in relationships that are satisfying, trusting, and intimate (Cutrona et al., 2005; Feeney & Collins, 2015). For support recipients, receiving support provides them with a sense of being cared about and fulfills their psychological needs for affection, belonging, and appreciation (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House, 1981). Hence, support provision in the family contributes to a better relationship between spouses and enhances their satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2009; Jensen et al., 2013; Reis et al., 2014; Väänänen et al., 2005). We seek to contribute to this stream of research by proposing and testing the association between spousal support provision and the couple's relationship satisfaction. Differentiating our work from existing studies, we conceptualize and operationalize relationship satisfaction at the dyadic (i.e., couple) level.

In addition to relationship satisfaction, spouses who receive support have a more positive view of themselves and higher levels of motivation in the pursuit of life opportunities (Feeney & Collins, 2015). As such, receiving support can enhance recipients' life satisfaction (Adams et al., 1996; Wan et al., 1996). These benefits also apply to support providers, who will experience heightened self-regard as well as a sense of meaning in life when providing support to a close one (Feeney & Collins, 2015). In sum, social support in the family contributes to both relational and personal well-being. Therefore, we expect that social support does not only serve a relationship-enhancing function for the couple but will also lead to more positive evaluations of life in general for both spouses.

Hypothesis 2. On days when employees provides more support to the spouse, (a) the couple feels more satisfied with their relationship, (b) the employee feels more satisfied with life, and (c) the spouse feels more satisfied with life.

Hypothesis 3. There is a positive indirect effect of daily help provision at work on (a) the couple's relationship satisfaction, (b) the employee's life satisfaction, and (c) the spouse's life satisfaction via spousal support provision at home.

1.2. Negative spillover-crossover: the effect of interpersonal conflict at work on family life

Interpersonal conflict refers to negative interpersonal encounters involving covert hostility, verbal aggression, and angry exchanges (Keenan & Newton, 1985). It has long been considered a stressful job demand (Pluut et al., 2022; Spector et al., 1988). Research has shown that interpersonal conflict at work can have negative psychological consequences. For example, employees who have been involved in interpersonal conflict at work report feelings of negative affect (Ilies et al., 2011), hostility (Glomb, 2002), and depression (Frone, 2000). In contrast to the beneficial effects of positive affect in line with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), negative emotions (e.g., anger, fear, or hostility) can provoke fight-or-flight responses and prompt individuals to act aggressively (Averill, 1983; Berkowitz, 1990; Watson, 2000). Furthermore, interpersonal conflict is a resource-depleting job stressor that can hamper individuals' ability to regulate impulsive and antisocial behaviors (Baumeister & Exline, 1999; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). As such, we expect that when employees experience interpersonal conflict at work, they are likely to bring home associated (negative) action tendencies and undermine their spouse. In support of this notion, various studies have shown that on days when employees experience higher job stressors, they are more likely to interact negatively with their spouse (Roberts & Levenson,

2001; Story & Repetti, 2006) and engage in aggressive behaviors later at home (Lim et al., 2018; Pluut et al., 2022). We hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4. On days when employees experience more interpersonal conflict at work, they display more undermining behaviors toward the spouse at home.

We expect that undermining one's spouse at home will impair both relational and personal well-being. For spouses who are undermined (e.g., being treated with anger and receiving criticism), their psychological needs for affection, belonging, and appreciation may remain unfulfilled. They also tend to perceive less warmth and support from their partner (Matthews et al., 1996). Consequently, they will have a less positive view of relationship quality. We further propose that such degrading behaviors may render spouses with a more negative view of themselves and lower self-worth, resulting in a more negative outlook on life. For employees who display undermining behaviors, the negative interpersonal interactions at home can bias their judgements and evaluations in congruent directions (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Matthews et al., 2006), such that they are more likely to perceive the marital relationship and life in general in a negative light and as less satisfactory. Taken together, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 5. On days when employees engage in more undermining behaviors at home, (a) the couple feels less satisfied with their relationship, (b) the employee feels less satisfied with life, and (c) the spouse feels less satisfied with life.

Hypothesis 6. There is a negative indirect effect of daily interpersonal conflict at work on (a) the couple's relationship satisfaction, (b) the employee's life satisfaction, and (c) the spouse's life satisfaction via undermining at home.

