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Workaholism and Relationship Quality:  
A Spillover–Crossover Perspective

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## Abstract

This study among 168 dual-earner couples examined the relationship between workaholism and relationship satisfaction. More specifically, on the basis of the literature, it was hypothesized that workaholism is positively related to work-family conflict. In addition, we predicted that workaholism is related to reduced support provided to the partner, *through* work-family conflict, and that individuals who receive considerable support from their partners are more satisfied with their relationship. Finally, we hypothesized direct crossover of relationship satisfaction between partners. The results of structural equation modeling analyses using the matched responses of both partners supported these hypotheses. Moreover, in line with predictions, we found that gender did not affect the strength of the relationships in the proposed model. We discuss workplace interventions as possible ways to help workaholics and their partners.

*Keywords:* Crossover, Relationship Satisfaction, Workaholism, Work-family conflict.

## Workaholism and Relationship Quality:

## A Spillover–Crossover Perspective

Researchers have been interested in the relationship of work experiences and relationship quality for some time as it became clear that the boundaries between work and family are permeable. Earlier studies have identified two different ways in which demands or strain is carried over from the work to the family domain (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Westman, 2002). Work-family conflict or *spillover* is a within-person across-domains transmission of demands and consequent strain from one area of life to another. Previous research has primarily focused on how experiences in the work domain are transferred to and interfere with the non-work domain for the same individual (e.g., Byron, 2005; Lambert, 1990; Leiter & Durup, 1996). In contrast, *crossover* involves transmission across individuals, whereby demands and their consequent strain cross over between closely related persons (Westman, 2001, 2002). Thus, in crossover, stress experienced in the workplace by an individual may lead to stress being experienced by the individual's partner at home. Whereas spillover is an *intra-individual* transmission of stress or strain, crossover is a dyadic, *inter-individual* transmission of stress or strain.

The earliest studies examined job demands reported by job incumbents (usually males) and the satisfaction and well-being of their spouses (usually females) (see Barling, DuPre & Hepburn, 1998; Burke, Weir & DuWors, 1980a; Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Jones & Fletcher, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Long & Voges, 1987). These studies typically found that higher levels of job demands reported by incumbents were associated with marital dissatisfaction and poorer psychological well-being of their spouses.

In the current study, we will focus on the relationship between *workaholism* and partners' relationship satisfaction. Specifically, we will examine whether the tendency of employees to invest too much time and effort in their work (Andreassen, Ursin & Eriksen,

2007) may initiate a process through which employees' behavior influences their partners and diminishes their relationship satisfaction. Only a few studies examined the consequences of workaholism for relationship quality, and these studies relied exclusively on *one source* of information (self-reports from employees *or* from their partners). The only exception is the study by McMillan, O'Driscoll and Brady (2004). Unfortunately, this particular study had a small sample size ( $N = 46$  workaholics,  $N = 42$  non-workaholics, and  $N = 40$  partners) and lacked the statistical power to show differences between workaholics' and non-workaholics' ratings of relationship quality (e.g., relationship adjustment, consensus, satisfaction) or the ratings provided by their partners. Moreover, the study examined merely differences in self- and partner's ratings rather than the mechanism through which workaholism intrudes into the relationship. This means that we still know little about how workaholism affects the quality of one's intimate relationship. The central aim of the present study is to fill this gap, and to examine whether workaholism influences *partners'* relationship satisfaction through an indirect process of crossover mediated by work-family conflict and social support provided to the partner. Our crossover approach adds another level of analysis to previous approaches by adding the inter-individual level, specifically the *dyad*, as an additional focus of study (Westman, 2002).

### *Workaholism and Relationship Quality*

Workaholism is an individual difference characteristic referring to self imposed demands, compulsive overworking, an inability to regulate work habits, and an over-indulgence in work to the exclusion of most other life activities (Robinson, 1997a). There is accumulating evidence that workaholism is related to poorer psychological and physical well-being (e.g., Andreassen et al., 2007; Burke & Matthiesen, 2004; Spence & Robbins, 1992). Furthermore, because workaholics are willing to sacrifice personal relationships to derive

satisfaction from work (Porter, 2001); it is not surprising that research suggests a negative relationship between workaholism and relationship quality.

