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Gender differences in the relationships between work-to-family conflict and satisfaction among dual-earner spouses

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how gender affects the relationships linking work-to-family conflict to job and life satisfaction among dual-earner spouses. Data were collected from 157 paired Chinese managers and their spouses. Our findings supported a pattern of gender asymmetry in both the within-person effect and the crossover effect. For the within-person effect, we found the relationship between work-to-family conflict and job satisfaction was negative for wives, but null for husbands, the relationship between work-to-family conflict and life satisfaction was negative for husbands, but null for wives. As for the crossover effect, husbands' work-to-family conflict was negatively related to wives' life satisfaction, but wives' work-to-family conflict had a null relationship with husbands' life satisfaction. Theoretical implication and future research directions are discussed.

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Work-to-family conflict; gender; resource depletion; source attribution; crossover effect

There is a tradition that explores gender differences in the work-family interface because gender associates with role prioritization between work and family roles (Eby et al., 2005; Leslie et al.,

both job and life satisfaction as the dependent variables of this study because job and life attitudes are quite important to both husbands and wives no matter in family life or work domain (Ford et al., 2007; Shockley & Singla, 2011; Staines et al., 1986). Work-family conflict occurs when role expectations from work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Studies have found that work-family conflict includes two directional aspects: work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict (Amstad et al., 2011; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Meta-analyses have found that high levels of bi-directional conflicts are detrimental to positive outcomes such as job and life satisfaction (Amstad et al., 2011; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Shockley & Singla, 2011). In this study, we focus on work-to-family conflict rather than family-to-work conflict because of the following two reasons. First, studies have found that work-to-family conflict was more likely to occur because work issues intrude into the family domain more readily than family issues into the work domain (Frone, 2003; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007). Second, compared with family-to-work conflict, organizations have more control over an employee's work role than family role and thus have more autonomy of using policy to reduce their employees' ave

World Bank provides data for China from 1990 to 2018. For the indicator, the average value for China during that period was 67.71 percent with a minimum of 61.26 percent in 2018 and a maximum of 73.2 percent in 1990 (World Economic Forum, 2020a). Although women's labor force participation rate in China is one of the highest in the world (Cooke, 2013), women still lack equal opportunities in politics and employment compared to men. Organizations were found to use gendered policies and practices favorable to men (Cooke, 2011; Cooke & Xiao, 2014). Evidence shows that female graduates have more difficulty in finding jobs (Cooke, 2013), women face more barriers in managerial jobs (Cooke, 2005), and the gender gap of highly paid workers is widening (Zhang et al., 2008). Women with paid jobs take on more family responsibilities disproportionately, even though most couples are dual earners (Zou & Bian, 2001). According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, China is ranked 106th out of 149 countries (World Economic Forum, 2020b), meaning that 70.5 percent of the countries studied had a smaller gap in education, health, economics, etc., between men and women than China did. In short, gender role expectations in China are changing, but the influence of gender role tradition still persists.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Gender role theory

Gender differences in the work-family research are commonly based on social role theory which posits that gender is expected to reflect role prioritization between work and family roles (Eby et al., 2005; Leslie et al., 2016). According to gender role theory, the division of labor along gender lines, in both work and family domains, institutionalizes gender role expectations in society (Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Gender role expectations prescribes that men are expected to be breadwinners and women be caregivers (Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2012).

The two mechanisms linking work-to-family conflict to satisfaction within a person

This study focuses on two dependent variables: life satisfaction and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to the degree to which an employee has a positive affective orientation to one's job (Locke, 1976). Life satisfaction refers to an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life (Diener et al., 1985). Studies posit that life satisfaction is a function of satisfaction in both work and family domains (Aryee et al., 1999; Rice et al., 1992). Because prior studies have consistently found such a relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction (e.g. Aryee et al., 1999; Rice et al., 1992), we do not propose a formal hypothesis for the relationship in this study.