1.3. The spouse's responsiveness as a buffering factor

People often share their experiences with closely related individuals (Rimé, 2009). While receiving social support upon the disclosure of negative experiences can reduce the impact of negative events (Rimé et al., 1991) and keep employees from displaying anger at home after a stressful workday (Repetti, 1989), sharing negative experiences at work does not always yield its intended benefits (Maisel & Gable, 2009). We believe that how responsive the spouse is to the focal employee's disclosures plays a moderating role in the negative work-family spillover process. When spouses are responsive—that is, they are understanding, validating, and caring (Reis et al., 2004)—they can make distressed employees feel less anxious and more secure (Maisel & Gable, 2009). This should lead to a quicker recovery for distressed employees and provide them with resources to regulate impulsive and antisocial behaviors (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). In other words, when spouses are responsive to employees' attempts to share negative events at work, employees are less likely to be affected by the negative psychological consequences of interpersonal conflict at work, and thus are less likely to display undermining behaviors at home. In contrast, when spouses are not responsive to employees' sharing attempts, it may make distressed employees feel even more negative and frustrated as they receive little understanding or care from their spouse. This, in turn, will prompt distressed employees to act more aggressively toward the spouse. We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 7. The spouse's responsiveness to the employee's sharing of work experiences moderates the positive relationship between daily interpersonal conflict at work and undermining at home, such that this relationship is weaker on days with high levels of responsiveness compared to days with low levels of responsiveness.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and procedure

We recruited participants through contacts from a university in eastern China. A total of 113 couples (i.e., full-time employees and their spouses) registered for this study. Data were collected via online surveys hosted by www.wjx.cn¹ as part of a larger study on linkages between work and family. First, participants filled out a baseline online survey that asked them to report demographic information. One week later, couples responded to daily online surveys for ten consecutive working days. Employees completed a survey from work in the midafternoon and a home survey in the evening. Spouses completed one home survey in the evening. Each daily online survey was followed up by two reminders if necessary to increase compliance rates. After excluding couples who responded on two days or less, and those who did not follow the procedure (e.g., responded to the surveys in a wrong sequence), we retained 567 matched day-couple observations (50.1 % compliance rate), from 70 couples. Among the participants, 44 % of employees were women. Participants indicated their age using six ranges (coded as 1 through 6): under 25 years, 26–30 years, 31–35 years, 36–40 years, 41–45 years, and 46 years and above. The mean of the age variable was 2.69 ($SD = 1.02$) for employees and 2.62 ($SD = 0.95$) for spouses.

2.2. Measures

A research assistant first translated all survey measures from English into Chinese. One author then independently back-translated the Chinese version of the measures into English for consistency checks (Brislin, 1980). To keep the surveys manageable and avoid

¹ This platform is equivalent to Qualtrics but is more popular among a Chinese audience.

participant fatigue, we used shortened versions of some measures (see Ohly et al., 2010). To keep the home surveys brief for both partners, the employee rated three constructs and the spouse rated four constructs at home.²

2.2.1. Help provision at work (rated by employees in the work survey)

We measured employees' help provision at work using the organizational citizenship behavior toward individuals (OCB-I) scale developed by Lee and Allen (2002). We selected five items from the original scale. Employees indicated the extent to which they engaged in the following behaviors on that workday: "willingly gave your time to help others who had work-related problems," "adjusted your work schedule to accommodate other employees' needs," "showed genuine concern and courtesy toward coworkers," "gave up time to help others who had work or nonwork problems," and "assisted others with their duties." Answers were recorded on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The average reliability across 10 days was 0.89.

2.2.2. Support provision at home (rated by spouses in the home survey)

We assessed employees' support provision to the spouse using their spouse's report on support receipt. We selected six items from the social support scale developed by Vinokur et al. (1996). The spouse indicated the extent to which employees "listened to you when you needed to talk," "showed that he/she cares about you as a person," "understood the way you think and feel about things," "helped you understand and sort things out when you were troubled by something," "provided you with direct help," and "made you feel you could rely on him/her." Answers were recorded using a five-point scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *very much*). The average reliability across 10 days was 0.95.

2.2.3. Interpersonal conflict at work (rated by employees in the work survey)

We measured interpersonal conflict at work using the four-item scale developed by Spector and Jex (1998). Employees assessed their interactions with others at work using a five-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*). Sample items include "Today, how often did you get into arguments with others at work?" and "Today, how often were people rude to you at work?" The average reliability across 10 days was 0.82.

2.2.4. Undermining at home (rated by employees in the home survey)

We measured undermining behaviors at home using the scale developed by Vinokur et al. (1996). We selected five items from this seven-item scale. Employees indicated the extent to which they displayed the following behaviors toward their spouse using a five-point scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *very much*): "acted in an unpleasant or angry manner toward your partner," "acted in ways that show you dislike your partner," "made your partner feel unwanted," "got on your partner's nerves," and "criticized your partner." The average reliability across 10 days was 0.91.

2.2.5. Spouse's responsiveness (rated by spouses in the home survey)

We measured the spouse's responsiveness using the responsiveness scale developed by Maisel and Gable (2009). Spouses were asked to indicate their agreement to three statements regarding what they said or did when their partner shared their negative work events or experiences of that day with them. The items started with "Today, when my partner told me about bad things happening at his/her work ..." and then assessed the spouse's response: "I tried to understand my partner," "I tried to value his/her abilities and opinions," and "I tried to make my partner feel cared for." Answers were recorded on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The average reliability across 10 days was 0.95.