For example, Robinson and Post (1997) found that work addicts were more likely to perceive their families as having worse communication, less clearly established family roles, and less affective involvement than individuals with low levels of work addiction behaviours. In addition, Robinson, Flowers, and Carroll (2001) reported that workaholics showed loss of emotional attachment, caring and desire; reduced positive feelings for the spouse; and reduced physical attraction as compared to non-workaholics. Consistent with these findings, Burke (1999b) reported that workaholics scored significantly lower on family satisfaction than other types of workers (work enthusiasts, unengaged workers, relaxed workers, and disenchanting workers). However, in their study among workaholics and their partners, McMillan et al. (2004) did *not* find evidence for disturbances in close relationships.

Related evidence for a relationship between workaholism and relationship quality comes from research on the relationship between Type A behavior of job incumbents (mainly male) and the satisfaction and well-being of their spouses (Barling, Bluen & Moss, 1990; Burke & Weir, 1980; Burke, Weir & DuWors, 1979; 1980b). This research is relevant since research has confirmed a positive relationship between Type A behavior and workaholism (e.g., Burke, 1999b; Burke, Koyuncu & Fiksenbaum, 2006). Friedman and Rosenman (1974), the creators of the Type A behavior concept, first suggested that Type A behavior was associated with poorer relationship quality. Burke and Weir (1980) found that a measure of global Type A behavior of husbands correlated positively with their own marital dissatisfaction and with their wives' marital dissatisfaction (Burke et al., 1979). Barling et al. (1990), in a sample of 134 medical practitioners and their wives, considered two Type A components identified by Pred, Spence and Helmreich (1986) in a study of marital dissatisfaction. These components were Achievement Striving (AS) and Impatience-

Irritability (II). Husbands' II (impatience, anger, irritability and hostility) was associated with their own and their wives' marital dissatisfaction while AS was not correlated with these.

Writers with a clinical orientation (Killinger, 1991; Oates, 1971; Robinson, 1998a) have also suggested that workaholism is associated with reduced levels of relationship quality. Robinson and his colleagues (Robinson, 1996a, 1996b; 1998a; Robinson & Kelley, 1998; Robinson & Post, 1995, 1997) consider work addiction as a symptom of a diseased family system. Work addiction, similar to other addictive behaviors is, to them, intergenerational and passed on to future generations through family processes and dynamics. Although not tested directly (i.e., workaholism scores of parents were not examined in relation to workaholism scores of their children), Robinson and his colleagues equate elevated health symptoms of workaholic fathers with elevated health symptoms of their children (e.g., anxiety and depression) as support for such a relationship (Robinson, 1999; Robinson & Kelley, 1998; Robinson & Post, 1995). Furthermore, Robinson and Post (1997) report data from a sample of 107 self-identified workaholics (members of Workaholics Anonymous chapters in North America) who completed the Work Addiction Risk Test (WART) and a family assessment instrument. Three levels of WART scores were compared. High scores differed from low and medium scores on six of the seven family assessment scales indicating poorer relationship quality in all cases.

#### *A Spillover-Crossover Perspective*

The studies reviewed so far are typical of the early research on the crossover of work experiences and job strain to family satisfaction and functioning (Westman, 2006). More recent crossover research designs have incorporated partner *dyads* (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2005; Hammer, Allen & Grigsby, 1997; Westman & Vinokur, 1998). Job and family demands are the common antecedents of the crossover process. Westman (2001, 2006)

also includes workaholism as a factor in an individual's personal attributes that may be involved in the crossover process.

Westman (2006) has suggested several possible mechanisms to explain the crossover process. First, direct crossover can take place between the two spouses/partners through empathic processes. That is, since spouses/partners spend considerable time together they become aware of and affected by each others' affective states. Second, the spouses/partners may share some common stressors (e.g., financial pressures, life events) that can lead to increased levels of common strains (e.g., negative affect). Third, crossover may be an indirect process. That is, there is an indirect crossover of strain mediated by the communication and interaction of the spouses/partners (e.g., coping strategies, social undermining, and lack of social support). In the current study, we particularly focus on the latter process. We expect that one partner's workaholism has a negative influence on the other partner's relationship satisfaction, through the experience of work to family conflict (WFC) and reduced social support provided to the partner (see Figure 1).