Our literature review identifies two theoretical mechanisms that explain the linkage between an individual's work-to-family conflict and job/life satisfaction: the mechanism of source attribution explains why conflict from one domain influences individual outcomes within the same domain (Grandey et al., 2005; Shockley & Singla, 2011; Zhang et al., 2012), and the mechanism of resource depletion explains why conflict from one

domain (e.g. work) influences individual outcomes in a second domain (e.g. family) (Frone et al.,

resources (e.g. time and energy) are limited, overwhelming demands from one domain exhaust one's resources, which makes it difficult to fulfill his or her role in other domain. Therefore, work-to-family conflict may cause the husband or wife to decrease the family role because they have limited resource, which in turn lowers life satisfaction. Studies also have found that work-to-family conflict is negatively related to family satisfaction and life satisfaction (Ford et al., 2007). Meanwhile, traditional gender role expectations shows that men are expected to be breadwinners and women be caregivers in China (Bowen et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2014). So for husbands, when work demands impede their family role, they tend to reduce their investment in the family role to make sure their limited resources are invested in the work role (Radcliffe & Cassell, 2015). In contrast, for wives, because their gender role focuses on family, when work demands impede their family role, they are less likely to reduce the investment in the family role. They may be more willing to reduce their investment in work and/or to use other approaches such as reducing their leisure time and mobilizing resources (e.g. hiring domestic helpers) (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007), and/or compensating the family on other occasions (Nicholas & McDowall, 2012). In short, work demands do not necessarily reduce their family investment (Radcliffe & Cassell, 2015). Consistent with our arguments, a recent study has found that the negative relationship between work-to-family conflict and perceived family accomplishment is stronger for male managers than for female managers (Zhao et al., 2019).

Satisfaction in both work and family domains are important in determining a person's life satisfaction (Aryee et al., 1999; Rice et al., 1992). According to identity theory (Stets & Serpe, 2013), a person is less likely to reap satisfaction from the domain in which he or she does not invest. Thus, a person is less likely to have family satisfaction if he or she invests less in the family domain, which in turn reduces his or her life satisfaction. Thus, guided by the mechanism of resource depletion and social role theory, we posit the hypotheses as follow. Note that our following hypotheses emphasize a controlling for job satisfaction because we need to rule out the possible influence originating from the mechanism of source appraisal.

Hypothesis 2a: There is a negative relationship between work-to-family conflict and life satisfaction for husbands after controlling for job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2b: The relationship between work-to-family conflict and job satisfaction is more strongly negative for husbands than for wives after controlling for job satisfaction.

Gender differences in the crossover effect between spouses

The crossover effect refers to the transmission of stress and strain from one member of a dyad to another (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013; Westman, 2001; Westman & Etzion, 2005). Unlike the mechanisms of source attribution and resource depletion, the crossover effect involves dyadic, interpersonal transmissions of stress and strain. Evidence shows that an individual's work-to-family conflict can increase his or her partner's family demands (Bakker et al., 2008).

Taking gender roles into account, we expect that the crossover effect works differently for husbands vs. wives. Husbands and wives are interdependent because they are in the same family system. According to Westman (2001)'s proposed processes,

we expect that one's strain can transmit to his or her spouse's well-being. However, we posit that there is gender asymmetry in the crossover effect when taking a gender role perspective. Specifically, the negative crossover effect is from husbands to wives, rather than from wives to husbands. When husbands experience high levels of work-to-family conflict, according to the mechanism of resource depletion, husbands tend to reduce their family investment. Because wives are more empathetic and are more sensitive to their spouses' stressful experiences (Westman, 2016) and socially prescribed to take the family role, husbands' reduction in the family role causes wives' increase in the family role. When wives are overwhelmed by the increased family role, they tend to have decreased life satisfaction. In contrast, when wives experience high levels of work-to-family conflict, they are less likely to reduce their family role, and their husbands are less likely to increase their family role (Radcliffe & Cassell, 2015).

Hypothesis 3a: There is a negative relationship between a husband's work-to-family conflict and his wife's life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b: The relationship between a husband's work-to-family conflict and his wife's life satisfaction is more strongly negative than that between a wife's work-to-family conflict and her husband's life satisfaction.