2.2.6. Couple's relationship satisfaction (rated by both employees and spouses in the home survey)

We measured the couple's relationship satisfaction using the five-item Quality Marriage Index developed by Norton (1983). Employees and spouses independently evaluated their satisfaction with the relationship by indicating their agreement to the given statements on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include "I feel that we have a good relationship" and "I feel that our relationship is strong." We then created a couple-level variable by taking the average of employee-rated and spouse-rated relationship satisfaction. In support of such aggregation, employees and their spouse highly agreed upon their satisfaction with the relationship at the within-individual level ($r_{wg} = 0.85$). Much of the total variance in both members' ratings of couple satisfaction was between-couple (ICC1 = 0.54, ICC2 = 0.73).

2.2.7. Life satisfaction (rated by both employees and spouses in the home survey)

We measured life satisfaction using the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985). Employees and spouses independently evaluated satisfaction with their own lives at that particular moment by indicating their agreement to the given statements on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal" and "I am satisfied with my life." The average reliability across 10 days was 0.93 for employees and 0.92 for spouses.

2.2.8. Control variables

At the within-individual level, we controlled for employees' positive and negative affect because they may influence employees'

² We explore possible implications and limitations stemming from this decision in the Discussion section.

behaviors at work and at home. Also, although affective and behavioral spillover are thought of as distinct processes (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lambert, 1990), these processes are not independent; and affect has consistent effects on behaviors such as helping through a variety of mechanisms (Carlson et al., 1988). For example, on days when employees experience high positive affect, they are more likely to enact helping behaviors at work (George, 1991) and provide support to their spouse at home (Lin et al., 2017). Similarly, on days when they experience high negative affect, employees may be more likely to get involved in interpersonal conflict at work and engage in undermining behaviors at home. Controlling for positive and negative affect enables us to test the proposed behavioral spillover processes above and beyond the well-documented effects of emotions (e.g., Culbertson et al., 2012; Williams & Alliger, 1994).³ We measured employees' positive and negative affect in the work survey using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule – Expanded Form (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994). Employees indicated the extent to which they felt particular emotions (e.g., “interested” and “upset”) at that moment using a five-point scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *very much*). At the between-individual level, we controlled for the effects of employees' age and gender.

2.3. Analytic strategy

We used multilevel modeling to account for the nested nature of the data (i.e., daily observations nested within individuals). This approach allows us to “simultaneously model intra- and interindividual relationships among the variables and parameters of interest” (Ilies et al., 2011, p. 53). Specifically, we conducted multilevel path analyses in Mplus 7.4, in which we specified paths among the study variables in a holistic model and implemented a simultaneous test of all hypotheses (see Ilies et al., 2017 for an example). A statistically significant path coefficient would provide support for the corresponding association between constructs. As we examined mediated relationships, we adopted a listwise deletion approach. To test the hypotheses involving mediations and moderated mediations, we followed Bauer et al. (2006) and calculated indirect effects and conditional indirect effects of “lower-level mediation” or “1-1-1 mediation” models. We used a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to conduct parametric bootstrapping (Preacher et al., 2010) and compute bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) for the indirect effects and conditional indirect effects. A 95 % CI excluding zero suggests a significant indirect effect.

In the multilevel path analyses, we specified random intercepts and fixed slopes across individuals (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) because the aggregated values of within-individual variables (e.g., average help provision at work across days) would likely vary across individuals, while our theorization does not concern any between-individual differences in the strength of the hypothesized within-individual relationships (e.g., the relationship between help provision at work and support provision at home). In addition, all predictors (i.e., the independent variables, the moderator, and the mediators) were centered relative to each individual's mean (i.e., group-mean centering; Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). This approach eliminates between-individual variance, so that our analyses strictly reflect within-individual relationships. Finally, we allowed the end outcomes (i.e., couple relationship satisfaction, employee life satisfaction, and spouse life satisfaction) to covary, as these variables are conceptually linked.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Before testing the hypotheses, we examined whether there was substantial within-individual variance for the focal variables in this study. To do so, we specified a null multilevel model (i.e., without any predictors) and obtained the variance at the within- and between-individual level for each variable. Table 1 presents the variance at both levels and the percentage of within-individual variance. As illustrated in Table 1, the percentage of within-individual variance for the study variables ranged from 21 % to 64 %, indicating that there was considerable within-individual variance for all variables.

Table 2 summarizes means, standard deviations, and within- and between-individual bivariate correlations. At the within-individual level, help provision at work was positively correlated with support provision at home ($r = 0.13, p < .01$), providing preliminary support for Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, support provision at home was positively correlated with couple relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.46, p < .01$), employee life satisfaction ($r = 0.19, p < .01$), and spouse life satisfaction ($r = 0.43, p < .01$). Hence, Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c also received preliminary support. As preliminary evidence for Hypothesis 4, interpersonal conflict at work was positively correlated with undermining at home ($r = 0.10, p < .05$). Finally, undermining at home was negatively correlated with couple relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.32, p < .01$), employee life satisfaction ($r = -0.19, p < .01$), and spouse life satisfaction ($r = -0.09, p < .01$), providing preliminary support for Hypotheses 5a, 5b, and 5c.