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Since workaholism is a phenomenon that leads people to spend excessively much time on their work at the expense of other activities, workaholics should differ from others regarding the extent to which they experience work-family conflict as well as the quality of their intimate relationships (Taris, Schaufeli & Verhoeven, 2005). Work-to-family conflict is defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Thus, participation in the family role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the work role. Some studies have indeed shown a positive relationship between workaholism and work-

family conflict (e.g., Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Taris et al., 2005). Additionally, from a personal resources perspective (e.g., Hobfoll, 2002), compulsive tendencies make workaholics to devote more resources (e.g., time, effort) to work, leaving them with fewer resources to devote to their family. Finally, Burke (2002) found that workaholics perceived their workplace environment as more demanding, stressful and less supportive of work-life balance; previous research has shown that perceived job demands are positively related to WFC (Demerouti, Geurts & Kompier, 2004). It can therefore be hypothesized that workaholics experience more work-family conflict (*Hypothesis 1*; see also Figure 1).

In addition, because they are immersed in their work (Schaufeli, Taris & Van Rhenen, 2008) – also while at home (Taris et al., 2005) – workaholics offer less emotional and instrumental support to their partners. However, we expect that workaholism is related to reduced support, only *through* work-family conflict (full mediation; *Hypothesis 2*). This view is consistent with the role scarcity hypothesis (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Accordingly, people possess limited and fixed amounts of resources (e.g., time and energy). Managing multiple roles (of employee and spouse) is problematic as they draw on the same, scarce resources.

Furthermore, the literature on family processes shows that stressed couples exhibit high levels of negative, unsupportive interactions and conflicts (Westman & Vinokur, 1998). The increased distress (associated with the experience of WFC) and its accompanying frustration lead an individual to initiate or exacerbate a negative interaction sequence with the partner (Westman, 2005). Using a multi-source study among 337 couples, Matthews et al. (1996) showed that both husbands and wives' WFC was indirectly (through psychological distress) related to hostile interactions and lowered marital warmth and supportiveness between the partners. It should be noted that social support has generally been studied as a *moderator* of the work-family conflict – strain relationship (e.g., Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Suchet

& Barling, 1986), and not as a mediator or intervening process variable in the relationship between WFC and outcomes. Thus, the present study takes a totally different approach than previous research, and is inspired by previous crossover studies suggesting that social support may be a mediator variable (Westman, 2006).

Previous research has suggested that social support has a direct effect and serves a health-restorative role by meeting basic human needs for social contact, regardless of the level of stress present (Wheaton, 1985). This generalized beneficial effect of social support occurs because social networks provide positive interactions, affirmation and encouragement that lead to an overall sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and positive affect (e.g., Cohen & Wills, 1985; Krause & Borawski-Clark, 1994; Viswesvaran, Sanchez & Fisher, 1999). On the basis of this, we also predict that individuals who receive considerable support from their partners are more satisfied with their relationship (*Hypothesis 3*; see also Figure 1).

Next to these relationships involved in the indirect crossover process (cf. Westman, 2005), we hypothesized direct crossover of relationship satisfaction between partners (*Hypothesis 4*). We expected this direct crossover only in the domain of relationship satisfaction since the marital relationship constitutes a sphere which is commonly shared by both partners (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). The direct transmission of relationship satisfaction can be substantiated using Westman's (2001) theory regarding direct effects (i.e., through an empathetic reaction; see also Bakker & Demerouti, in press). The only study that examined the crossover of positive experiences (marital satisfaction) in addition to the transmission of negative experiences (exhaustion and psychosomatic complaints) found *no* empirical support for crossover (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). However, Matthews et al. (2006) found a significant correlation of .67 for relationship satisfaction within couples. It should be noted that these effects were not the focus of the study by Matthews et al. (2006), but they do serve to provide initial evidence for a crossover of relationship satisfaction.

Because the literature suggests that men do not consistently differ from women in their levels of workaholism (Burke, 1999a; Doerfler & Kammer, 1986) and work-family-interference (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999), we expect that men will not differ from women in terms of the strength of the hypothesized relationships. This implies that the same mechanism will apply to both men and women which can be further justified by the nature of the present sample, namely young dual-earner parents. Kaufman and Uhlenberg (2000) found that while older employees seem to favour the ‘good provider’ model implying that they worked more after having become parents, younger employees showed more evidence of the ‘involved father’ model in which work effort did not increase with parenthood. This is evidence that the traditional gender role differences in organizing work and family life are less applicable to younger generations with both parents being involved in family-related work. Thus, our final hypothesis is that gender will not affect the strength of the relationships in the proposed model (*Hypothesis 5*). The hypotheses are summarized and graphically displayed in Figure 1.