The emotional relatedness in close relationships and the share of positive and negative events likely results in a positive crossover effect between husbands' and wives' life satisfaction. Although earlier crossover effect studies largely concern negative events, mood, stress and strain (Westman, 2001), a growing body of recent studies has found contagion of positive experiences is also common (Bakker et al., 2009; Carlson et al., 2011). Demerouti et al. (2005) found that men's life satisfaction consequently predicted their partner's level of life satisfaction. Thus, we expect a direct and positive relationship between husbands' and wives' life satisfaction, that is, a husband's life satisfaction is positively related to his wife's life satisfaction. Because this expectation is a replication of Demerouti et al. (2005) and not the focus of our study, we do not propose a formal hypothesis.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships proposed in our hypotheses.

Method

Sample and procedures

Samples in the study consisted of managers that participated in training programs at a university in Beijing, China from 2014 to 2015. The authors gave training courses to the managers. During the break of the courses, the authors solicited trainee's participation with no monetary incentives. We explained the purpose of this study to trainees and solicited trainees whose spouse also had full-time or part-time paid jobs to participate in the survey. Before we sent our online questionnaire, we empathized in the description part that it was an academic research, all the participation in our study was voluntary, and we kept their responses confidential. The participants could only enter the questionnaire system after choosing the option of informed consent. For those who agreed participation, we asked them to report their demographic variables, perceived work-to-family

The hypothesized paths

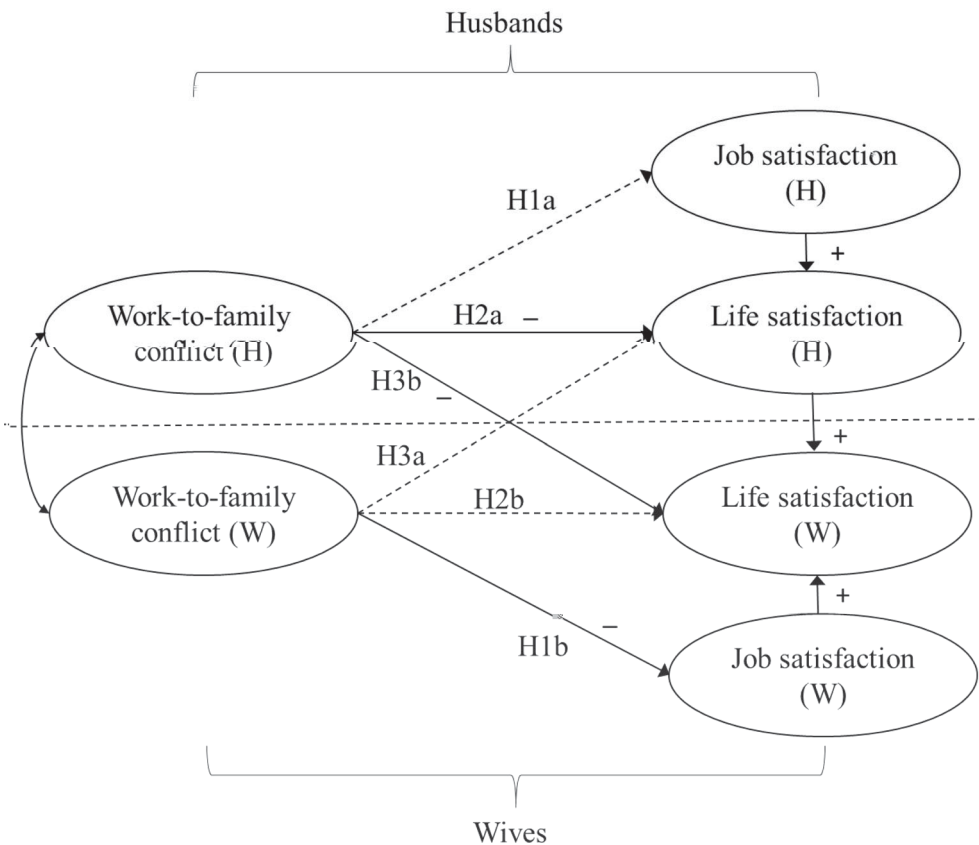


Figure 1. The hypothesized paths. Note. H = husbands; W = wives; The upper half is husbands' work-to-family conflict and satisfaction; the lower half is wives' work-to-family conflict. The solid lines mean statistically significant correlations. The dotted lines mean null or weak correlations. The dash (-) signifies a negative relationship; the plus sign (+) signifies a positive relationship.