3.2. Hypothesis testing

Fig. 1 presents the hypothesized path model that we tested as well as the path-analytic results. Table 3 summarizes the findings concerning indirect effects and conditional indirect effects (i.e., moderated mediations).

Hypotheses 1 through 3 delineate a positive behavioral spillover-crossover process at the work-family interface. Hypothesis 1 posits that on days when employees provide more help at work, they provide more support to their spouse at home. There was indeed a

³ If we remove positive and negative affect as control variables (see Spector & Brannick, 2011), the results remain substantially the same (in terms of statistical significance).

Table 1

Within-individual variance and between-individual variance of study variables.

Variables	Within-individual variance	Between-individual variance	% within-individual variance
Helping at work	0.39	0.58	40 %
Interpersonal conflict at work	0.16	0.09	64 %
Spouse's responsiveness	0.38	0.34	53 %
Support provision at home	0.46	0.52	47 %
Undermining at home	0.26	0.20	57 %
Couple's relationship satisfaction	0.61	1.81	25 %
Employee's life satisfaction	0.22	0.84	21 %
Spouse's life satisfaction	0.20	0.77	21 %

positive relationship between helping at work and support provision to the spouse at home ($\beta = 0.10, p = .027$). Thus, [Hypothesis 1](#) received support. Support provision to the spouse at home was positively associated with the couple's relationship satisfaction ($\beta = 0.40, p < .001$), the employee's life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.19, p < .001$), and the spouse's life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.40, p < .001$), providing support for Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c, respectively. Furthermore, the indirect effects of help provision at work on the couple's relationship satisfaction, the employee's life satisfaction, and the spouse's life satisfaction via spousal support provision at home were all positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.053, 95 % CI = [0.006, 0.109], for couple relationship satisfaction; indirect effect = 0.014, 95 % CI = [0.001, 0.032], for employee life satisfaction; indirect effect = 0.031, 95 % CI = [0.003, 0.066], for spouse life satisfaction). Hence, Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c were also supported.

Hypotheses 4 through 6 describe a negative behavioral spillover-crossover process at the work-family interface. [Hypothesis 4](#) predicts that on days when employees experience interpersonal conflict at work, they display more undermining behaviors at home. As shown in [Fig. 1](#), interpersonal conflict at work was positively and significantly related to undermining behaviors toward the spouse at home ($\beta = 0.11, p = .048$). Thus, [Hypothesis 4](#) received support. In line with Hypotheses 5a and 5b, undermining the spouse at home was negatively associated with the couple's relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.25, p < .001$) and the employee's life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.17, p < .001$). However, undermining was not associated with the spouse's life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.03, p = .360$). Therefore, Hypotheses 5a and 5b, but not Hypothesis 5c, were supported. The indirect effects of interpersonal conflict at work on the couple's relationship satisfaction and the employee's life satisfaction via undermining at home were both negative and significant (indirect effect = -0.057 , 95 % CI = $[-0.119, -0.009]$, for couple relationship satisfaction; indirect effect = -0.024 , 95 % CI = $[-0.053, -0.003]$, for employee life satisfaction), thus supporting Hypotheses 6a and 6b. In contrast, the indirect effect of interpersonal conflict at work on the spouse's life satisfaction was nonsignificant (indirect effect = -0.003 , 95 % CI = $[-0.013, 0.005]$). Therefore, Hypothesis 6c received no support.

Lastly, [Hypothesis 7](#) proposes that the spouse's responsiveness weakens the positive relationship between experiencing interpersonal conflict at work and showing undermining behaviors toward the spouse at home. The interactive effect of interpersonal conflict at work and the spouse's responsiveness on undermining at home was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.08, p = .009$). Simple slopes analysis (see [Fig. 2](#) for a visual depiction) further revealed that the relationship between interpersonal conflict at work and undermining at home was positive and significant when the spouse's responsiveness was low (simple slope = 0.18, $p = .024$), while nonsignificant when responsiveness was high (simple slope = 0.09, $p = .113$). In line with the significance of the interactive effect, the difference in simple slopes was significant (difference = 0.09, $p = .007$). Therefore, [Hypothesis 7](#) was supported.