## Method

### *Procedure*

The data were collected in The Netherlands by means of two questionnaires. In order to ensure that both partners were working, participants were approached through the daycare center where they brought their child(ren). In total, ten different daycare centers participated in the study. The researchers left two identical questionnaires, one for each partner, in the child’s pigeonhole. The questionnaires were code-numbered to match the partners correctly. Despite this code numbering the participants remained unidentified as both questionnaires were answered anonymously. Participants were included in the study on a voluntary basis. The partners were kindly requested to fill out the questionnaires independently. Respondents returned their questionnaires in closed envelopes to a special box placed in a central position

at the entrance of the daycare center. The dual-earner parents provided information with respect to their levels of workaholism, work-family conflict (WFC), received social support, and relationship satisfaction.

### *Participants*

The participants in the study were 168 couples of dual-earner parents in The Netherlands. Of the 900 questionnaires distributed, 360 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 40%. Twenty-four questionnaires could not be used in the analyses, because only one partner participated, thus leaving 336 questionnaires or 168 couples for data analyses. Men were slightly older than women,  $t(334) = 4.70, p < .001$  (Men  $M = 35.79, sd = 4.59$ , Women  $M = 33.60, sd = 3.88$ ;  $d = .52, 95\% CI: .30-.73$ ). All couples had child(ren) younger than three years old who lived at home, and 33% had at least one additional child in the age between four and twelve years. The most frequently mentioned level of education was university (36%), followed by college education (31%). There was no difference between the genders regarding educational level,  $t(334) = 1.32, p = .19$ . However, women worked more often with people (74%) than did men (55%),  $\chi^2(1) = 11.67, p < .001$ , while men worked more often with information (31%) than women (21%),  $\chi^2(1) = 4.48, p < .05$ . For example, more women (30.7%) than men (9.6%) worked in health care (as a doctor, nurse, therapist), whereas more men worked in industry – as a production manager, constructor, engineer (Men: 10.2%, Women 1.8%) and in business – as a manager, consultant, salesperson (Men 34.3% vs. Women: 26.5%). In addition, more men (40%) than women (19%) had a supervisory role,  $\chi^2(1) = 17.27, p < .001$ .

### *Measures*

*Workaholism* was measured with the Dutch version (Taris et al., 2005) of the Compulsive Tendencies (CT) subscale of the Work Addiction Risk Scale (WART; Robinson, 1999). Taris et al.'s three studies build a strong case for use of the CT subscale as adequately

representative of workaholism. The overlap between the full 25-item WART and the CT subscale was high ( $.89 < r < .93$ ,  $p's < .001$ ). In addition, the patterns of correlations with other concepts (e.g., working overtime, work-family conflict, and exhaustion) were very similar. Thus, the full WART and its CT subscale appear to measure the same concept. The scale includes nine items, such as “I feel guilty when I am not working on something”, and “I put myself under pressure with self-imposed deadlines when I work” (1 = never, 4 = always).

*Work-Family Conflict* was assessed with three items that are a selection of the Dutch questionnaire Survey Work-home Interference NijmeGen (SWING; Geurts et al., 2005). The authors of the scale generated an item-pool derived from 21 published scales (e.g., Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983; Netemeyer et al., 1996), and consequently, using multiple raters, they selected the nine items best fitting to the working definition of WFC (together with other criteria of minimal confounding with health outcomes, or work and home characteristics, as well as meaningful content in the Dutch language). The three items used in the present study (see also Demerouti, Bakker & Bulters, 2004) are: “How often does it happen that you do not fully enjoy the company of your spouse/family/friends because you worry about your work?”, “How often does it happen that you find it difficult to fulfil your domestic obligations because you are constantly thinking about your work?” and “How often does it happen that your work schedule makes it difficult for you to fulfil your domestic obligations?” Responses could be made on a five-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always). We could use the data of a previous Dutch study among 751 postal employees (Wagena & Geurts, 2000) to examine the relationship between the three-item index utilized in the present study and the original nine-item scale. The correlation was high,  $r = .90$ ,  $p < .01$ .