conflict, job satisfaction and life satisfaction using online questionnaires during the breaks in their courses. Then, we asked each trainee to invite his or her spouse to complete an online questionnaire and reply within one week. We asked each trainee and his/her spouse to write down the last five digits of the trainee's cellphone number to ensure matched questionnaires.

367 trainees completed and submitted the questionnaires. 76.84% were men. We collected 192 spouse questionnaires, representing a 57.83% response rate. We used the five digits trainees and the spouses wrote down in questionnaires to match the responses from trainees and their spouses. No repeated numbers were found. After matching the cases, we had a final sample comprised 157 pairs of husband-wife dyads. The husbands' average age was 38.15 years ($SD = 5.78$); their wives' average age was 35.95 ($SD = 6.88$). The husbands worked for 45.41 h per week ($SD = 12.67$) on average; that of their wives was 41.35 h per week ($SD = 14.96$). The husbands' average housework hours was 13.21

h per week ($SD = 11.20$); that of their wives was 27.25 h per week ($SD = 19.87$). Hierarchical rank in organizations (3 = top level, 2 = middle level, 1 = entry level) was 2.12 ($SD = .56$) for husbands and 1.48 ($SD = .61$) for wives. Their marriage time was 8.82 years ($SD = 5.89$) on average.

Measures

The variables were measured with well-established scales. They were developed in English, and we translated them to Chinese following the process of back translation (Brislin et al., 1973). All the variables in our model ranged from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 6 ('strongly agree').

Work-to-family conflict

We adapted the 4-item scale from Netemeyer et al. (1996) to measure work-to-family conflict. The Cronbach α in Netemeyer et al. (1996) is 0.88, 0.89, 0.88 for three samples. The included items were 'The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities', 'Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me', 'My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill my family duties' and 'Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities'. The Cronbach α in this study was .91 for husbands and .89 for wives.

Job satisfaction

We adapted the 3-item scale from Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) scale to measure job satisfaction. The Cronbach α is 0.87 in Brayfield and Rothe's study in 1951 and 0.83 in Aryee, Fields & Luk's study in 1999. The included items were 'I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job', 'Most days, I am enthusiastic about my job' and 'I am seldom bored with my job'. The Cronbach α in this study was .75 for husbands and .76 for wives.

Life satisfaction

We adapted the 4-item scale from Diener et al.'s (1985) to measure life satisfaction. The Cronbach α in Diener et al.'s (1985) is 0.87 in the study. The included items were 'In most ways my life is close to my ideal', 'I am satisfied with my life', 'So far I have gotten the important things I want in life' and 'If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing'. The Cronbach α in the current study was .82 for husbands and .79 for wives.

Control variables

The control variables for both husbands and wives included age, marriage time, average work hours per week and average housework hours per week which were measured continuously. We also controlled hierarchical rank in organizations. We controlled age and marriage time because studies have found age and marital status are predictors of life satisfaction (Choi, 2008; Diener et al., 2002; Near et al., 1984; Zhang et al., 2012). We controlled average work hours per week, average housework hours per week, and hierarchical rank in organizations because we aim to rule out their potential influences on life and job satisfaction (Choi, 2008; Zhao et al., 2019). Marriage time was highly

correlated with both husbands' age ($r = .82$) and wives' age ($r = .79$), therefore, to avoid the problem of multicollinearity, we excluded it when testing models. Because husbands' age and wives' age were highly correlated ($r = .79$), we used husbands' age as the control variable and excluded wives' age when testing structural equation models.