While not formally hypothesized, we also tested for conditional indirect effects on the three outcomes in our model. The indirect effect of interpersonal conflict at work on the couple's relationship satisfaction via undermining at home was negative and significant when the spouse's responsiveness was low (conditional indirect effect = -0.074 , 95 % CI = $[-0.154, -0.009]$), while nonsignificant on days when the spouse's responsiveness was high (conditional indirect effect = -0.037 , 95 % CI = $[-0.093, 0.011]$; difference in conditional indirect effects = 0.037, 95 % CI = $[0.011, 0.068]$). Similarly, the indirect effect of interpersonal conflict at work on the employee's life satisfaction via undermining at home was negative and significant when the spouse's responsiveness was low (conditional indirect effect = -0.031 , 95 % CI = $[-0.068, -0.003]$), while nonsignificant when the spouse's responsiveness was high (conditional indirect effect = -0.015 , 95 % CI = $[-0.042, 0.005]$; difference in conditional indirect effects = 0.016, 95 % CI = $[0.004, 0.031]$). In contrast, the indirect effect of interpersonal conflict at work on the spouse's life satisfaction via undermining at home was nonsignificant regardless of whether the spouse's responsiveness was high (conditional indirect effect = -0.006 , 95 % CI = $[-0.020, 0.005]$) or low (conditional indirect effect = -0.003 , 95 % CI = $[-0.012, 0.003]$; difference in conditional indirect effects = 0.003, 95 % CI = $[-0.009, 0.003]$).

4. Discussion

Much research effort has been directed toward understanding in what ways employees may bring home their work experiences and how these work experiences may affect employees' family life, both for themselves and for their family members (e.g., [Pluut et al., 2022](#); [Repetti et al., 2009](#); [Wagner et al., 2014](#)). Key to this stream of research are the phenomena of spillover and crossover—two different processes whereby work experiences of employees influence their own emotions, attitudes, and behaviors as well as the emotions, attitudes, and behaviors of their spouse (or other family members) at home. These processes at the work-family interface can manifest at the day-to-day level, affecting daily family life.

In this dyadic daily study, we drew on the spillover-crossover model ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2013](#)) to investigate the impact of help

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables.

Variables	Mean	SD _W	SD _B	Correlations											
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Positive affect	3.34	0.48	0.74		−0.02	0.47**	0.07	0.00	0.04	0.06	0.08	0.23*	−0.02	−0.13	0.00
2. Negative affect	4.49	0.33	0.50	0.03		−0.24*	0.46**	−0.03	−0.05	0.45**	−0.24*	−0.49**	−0.12	0.01	0.13
3. Helping at work	2.57	0.62	0.76	0.35**	0.04		−0.01	−0.07	−0.02	0.05	0.10	0.31**	0.00	−0.07	0.01
4. Interpersonal conflict at work	4.74	0.40	0.30	−0.05	0.24**	0.00		0.09	0.02	0.61**	−0.12	−0.18	−0.16	0.12	0.14
5. Spouse's responsiveness	1.79	0.62	0.58	0.02	0.09*	0.00	−0.07		0.81**	−0.19	0.62**	0.19	0.58**	0.15	0.15
6. Support provision at home	2.14	0.68	0.72	0.12*	0.06	0.13**	−0.04	0.46**		−0.26*	0.65**	0.27*	0.59**	0.17	0.25*
7. Undermining at home	4.58	0.51	0.45	−0.10*	0.08	−0.09*	0.10*	−0.13**	−0.15**		−0.36**	−0.31**	−0.27*	0.05	−0.11
8. Couple's relationship satisfaction	1.78	0.78	1.35	0.18**	0.08	0.16**	0.08	0.39**	0.46**	−0.32**		0.55**	0.67**	0.26*	−0.05
9. Employee's life satisfaction	3.07	0.47	0.92	0.13*	−0.05	0.14**	−0.03	0.12*	0.19**	−0.19**	0.31**		0.45**	0.00	−0.07
10. Spouse's life satisfaction	2.56	0.45	0.88	0.07	0.01	0.05	−0.01	0.37**	0.43**	−0.09*	0.43**	0.21**		−0.06	−0.04
11. Age	2.69	–	1.02	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–		−0.24*
12. Gender	1.44	–	0.50	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	

Note. Within-individual correlations are below the diagonal ($N = 567$); between-individual correlations are above the diagonal ($N = 70$). Means are between-individual descriptive statistics and SD_W and SD_B are standard deviations at the within-individual level and at the between-individual level, respectively. Employee gender was coded as 1 = men, 2 = women. Employee age was coded as 1 = under 25 years, 2 = 26–30 years, 3 = 31–35 years, 4 = 36–40 years, 5 = 41–45 years, 6 = 46 years and above.

* $p < .05$.