*Social Support* was assessed using Abbey, Abramis, and Caplan's (1985) eight-item scale. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent their partner “gave support when needed”, “told things that strengthened their self-confidence”, “listened to them when they

felt the need to talk about things that were very important to them”, and so on. Thus, social support was assessed by *partners* rather than through self-ratings. The answer format was a five-point scale ranging from ‘not at all’ (1) to ‘a great deal’ (5).

*Relationship Satisfaction.* Participants were asked to indicate their satisfaction in the current intimate relationship. We used five items from the ‘relational interaction satisfaction scale’ (Buunk, 1990), for example “I feel happy when I’m with my partner” and “It is going well between my partner and me” (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*).

### *Data Analysis*

The matched responses of both partners were analyzed with structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques, using the AMOS 7 software package (Arbuckle, 2006). We analyzed the covariance matrix using the maximum likelihood method of estimation. Besides the chi-square statistic, the analysis assessed the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). The theoretical model we tested is presented in Figure 1. Because of the large number of items and the inclusion of both men’s and women’s variables in one overall model, it was not possible to conduct SEM-analysis on a full disaggregation model. For this reason, a *partial* disaggregation model (Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998) was tested by creating two composites, i.e. parcels of items, per construct as recommended by Hall, Snell, and Foust (1999). ‘Workaholism’, ‘received social support’, and ‘relationship satisfaction’ were each included as latent factors with as indicators two halves of their scales. ‘Work-family conflict’ was included as a latent factor with one indicator, namely the scale score. To control for random measurement error, the error variance of WFC was set equal to the product of its variance and the one minus the internal consistency (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). All structural paths in the model were constrained to be equal for men and women. Finally, we modeled the relationships between men’s and women’s variables as covariations between the

errors of the respective variables (e.g., a covariation between the errors of men's WFC and women's WFC). Only the crossover relationship between men's and women's relationship satisfaction was modeled as a reciprocal relationship (see also Demerouti, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2005).

## Results

### *Descriptive Statistics*

The means, standard deviations, internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha), and correlations between the study variables are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen, all variables have satisfactory reliabilities with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .74 or higher.

Furthermore, men scored higher than their partners on workaholism ( $t(334) = 3.56, p < .001$ ;  $d = .39, 95\% \text{ CI: } .17-.60$ ), and WFC ( $t(334) = 3.33, p < .001$ ;  $d = .37, 95\% \text{ CI: } .15-.59$ ). The effect of gender on these two variables is medium (cf. Cohen, 1992).

### *Test of the Workaholism Model*

Results of the SEM-analysis showed that the proposed Workaholism model (displayed in Figure 2) fit adequately to the data,  $\chi^2(72) = 123.81$ , GFI = .90, IFI = .96, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, workaholism was positively related to WFC (Men  $\beta = .78, p < .001$ ; Women  $\beta = .86, p < .001$ ). WFC, in turn, was a significant predictor of one's partners' experience of social support (Men  $\beta = -.21, p < .001$ ; Women  $\beta = -.20, p < .001$ ).

To test Hypothesis 2 stating that workaholism is related to (reduced) support *through* work-family conflict, we performed the Sobel test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The results indicated that WFC fully mediates the relationship between men's workaholism and women's experience of social support,  $z = -3.50, p < .001$ ; and between women's workaholism and men's experience of social support,  $z = -3.60, p < .001$ . This means that Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Further, and in line with Hypothesis 3, social support was positively related to relationship satisfaction (Men  $\beta = .59, p < .001$ ; Women  $\beta = .56, p < .001$ ). Additionally, men's relationship satisfaction was significantly related to women's relationship satisfaction ( $\beta = .38, p < .001$ ), and vice versa ( $\beta = .48, p < .001$ ). Moreover, AMOS provides the so-called stability index for reciprocal relationships. In general, stability indices below the value one indicate that the non-recursive model has an admissible solution (Arbuckle, 2006). The stability index regarding the reciprocal relationship between husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction was far below the value one in the current study, namely .18. This means that Hypothesis 4 is supported as well.