Data analyses

We used STATA 20.0 to calculate descriptive statistics and simple correlations, and Mplus 8.0 to conduct a series of confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modeling tests. Because our model hypothesizes how one's work-to-family conflict relates to his or her spouse's life satisfaction, the model is an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). APIM is an analytic strategy that deals with non-independence in dyadic data and allows for simultaneously testing both actor and partner effects (Kenny et al., 2006). In our model, the actor effect refers to relationship between work-to-family and job/life satisfaction for husbands and wives respectively, and the partner effect refers to the relationship between a focal person's work-to-family conflict and his or her spouse's life satisfaction. Because of the non-independence characteristics in dyadic data, we set correlates between the same variables measured for husbands and wives in the Mplus syntax. Following the recommendations by Bollen and Long (1993) as well as Hu and Bentler (1998, 1999), we used multiple fit indices to examine the measurement model, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). CFI and TLI surpassing .90 indicate good fit, and values equal to or exceeding .95 signal excellent fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998). SRMR less than .08 indicates a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). RMSEA less than or equal to .05 signals close fit; values between .05 and .08 indicate a reasonable fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

To assess the potential problem of common source bias, we took two approaches recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). First, we conducted a Harman one-factor test for husbands and wives respectively. The single-factor measurement model had poor fit indices for husbands ($\chi^2 = 469.02$; $df = 44$; $RMSEA = .25$; $CFI = .45$; $TLI = .32$; $SRMR = .17$) and wives ($\chi^2 = 392.96$; $df = 44$; $RMSEA = .23$; $CFI = .52$; $TLI = .40$; $SRMR = .18$), indicating that same source bias might not be a serious problem. Second, we added an artificial common source factor into the measurement model with all items loading on it. The measurement model had a result of moderate fit indices for husbands ($\chi^2 = 89.52$; $df = 41$; $RMSEA = .09$; $CFI = .95$; $TLI = .93$; $SRMR = .08$) and for wives ($\chi^2 = 118.14$; $df = 41$; $RMSEA = .11$; $CFI = .91$; $TLI = .88$; $SRMR = .09$). As for the revised model that added a common source factor to the measurement model, the fit indices were also acceptable for husbands ($\chi^2 = 85.04$; $df = 40$; $RMSEA = .09$; $CFI = .95$; $TLI = .93$; $SRMR = .07$) and wives ($\chi^2 = 110.64$; $df = 40$; $RMSEA = .11$; $CFI = .92$; $TLI = .89$; $SRMR = .09$). Although the chi-square decrease for husbands ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.48$, $\Delta df = 1$) and wives ($\Delta\chi^2 = 7.50$, $\Delta df = 1$) were both statistically significant ($p < .05$), the variance extracted by the common source factor was .14 for husbands and .14 for wives, falling below the .50 cutoff, indicating the existence of a latent factor representing the manifest indicators (Dulac et al., 2008). The results confirmed that common source bias was not a serious problem in this study.

To test if there are gender di

corresponding path estimates equal for both husbands and wives. Differences exist when the change in Chi-square is statistically significant.

Results

Descriptive information and bivariate correlations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, reliabilities of Cronbach's alphas, and bivariate correlations. To better understand the sample characteristics, we compared the mean differences of variables between husbands and wives using paired sample t-tests. The results showed that husbands spent more hours on average in paid work per week than wives ($t = 2.67, p < .01$), and wives spent more time on housework, compared with their husbands ($t = -8.28, p < .001$). Husbands' rank in their organizations were higher than their wives' rank ($t = -9.49, p < .001$). Husbands reported higher levels of work-to-family conflict ($t = 5.15, p < .001$) than their wives reported.

Hypotheses testing

We tested our hypothesized model with APIM. The fit indices demonstrated a good fit ($\chi^2 = 364.49$; $df = 194$; $\chi^2/df = 1.88$; RMSEA = .08; CFI = .89; TLI = .87; SRMR = .09). Figure 2 shows the path estimates.