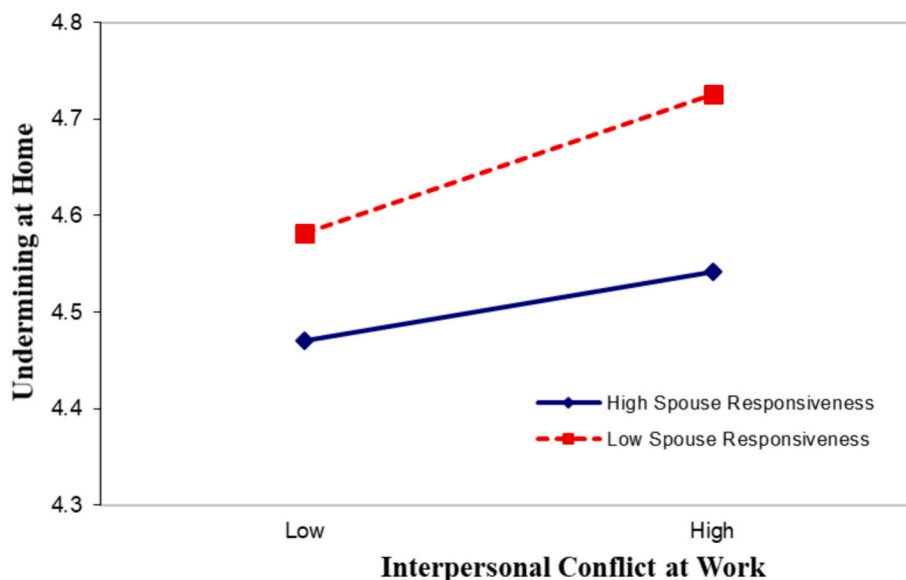
** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Summary of indirect effects and significant differences in conditional indirect effects.

Indirect effect	Estimate	95 % CI
Helping at work → support provision at home → couple's relationship satisfaction	0.053	[0.006, 0.109]
Helping at work → support provision at home → employee's life satisfaction	0.014	[0.001, 0.032]
Helping at work → support provision at home → spouse's life satisfaction	0.031	[0.003, 0.066]
Interpersonal conflict at work → undermining at home → couple's relationship satisfaction	−0.057	[−0.119, −0.009]
Conditional indirect effect when spouse's responsiveness is low	−0.074	[−0.154, −0.009]
Conditional indirect effect when spouse's responsiveness is high	−0.037	[−0.093, 0.011]
Difference in conditional indirect effects	0.037	[0.011, 0.068]
Interpersonal conflict at work → undermining at home → employee's life satisfaction	−0.024	[−0.053, −0.003]
Conditional indirect effect when spouse's responsiveness is low	−0.031	[−0.068, −0.003]
Conditional indirect effect when spouse's responsiveness is high	−0.015	[−0.042, 0.005]
Difference in conditional indirect effects	0.016	[0.004, 0.031]
Interpersonal conflict at work → undermining at home → spouse's life satisfaction	−0.003	[−0.013, 0.005]
Conditional indirect effect when spouse's responsiveness is low	−0.006	[−0.020, 0.005]
Conditional indirect effect when spouse's responsiveness is high	−0.003	[−0.012, 0.003]
Difference in conditional indirect effects	0.003	[−0.009, 0.003]

Note. CI = confidence interval.

**Fig. 2.** The moderating effect of spouse responsiveness.

provision and interpersonal conflict at work on family interactions and on personal and relational well-being. As a positive spillover-crossover process, we demonstrated that help provision at work indirectly and positively influences couples' relationship satisfaction, employees' life satisfaction and spouses' life satisfaction via support provision to the spouse at home. As a negative spillover-crossover process, we showed that interpersonal conflict at work indirectly and negatively influences couples' relationship satisfaction and employees' life satisfaction via undermining behaviors toward the spouse at home. This latter indirect negative relationship was mitigated by the spouse's responsiveness to employees' sharing of negative experiences at work. Notably, there was a lack of support for the hypothesized negative effects of interpersonal conflict at work and employees' undermining at home on spouses' life satisfaction. Previous work has found that people rely more on positive experiences than on negative experiences when forming life satisfaction judgements (Jovanović & Joshanloo, 2022). This may explain why we found a positive spillover-crossover effect of help and support provision but did not find a negative spillover-crossover effect of interpersonal conflict and undermining on spouses' life satisfaction.

4.1. Theoretical contributions

First, we contribute to work-family spillover theory (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) by focusing on the often-overlooked behavioral pathways that connect work and family. Researchers have proposed three pathways—attitude, behaviors, and moods—through which spillover between work and family occurs. Among these pathways, behavioral spillover remains largely understudied (Byron, 2005; McNall et al., 2010). By examining both positive behavioral spillover and negative behavioral

spillover from work to family, our study demonstrates that employees' behaviors at work significantly influence how they engage with significant others at home. In addition, our findings provide strong evidence that behavioral spillover occurs on a daily basis, which supports the theoretical discussion by [Edwards and Rothbard \(2000\)](#), who suggested the possibility of daily behavioral spillover but noted the lack of empirical support.

