Unintended Consequences of Being Proactive?
Linking Proactive Personality to Coworker Envy, Helping, and Undermining, and the Moderating Role of Prosocial Motivation

Abstract

Drawing upon social comparison theory, we developed and tested a model to examine potential negative coworker reactions toward proactive employees. We theorized that a focal employee's proactive personality is positively related with his or her high relative standing in the group, which in turn exposes him or her to being the target of coworker envy. This may then reduce the focal employee's received help from coworkers and give rise to coworker undermining. We further reasoned that employee prosocial motivation moderates the serial mediated relationships. Our hypotheses were generally supported in three field studies involving a total of 1069 employees from 223 groups. Proactive personality was negatively and indirectly related to received help from coworkers, via relative leader-member exchange (RLMX) and relative job performance, and then via being envied by coworkers (Study 1). Results also generally supported the positive and indirect effect of proactive personality on coworker undermining via the same set of sequential mediators (e.g., RLMX and then being envied, Study 2). The indirect effects of proactive personality on coworker helping and undermining (e.g., via relative job performance and coworker envy) were only significant when employees' prosocial motivation was low (Study 3). This research contributes to a more complete and balanced theorization of the influences of proactive personality in organizations.

Keywords: proactive personality; leader-member exchange; envy; helping and social undermining; prosocial motivation

He who surpasses...must look down on the hate of those below.

— Lord Byron (1885), *Childe Harold's pilgrimage: A romaunt*, p. 186

The past two decades have been witness to a surge of research interest in proactivity (Bindl & Parker, 2010; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008), probably due to the increasing need for employees to take initiative in organizations facing increased uncertainty and competition (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Substantial research efforts have been devoted to antecedents of proactive behaviors, and in particular to proactive personality, defined as "a relatively stable tendency to effect environmental change" (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p. 103). Indeed, meta-analytic evidence has documented that proactive personality is positively related to such favorable outcomes as quality leader-member relationships and superior job performance, even when controlling for other personality traits (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Spitzmuller, Sin, Howe, & Fatimah, 2015; Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013).

As demonstrated in the above meta-analyses, research has predominantly portrayed proactive personality as *beneficial* for employees and organizations. While insightful, this research has paid less attention to the potential *unintended consequences*—being proactive may not always be appreciated by coworkers (Bindl & Parker, 2010; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Indeed, the same meta analyses have revealed substantial variability (e.g., large credibility intervals) in the generally positive relationships between proactive personality and proximal positive work outcomes (e.g., job performance and leader-member relationships). Such findings suggest that the positive effects of proactive personality are not universally strong in magnitude. [1] Furthermore, the credibility intervals for the meta-analyzed correlations between

[1] We are indebted to our anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.

proactive personality and distal objective career success variables (i.e., salary and promotion, see Fuller & Marler, 2009) included both positive and *negative* values, suggesting that positive effects of proactive personality in some situations may be negative in others. Such findings point to the possibility of looking into potential negative effects of proactive personality.

In fact, scholars have found that under certain conditions, proactive personality may be negatively related to job performance (e.g., Chan, 2006; Erdogan & Bauer, 2005; Wihler, Blickle, Ellen, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2017; see Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2016 for a review) and well-being (e.g., Fay & Hüttges, 2017; Strauss, Parker, & O'Shea, 2017). Conceptually, Bateman and Crant (1999) theorized that proactive personality may be "counterproductive" (p. 67). Frese and Fay (2001) concurred that proactive people may be "perceived by the environments [e.g., coworkers] as being tiring and strenuous" (p. 141). Bolino, Valcea, and Harvey (2010) pointed out that proactive people may pose a threat to *coworkers* of losing desired organizational resources, and lead to "increased tension between proactive and non-proactive employees" (p. 333). Given the prominence of coworker influence in organizations (e.g., Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Sherony & Green, 2002), it is somewhat surprising that there has been little research on "peers' responses to proactivity" (Parker, Wang, & Liao, 2019, p. 240).

Our examination of possible negative influences of proactive personality has also been inspired by recent research on negative effects of other "positive" individual characteristics, including cognitive intelligence (Kim & Glomb, 2010), extraversion (Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011), and emotional intelligence (Côté et al., 2011). Judge, Piccolo, and Kosalka (2009) termed such cases as "paradox of traits": "traits rarely have unalloyed advantages (or disadvantages) even in a single context at a single point in time" (p. 859). Evolutionary psychologist Nettle (2006) pointed out that "behavioral alternatives [of personality] can be considered as trade-offs,

with a particular trait producing not unalloyed advantage but a mixture of costs and benefits such that the optimal value for fitness may depend on very specific local circumstances" (p. 625).

In the current research, we adopt social comparison theory (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Greenberg, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2007) as the overarching theoretical backdrop to investigate *how*, *why*, and *when* proactive personality leads to unintended coworker reactions (Figure 1). Existing literature has primarily focused on performance-related variables as catalysts of social comparison in organizations (Greenberg et al., 2007). [2] Investigating the role of proactive personality in social comparison is important in the group context. Proactive personality is "rooted in people's needs to manipulate and control the environment" (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p. 104) and represents "a form of dominance" to coworkers (Parker et al., 2019, p. 229). Thus, proactive employees may be perceived by coworkers as potential threats and competitors, and then selected as targets of social comparison and envy (Festinger, 1954).