The results showed the relationship between work-to-family conflict and job satisfaction was different for husbands and wives. For wives, work-to-family conflict was negatively related to job satisfaction ($b = -.25, SE = .09, p < .01$), whereas there was a null relationship for husbands, so Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. After constraining the corresponding path estimates equally, we found the change in Chi-square was marginally significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.77, \Delta df = 1, p < .1$). The results support our Hypothesis 1c, though the support is weak.

The result showed the relationship between work-to-family conflict and life satisfaction was different for husbands and wives. For husbands, after job satisfaction was controlled, work-to-family conflict was negatively related to life satisfaction ($b = -.13, SE = .05, p < .05$), whereas there was a null relationship for wives. Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported. After constraining the corresponding path estimates equally, we found the change in Chi-square was not statistically significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.49, \Delta df = 1, n.s.$). Therefore, although we found that the relationship between work-to-family conflict and life satisfaction was different for husbands and wives, we did not find that the relationship was more negative for husbands than for wives, Hypothesis 2c was not supported.

As we anticipated, the relationship between an individual's work-to-family conflict and his or her spouse's life satisfaction was different for husbands and wives. There was a negative relationship between a husband's work-to-family conflict and his wife's life satisfaction ($b = -.16, SE = .06, p < .05$) whereas there was a null relationship between a wife's work-to-family conflict and her husband's life satisfaction, so Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported. After constraining the corresponding path estimates equally, we found the change in Chi-square was statistically significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 7.72, \Delta df = 1, p < .01$). The finding supported our Hypothesis 3c that the relationship is more strongly negative when the crossover is from husbands to wives.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and simple correlations.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
<i>Husbands</i>															
1. Age, H															
2. Work Hours, H	-.06														
3. Housework Hours, H	-.11	-0.12													
4. Hierarchical Ranks, H	-.13	-.29**	.19*												
5. Married Time	.82**	-.01	-.15	-.12											
6. Work-to-family Conflict, H	.01	.25**	-.33**	-.05	-.05	(.91)									
7. Job Satisfaction, H	.01	.08	-.10	-.01	-.01	.00	(.75)								
8. Life Satisfaction, H	.04	-.10	.03	.09	.17	-.21**	.35**	(.82)							
<i>Wives</i>															
9. Age, W	.79**	-.10	-.03	-.05	.79**	-.04	.02	.10							
10. Work Hours, W	-.05	.07	.02	.04	.12	-.09	.12	.16*	.01						
11. Housework Hours, W	-.03	.00	.17*	.05	.10	.05	.02	-.05	.05	.04					
12. Hierarchical Ranks, W	.06	.08	-.07	.27**	.13	.08	.02	.16*	.03	-.02	-.15				
13. Work-to-family Conflict, W	.02	-.03	-.12	.06	.00	.12	.12	.06	.00	.27**	-.22**	.11	(.89)		
14. Job Satisfaction, W	.03	-.04	.13	.03	.05	-.03	.21**	.13	.09	-.05	.11	.01	-.12	(.76)	
15. Life Satisfaction, W	.06	-.07	.09	-.06	.06	-.25**	.17*	.22**	.16*	.11	.10	-.02	-.15	.42**	(.79)
Mean	38.15	45.41	13.21	2.12	8.82	3.56	4.10	3.77	35.95	41.35	27.25	1.48	2.95	3.80	3.89
SD	5.78	12.68	11.20	0.56	5.90	1.19	0.85	0.90	6.88	14.96	19.87	0.61	1.04	0.88	0.78

Notes. $n = 157$ couples. H = husbands; W = wives; Work hours = average paid work hours per week; Housework hours = average housework hours per week. The numbers in parentheses on the diagonal of the table are Cronbach's alpha estimates.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Additional analyses

We also tested whether husbands and wives allocate their time on the work and the family in a different pattern. We found no difference in average paid work hours per week between husbands and wives, but there is a difference in average housework hours per week between husbands and wives ($t = -8.28$, $p < .001$). Specifically, wives spent 27 h on housework whereas husbands spent 13 h on housework. Consistent with arguments we used for proposing hypotheses based on the mechanism of resource depletion, the findings suggest that wives face a greater challenge in balancing their work and family roles than their husband do.