Finally, to test the hypothesis that gender does not affect the strength of the relationships in the proposed model (Hypothesis 5), we compared the constrained model with an unconstrained model. Results of the chi-square difference test indicated that there were no substantial differences between men and women,  $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 8.14, n.s.$ , thus confirming Hypothesis 5.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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## Discussion

The present study adds to the literature on workaholism by examining the association between workaholism, work-family conflict and partner relationship satisfaction using the *dyad* as the unit of analysis. Previous studies almost exclusively relied on one source of information (self-reports from employees *or* from their partners), and therefore suffered from self-presentation and common method variance problems. The main contribution of this study is that it revealed a relationship between workaholism and employees' behavior in private life, as reported by their partners. Both men and women reported on their own workaholism and

work-family conflict, and their partners reported on the support they received as well as their relationship satisfaction. Results clearly supported our spillover hypothesis by showing that workaholism is positively related to work-family conflict. Thus, those employees with compulsive tendencies to spend an extremely high percentage of their time on work showed more interference of work with private life. They were more inclined to think and worry about their work when at home, gave priority to their work, and neglected their domestic obligations and the relationship with their partner. As a consequence, their partners were less supported resulting in reduced relationship satisfaction. This supports our indirect crossover hypothesis stating that work-related behaviours and strain may crossover to the partner and intrude into family life.

Thus, the current contribution also lies in the fact that it reveals the *process* that takes place when work interferes with private life because employees are obsessed with work. The findings are in line with Hobfoll's (2002) conservation of resources theory. Accordingly, compulsive tendencies make workaholics to devote more resources (e.g., time, emotions) to work, leaving them with fewer resources to devote to their family. In addition, our results are consistent with the role scarcity hypothesis (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) postulating that people possess limited and fixed amounts of resources (e.g., time and energy). Managing multiple roles (e.g., of employee, spouse and parent) is problematic as they draw on the same, scarce resources. Previous research has demonstrated that especially time- and strain-based conflict (i.e. fulfilment of demands in one domain is difficult owing to the time devoted to and strain produced in the other domain, respectively) are associated with various negative work-, family- and stress-related outcome variables (see, for a meta-analysis, Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000).

Finally, our findings expand previous spillover and crossover research by showing how the two streams of literature are related. WFC not only has ramifications for oneself, but

also for one's partner. Consistent with Westman's (2006) crossover theory, we showed that there is an indirect crossover of strain (workaholism and WFC) mediated by interaction of the partners (through lack of social support). Next to this indirect crossover, the study provides evidence for direct crossover of relationship satisfaction between partners. While relationship satisfaction constitutes an experience which is commonly shared by both partners (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999), empirical evidence is scarce and our study is the first to provide support for such a relationship. Thus, next to the crossover of negative experiences our study confirms that crossover of positive experiences takes place within couples.

As hypothesized, we found no substantial gender differences regarding the process through which workaholism intrudes in and negatively influences the relationship. While men reported slightly higher workaholism and WFC levels, this did not change the way through which workaholism of the one partner was related to relationship satisfaction of the other partner. Perhaps one reason why we did not find gender differences is that our sample included highly educated and young couples with enhanced family obligations due to their young children. This might have led both partners to be equally involved in family life. Irrespectively of gender, the more the focal person reported workaholism, the more WFC s/he experienced. WFC represents the linking mechanism between work-related factors on the one hand and family or individual outcomes on the other hand (Voydanoff, 1992), and indicates the degree to which the person allows that negative attributes of the work domain are transferred to the home domain. As soon as WFC came into play, individuals apparently withdrew supportive behavior towards their partners, irrespective of their gender, which coincided with diminished relationship satisfaction. Conceptually similar findings have been reported in the past. Moen and Yu (2000) found that working conditions, working hours, and life quality including stress, WFC and coping/mastery differed between men and women.

However, the factors associated with life quality were similar across genders, implying similar linking mechanisms between work and life outcomes.

Although a strength of our study design is the exploration and matching of data within and between couples, there are some limitations that need to be raised. This study focused on inter-gender relationships, and the generalizability of the results to same gender couples is unknown. In addition, our study was conducted in The Netherlands, which limits the external validity of our findings. There is a growing recognition that larger social, cultural, and political contexts may affect individuals' perceptions and experiences within the work-family domain (e.g., Lewis, 1997; Westman, 2002). For instance, in The Netherlands, the state is responsible for providing work-family supports (e.g., childcare arrangements), whereas in other countries (e.g., the U.S.) companies are the primary providers of work-family assistance to employees. Thus, the specific cultural context may have affected our findings, which therefore need to be interpreted with care. Furthermore, our response rate was relatively low (40%), which may question the generalizability of our findings. It should be noted, however, that low response rates are not uncommon in crossover research (e.g., Demerouti et al., 2005; Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). Dual earner couples are often too busy with their work and private life to respond. Finally, we used a cross-sectional design which precludes causal inferences. This means that the relationships proposed by our model await further testing in longitudinal research. This is the more important since workaholism may also partly be a *consequence* of poor relationship satisfaction (as an escape coping strategy).