In our examination of behavioral spillover, we have focused specifically on interpersonal types of work behaviors and experiences. In doing so, we contribute to research on interpersonal models of the work-family interface (e.g., [Pluut et al., 2022](#)). Our findings show that providing help to co-workers is an interpersonal work behavior that triggers a positive spillover effect from work to family, while interpersonal conflict is a stressful work experience that triggers a negative spillover effect. However, we have not only demonstrated two parallel spillover processes, but we also add to the theoretical understanding of crossover effects whereby employees' behaviors and interpersonal experiences at work indirectly impact their spouse's well-being. By modeling marital behaviors—support provision and undermining at home—as outcomes of behavioral spillover and as starting points for crossover processes between spouses, we highlight the importance of marital behaviors as the “linking pin” between intraindividual spillover processes and interindividual crossover processes. Having identified marital behaviors as critical mediators for spillover-crossover processes, we add to the theoretical understanding as to *why* and *how* interpersonal work experiences exert their impact on personal and relational well-being.

In addition to illuminating the blurred nature of work-family boundaries, our study explains *when* behavioral spillover from work to family occurs. That is, a third contribution of our study lies in the examination of a boundary condition for the negative spillover-crossover effect of interpersonal conflict at work. Existing work on interpersonal models of the work-family interface has typically examined employees' dispositional characteristics as moderators (e.g., [Lin et al., 2017](#); [Pluut et al., 2022](#)). Our study shows that the quality of communication between spouses also matters. Specifically, when spouses are responsive to employees' sharing of negative work experiences by actively listening, providing empathy and offering validation, the negative spillover from work to family can be significantly reduced. Our findings thus underscore the need to examine interpersonal dynamics at home and specifically the critical role that spouses play.

All in all, we believe the findings from our study are indicative of blurred boundaries. First, interpersonal work behaviors and experiences influence behavioral dynamics between spouses at home, ultimately impacting the well-being of both. Second, sharing negative experiences and being responsive to disclosures influences the blurredness of work-family boundaries by buffering against the detrimental impact of interpersonal conflict at work on family life. We hope our study opens new avenues for work-family researchers and encourages further investigation into other specific types of work behaviors that may spill over to the family domain and their potential impacts on work, family, and personal outcomes.

4.2. Practical implications

Our results on both positive and negative spillover processes inform organizational practice regarding which negative work experiences to minimize and which positive work experiences to optimize in order to ultimately promote employee well-being in the family domain. First, our research highlights that a culture of helping can enhance the positive spillover effects from work to employees' family lives. Organizations can foster this culture by creating prosocial norms ([Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004](#); [Grant & Patil, 2012](#); [Li et al., 2014](#)), for instance through recognition programs that reward helping behaviors, but also by ensuring employees have high-quality exchange relationships with both the leader and coworkers ([Lin et al., 2024](#)) and by creating enriched jobs ([Grant, 2007](#); [Grant, 2008](#); [Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006](#)). Second, our research implies that organizations should consider providing training programs on conflict management ([Leon-Perez et al., 2016](#)) and, perhaps, mindfulness ([Kay & Skarlicki, 2020](#)) to mitigate the negative spillover effects of interpersonal conflict from work to family. By equipping employees with the necessary skills, such as collaborative problem-solving and emotion regulation ([Leon-Perez et al., 2016](#)), to manage interpersonal conflict at work effectively, employees can address such conflicts more constructively and bring home less stress. This, in turn, could positively influence their interactions with spouses at home.

Finally, our findings about the moderating role of spouse's responsiveness have practical implications for couples counseling. Negative work-family spillover can be contained if the employee shares stressful events at work and the spouse is responsive to the employee's concerns. Practitioners can utilize our insights to help couples develop better communication strategies and support mechanisms, namely how to actively listen, show understanding, and provide validation when discussing work-related issues at home. These skills can help couples build a supportive home environment, thereby enhancing their ability to cope with negative work experiences, reducing undermining behaviors at home, and strengthening their couple relationship.

4.3. Strength, limitations, and suggestions for future research

This study has several strengths related to the theorizing and research design. First, we drew on the work-family spillover literature to conceptualize behavioral spillover as an ephemeral (daily) phenomenon. To test our proposed model, we adopted experience sampling methodology that allowed us to examine employees' daily experiences. Our data revealed that there was considerable within-individual variation in behaviors at work and at home (see [Table 1](#)), lending support to our approach of investigating behavioral spillover on a daily basis. Second, our research design involved data provided by two sources (i.e., employees and their significant others), which helped reduce threats associated with common source variance ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)). Furthermore, the repeated-measures design allowed us to model the within-individual relationships among the study variables, while partialling out between-individual differences that may confound the main and interactive effects.

Despite these strengths, our study has limitations that need to be discussed and may inform future research. The first limitation

relates to the unmeasured mechanisms explaining the behavioral spillover processes. We suggested that the positive broadening associated with help provision at work and the hostile attitudes associated with interpersonal conflict at work could facilitate behavioral spillover into the family domain. However, we did not measure these processes in our study. Although we developed our hypotheses based on established theories, future studies can shed light on these mechanisms by using direct assessments of explanatory phenomena.