According to Westman et al. (2009), when testing crossover effect between spouses, it is critical to clarify whether traditional gender role expectations (i.e. husbands as breadwinners and wives as caregivers) are prevalent in the samples. Because when wives earn more or have higher social status than husbands, husbands may take on more

family demands, which is not consistent with the arguments we used in proposing gender asymmetrical hypotheses. To explore such possibility, we tested if relative rank moderates the relationship between a focal person's work-to-family conflict and his or her spouse's life satisfaction. We coined relative rank by scoring it as one when a wife's organizational rank is higher than or equals to her husband and scoring it as zero when a wife's organizational rank is lower than her husband. We also did robust check by computing relative rank as one when a wife's organizational rank is higher than her husband and computing it as zero when a wife's organizational rank is lower than or equals to her husband. We did not find any moderating effect.

Discussion

Theoretical implications

Prior studies have postulated that gender issues are intricately related to the work-family interface (e.g. Eby et al., 2005; Pleck, 1977; Westman et al., 2009). Our study provides evidence of gender differences in the relationships linking work-to-family conflict and satisfaction among dual-earner spouses. Specifically, our study contributes to the literature in the following ways.

First, our study finds gender differences in the mechanism of source attribution for dual-earner spouses. Although studies have explored gender's moderating role in the relationships between work-family conflict and individual outcomes, there is a lack of consensus in the findings (e.g. Bagger et al., 2008; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; McElwain et al., 2005; Pleck, 1977), reflecting the absence of an adequate mechanism for explaining the relationships. In this study, we based our Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c on the mechanism of source attribution (e.g. Shockley & Singla, 2011; Zhang et al., 2012). Our study is the first proposing that gender affects how the mechanism of source attribution works when comparing husbands and wives. Guided by gender role theory, we found that the relationship between work-to-family conflict and job satisfaction was negative for wives, but was null for husbands. Consistent with prior studies (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Grandey et al., 2005; Shockley & Singla, 2011), this finding shows that wives, who tend to take more of the family role than their husbands, are more readily engaged in source attribution and experience negative attitudes towards the work role causing the interference.

Second, our study finds gender differences in the mechanism of resource depletion for dual-earner spouses. Guided by gender role theory and the mechanism of resource depletion, we found that the relationship between work-to-family conflict and life satisfaction was negative for husbands, but was null for wives. Consistent with Radcliffe and Cassell (2015), our finding suggests that husbands, who tend to take more of a work role than their wives, are more likely to reduce their family investment when they experience too many work demands; whereas, when wives experience too many work demands, they are less likely to reduce their family investment. Our additional data analyses showed that there is no difference in average paid work hours per week between husbands and wives, but there is a difference in average housework hours per week between husbands and wives ($t = -8.28, p < .001$). Specifically, wives spent 27 h on housework whereas husbands spent 13 h on housework.

Third, our study provides evidence of gender differences in the mechanism of cross-over effect between spouses. Prior studies have furnished adequate evidence supporting the transmission of positive and negative effects from one member of a dyad to another (e.g. Westman, 2001; Westman et al., 2013; Westman & Etzion, 2005). Our study showed that there is gender asymmetry in the relationship between an individual's work-to-family conflict and his or her spouse's life satisfaction. Specifically, the relationship between a husband's work-to-family conflict and his wife's life satisfaction was more strongly negative than that between a wife's work-to-family conflict and her husband's life satisfaction. Our finding suggests that wives are vulnerable to husbands' work-to-family conflict.

We found that the relationship between work-to-family conflict and job satisfaction is more strongly negative for wives than for husbands. However, we did not find that the relationship between work-to-family conflict and life satisfaction is more strongly negative for husbands than for wives after controlling for job satisfaction. It's may be because gender differences between husbands and wives are likely to be more prominent in nations emphasizing traditional gender roles than those with gender egalitarianism. Although traditional gender roles still persist in China, there is within-gender variation reflecting generational differences. Future research needs to take the within-gender variation into account. Gender role attitudes, defined as an individual's attitudes about how family and work roles do and should differ based on beliefs about gender in the society where he or she lives (Korabik et al., 2008), are likely to elaborate on gender differences with a gender group.