Despite these limitations, the current study suggests that workaholism has negative consequences for relationship quality. Workaholics let their work interfere with private life, and seem less inclined to help their partners, which reduces their partners' relationship satisfaction. This ultimately seems to fire back, since partners' relationship satisfaction was reciprocally related.

*Addressing Workaholism*

How can employers help workaholics and workaholics help themselves? Fassel and Schaeff (1989) offer the following ideas. Employers should pay attention to the performance and work habits of employees and be alert to warning signs of workaholism. They should not reward addictive behavior, but recognize those employees who are productive but also lead balanced lives. They should ensure that employees take vacation time away from work. Finally, job insecurity, work overload, limited career opportunities and lack of control can make employees feel compelled to work longer. If these factors exist, employers should try to minimize their impact on the atmosphere within the organization.

Even better would be to optimize the work environment such that employees are exposed to challenging (but not too high) job demands, and sufficient job resources. Several studies (Bakker, in press; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) have shown that job resources (e.g., job control, performance feedback, opportunities for development) foster work engagement – a more positive form of employee well-being than workaholism (Schaufeli, Taris & Bakker, 2006). Such job resources can readily be mobilized through existing human resource management strategies including training, coaching, and job evaluation conversations.

Haas (1991) also highlights the role that managers can play in assisting their workaholic employees to change. Workaholic employees should be referred to an employee assistance program or a recovery program to start treatment processes. Managers should help prioritize projects for employees as long-term and short-term assignments. Workaholics must be encouraged and helped to delegate their work. The employee should be given specific times to take breaks and to leave work. It may also be possible to reduce the negative effects of workaholism, particularly well-being and health consequences, through stress-management training. The development of workplace values that promote new, more balanced priorities

and healthier lifestyles will support those workaholism types that want to change their behaviors, as well as their partners.

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Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations (SD), Cronbach's Alpha (on the diagonal), and Correlations for the Model Variables*

| Variable                       | Mean <sup>1</sup> | SD  | 1     | 2      | 3      | 4     | 5      | 6      | 7     | 8     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| <i>Men (N = 168)</i>           |                   |     |       |        |        |       |        |        |       |       |
| 1. Workaholism                 | 2.16 <sub>a</sub> | .47 | (.80) |        |        |       |        |        |       |       |
| 2. Work-Family Conflict        | 1.92 <sub>a</sub> | .65 | .65** | (.77)  |        |       |        |        |       |       |
| 3. Social Support from Partner | 4.07 <sub>a</sub> | .55 | -.13  | -.31** | (.88)  |       |        |        |       |       |
| 4. Relationship Satisfaction   | 3.34 <sub>a</sub> | .54 | .04   | .07    | .20*   | (.84) |        |        |       |       |
| <i>Women (N = 168)</i>         |                   |     |       |        |        |       |        |        |       |       |
| 5. Workaholism                 | 1.97 <sub>b</sub> | .48 | .11   | .12    | -.10   | -.12  | (.81)  |        |       |       |
| 6. Work-Family Conflict        | 1.69 <sub>b</sub> | .58 | .14   | .21**  | -.22** | -.13  | .67**  | (.74)  |       |       |
| 7. Social Support from Partner | 3.99 <sub>a</sub> | .60 | -.19* | -.32** | .52**  | .21** | -.18*  | -.25** | (.87) |       |
| 8. Relationship Satisfaction   | 3.36 <sub>a</sub> | .54 | -.09  | -.05   | .19*   | .60** | -.25** | -.20*  | .43** | (.88) |

*Note.*<sup>1</sup> Means with unequal subscripts for men and women indicate that the variables differ between both groups at the  $p < .001$  level.  
 \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* Proposed Workaholism Model.

*Figure 2.* Standardized Solution (Maximum Likelihood Estimates) of the Proposed Workaholism Model. *Note.* All parameters are significant at the  $p < .05$  level or lower, except the parameter with an asterisk.