A second limitation relates to the number of measurements per day. In line with spillover theory, our design incorporated measurements at work and at home. However, our spillover-crossover model (see Fig. 1) involves two causal steps, one by which work experiences influence marital behaviors and another by which marital behaviors influence well-being. The latter effects involve variables that are measured concurrently in the home survey and therefore do not warrant causal claims. As it is possible that life and relationship satisfaction are predictors of marital behaviors, future research should aim for three measurements per day and have proper temporal sequencing of the measurements in line with the spillover and crossover effects.

Another limitation relates to the sources from which we collected the data. We measured helping behaviors at work using employees' self-reports. Scholars have cautioned that self-ratings of helping behaviors in the workplace may be inflated (compared to other-ratings), as employees may over-report the extent to which they offer help for social desirability reasons (Allen et al., 2009). Similarly, employees may over-report desirable marital behaviors and under-report undesirable marital behaviors. In line with crossover theory, our design incorporated measurements from both partners. While one type of marital behavior was self-rated (undermining), the other (support provision) was rated by the spouse. One-partner data, as we have for marital behaviors, are subject to reporting bias because spouses' perceptions of marital reality may differ (Szinovacz & Egley, 1995). We are not able to tell the extent to which the scores derived from one-partner data differ from scores that would have been based on couple data. We therefore suggest that future research measures both marital behaviors with couple data, as we did with relationship satisfaction. Moreover, although there is evidence showing that actors might be the best-informed source for behavioral ratings at work (Berry et al., 2012), future research can collect coworker or supervisor ratings of helping behaviors at work when investigating behavioral spillover effects.

Our measurement approach is also relevant in a discussion of the possible reasons for the lack of support for the hypothesized negative effect of undermining at home on the spouse's life satisfaction; it is possible that our use of different sources for measuring the employee's undermining behaviors at home (employee-rated) and the spouse's life satisfaction (spouse-rated) was responsible for this lack of support from the data, in the context of supportive behaviors being measured with spouse ratings. That is, although we did observe a significant zero-order correlation between undermining behavior and spouse's life satisfaction ($r = -0.09$, $p < .01$; see Table 1), there was no relationship among those constructs in the path model that included support behaviors likely because supportive behaviors had a much stronger relationship to spouse's life satisfaction ($r = 0.43$ vs -0.09) as they were both rated by spouses. Also on the topic of the sources of the ratings, unlike the support provision construct, which was rated by spouses, undermining was a marital behavior self-rated by employees, and it is thus possible that the relationship between undermining and the employee's life satisfaction is explained, at least in part, by common source variance. This is a limitation of our research design and emphasizes the need for collecting couple data on the behavioral mediators (support provision and undermining) in our model (i.e., ratings from both spouses, as we did with relationship satisfaction).

We have examined a moderator only for the negative spillover-crossover process, not for the positive spillover-crossover process. We are therefore not able to provide insights into the conditions under which positive behavioral spillover is more likely to occur. We urge future researchers to explore potential moderators for the spillover effect of helping behaviors at work. Helping others at work can sometimes be depleting (Bolino et al., 2015) and may not always be received favorably (Lee et al., 2023). Positive work-related conversations or interpersonal capitalization (Ilies et al., 2011; Tremmel et al., 2019), autonomous motivation (Zeijen et al., 2023), and received gratitude and perceived prosocial impact (Lee et al., 2019) may be factors that shed further light on the relationship between help provision at work and support provision at home.

Regarding moderators for the crossover effects, it is possible that the strength of the effects of employees' support provision and undermining at home on their spouse's life satisfaction depends on the spouse's own work experiences of the day or on other factors specific to the spouse and not the couple. Given that life satisfaction involves an evaluation of various life domains, such as marriage, job, and finance (Heller et al., 2004), spouses may be less affected by marital behaviors of employees at home if they are satisfied with other areas of their life. Unfortunately, we did not collect information about spouses' daily work experiences or other types of satisfaction. Future studies on behavioral spillover across the work-family interface are recommended to incorporate spouses' experiences and personal factors to explore boundary conditions. This may in particular shed light on the unsupported association between employees' undermining and their spouse's life satisfaction.

5. Conclusion

For many of us, a large portion of our time is spent at work. As the line between work and family becomes increasingly blurred with rising work expectations and technology, it is essential for us to understand how our work life affects us in the family domain. In the current research, we examined how positive and negative interpersonal work behaviors and experiences cross the work-family boundary and exert influence on employees' marital behaviors and subsequent well-being (spillover effects) and spouses' well-being (crossover effects). Our findings provide new insights into how experiences at work can enrich or interfere with family life through a behavioral lens. Our findings also highlight that the effects of experiences at work extend beyond the work context and employees themselves; work-family spillover influences, but is also dependent on, dynamics between partners at home.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Remus Ilies: Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Project administration. **Jingxian Yao:** Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Helen Pluut:** Writing – original draft, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Alyssa X. Liang:** Writing – original draft, Data curation. **Qingxiong (Derek) Weng:** Writing – original draft, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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