Practical implications and limitations

Our study has practical implications. Work-to-family conflict is negatively related to job satisfaction for wives, which suggests that companies and managers should pay attention to female employees' work-family issues, especially those in key positions. Managers can try to reduce the work-to-family conflict by providing flexible work practices such as job sharing, flexible time scheduling, and telecommuting. Although work-to-family conflict had a null relationship with job satisfaction for husbands in our research, work-to-family conflict experienced by male employees should not be neglected by management. In China, male employees endure high levels of work-to-family conflict because they expect that rewards (e.g. money, benefits, and social status) from work are instrumentally beneficial to their families (Zhang et al., 2014). If employees feel that their contributions are not recognized by rewards, they tend to be dissatisfied with their job. Thus, managers should pay attention to performance and compensation management for their employees.

A husband's work-to-family conflict was negatively related to his own and his wife's life satisfaction. For husbands, on the one hand, husbands should be aware of the impact to families and learn to adjust themselves to avoid bringing working issues or feeling into families. On the other hand, husbands shall make efforts to lower their work-to-family conflict. A study has found that life satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between the perception of family-supportive practices and work-related outcomes (job satisfaction, turnover intentions and job burnout) (Haar & Roche, 2010), suggesting that it is meaningful to improve or maintain employees' life

satisfaction by reducing work-to-family conflict. Meanwhile, wives should also need more understanding and inclusion, and try to solve them through communication or third party consultant rather than stimulating greater problems facing with husbands' work-to-family conflict.

Our study has limitations. First, we used cross-sectional data which prevents an investigation of causality in our model. In our study, the causality from work-family conflict to satisfaction is based on theory and prior research findings. Although most studies assume causality from work-family conflict to satisfaction, it is plausible that satisfaction could alter people's perception of their work-family conflict. For example, Kinnunen et al. (2004) found that for men, a low level of job satisfaction at Time 1 predicted work-to-family conflict perceived at Time 2. A recent meta-analytic study found a reciprocal relationship between work-to-family conflict and strain (Nohe et al., 2015). Future research could collect data at multiple times to unpack the causal relationships between work-family conflict and satisfaction.

Second, the cultural context may be an important factor for understanding the results we found in this study. A long tradition of Confucian culture encourages the Chinese to maintain traditional gender roles. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2020, an index that ranks countries based on gender equality published by the World Economic Forum, China has a 33.4 percent gap between men and women in education, health, politics, and economics. We suspect that there are contextual reasons at the macro-level for our gender asymmetry results. Our literature review showed that gender differences are often found in studies using samples from cultures with traditional gender values (e.g. Japan with a gender gap of 34.8 percent), and are less likely to be found in studies using samples from gender egalitarian cultures (e.g. Finland with gender gap of 16.8 percent). Future research is needed to check if the effect of gender asymmetry is likely to occur in collectivistic and gender traditional cultures rather than in individualistic and gender egalitarian cultures.

Third, because the current study focused on dual-earner spouses, the findings may not be generalized to couples in which only one partner works or couples who are cohabiting. Although we did not find the number of cohabiting couples in China, we expect the number is increasing with economic development and the change of gender ideology. Future studies can explore how gender play a role in the relationship between work-family conflict and satisfaction among other types of couples.

Conclusion

In this study, we test how gender work in the mechanisms linking work-to-family conflict to satisfaction among dual-earner spouses. Using dyadic data of spouses, we found that gender act as moderators in the mechanism of source attribution and that of resource depletion, suggesting that the extent to which these two mechanisms work relates to gender role in a couple. As for the crossover effect between a husband and his wife, we propose a gender asymmetrical effect. Specifically, we found that a husband's work-to-family conflict is negatively related to his wife's life satisfaction. The findings suggest companies and managers should pay proper attention to employees' family life and help them deal with the relationship between work and family. We hope this

study can stimulate more research exploring the gender differences in the work-family interface.

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