==== insert Figure 1 about here ====

We propose a moderated serial mediation model by drawing primarily upon the literatures on *relative leader-member exchange* (RLMX) (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2013; Herman, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2012; Hu & Liden, 2013) and workplace envy (e.g., Duffy, Shaw, & Schaubroeck, 2008; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Vecchio, 1997), both of which share a common emphasis on the prominence of social comparison in organizational contexts (Greenberg et al., 2007). Leader-member exchange (LMX), which focuses on the quality of relationship between each leader and follower, provides the basis for RLMX, which is defined as "the actual degree to which the focal individual's LMX differs from the average leader–subordinate LMX in the work group" (Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010, p.

[2] We thank our anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

850). In brief, because proactive employees tend to garner high standings in terms of RLMX and relative job performance, upward social comparison may prompt coworker emotional reactions of *envy* toward proactive employees. Coworker envy in turn is hypothesized to be negatively related to received *help* from coworkers and positively related to being *undermined* by coworkers, two major types of behavioral outcomes of coworker envy (e.g., Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012; Parrott, 2016).

We further probe whether employee *prosocial motivation,* the desire to protect and enhance others' well-being (Batson, 1987; Grant, 2007), moderates the relationships between RLMX and being envied, and between relative job performance and being envied, and thus the indirect effects of proactive personality on received coworker help and social undermining in the serial mediation model. Recent research on social comparison and envy suggests that employees are most likely to become targets of coworker envy when they have high status (e.g., high RLMX and relative performance), and do not get along well with coworkers (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). This notion has been echoed by recent theorizing on wise proactivity, highlighting the importance of social and interpersonal contexts in proactivity processes (Parker et al., 2019).

The current investigation contributes to the scholarship on proactive personality and related literatures in three ways. First, by investigating potential negative effects of proactive personality on coworker reactions, it *complements* and *broadens* previous research that has primarily focused on the benefits (Fay & Hüttges, 2017; Strauss et al., 2017). Parker et al. (2019) contended that "the more proactive employees consider their social and relational context, and stay attuned to the characteristics of others, the more likely their proactivity will be effective" (p. 235). Judge and Lepine (2007) asserted that "a more nuanced view of the importance of

personality to behavior would recognize that even generally desirable traits (i.e., traits associated with fitness in a general or even evolutionary sense) likely involve trade-offs associated with particular criteria" (p. 333). In this vein, this research contributes to the development of a more balanced and complete theorization on the effects of proactivity.

Second, our research extends the scholarly work on social comparison by highlighting the role of employee proactivity and prosocial motivation. Prior research has paid little attention to what types of personality traits trigger upward comparison and boundary conditions (Cuddy et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2007). Proactive personality reflects a disposition to gain control and dominance over the work environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Parker et al., 2019). As such, proactive employees tend to become the targets of upward social comparison, especially when they are low on prosocial motivation. Through exploring the unique agentic characteristics embedded in proactive personality and moderating role of prosocial motivation, this research paves a new avenue for examining more social comparison processes in organizations.

Third, this research contributes to the literature on leader-member exchange (LMX) by shedding light on crucial employee-related antecedents and coworker-related consequences of RLMX. RLMX represents a central premise of LMX theory that leaders differentiate between followers (Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982). Yet, substantially less is known about precursors of RLMX as well the mechanims through which one group member's RLMX affects coworkers (Herman et al., 2012). Through probing the antecedents and coworker-related outcomes, our investigation extends research on differentiated leadership by moving a "leader-centered" perspective in the prior research to a relatively more comprehensive perspective that also considers employee personality traits and coworker reactions.

Theoretical Development and Hypotheses

Social Comparison in Organizations

Theory of social comparison was originally put forth by Leon Festinger (1954). Social comparison was later formally defined as "the process of thinking about information about one or more other people in relation to the self" (Wood, 1996, pp. 520-521). In his seminal paper, Festinger (1954) contended that human beings have an innate and fundamental drive to assess their abilities and opinions for the purpose of adaptation. Often times, they lack objective standards, thus they turn to other similar people (e.g., peers) as references instead. This is especially the case in uncertain and competitive environments.

The nature of organizational life provides abundant opportunities for employees to compare themselves frequently and closely with coworkers (Brown, Ferris, Heller, & Keeping, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2007). Employees compete for scarce organizational rewards and resources, such as pay raises, promotions, training opportunities, rewarding assignments, and office space. *Competition* and *hierarchy* in organizations serve as the breeding ground for social comparison, either privately or in public, automatically or in a motivated manner (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001; Vecchio, 1997). Wood (1996) proposed three major processes of social comparison: *acquiring*, *thinking about*, and *reacting to* social information. This framework explains how and why a social comparison process happens.

Acquiring social information is the first critical step, which entails selecting "particular targets and types of social information for further observation" (Wood, 1996, p. 521). Employees often select peers as targets (e.g., Duffy et al., 2008; Greenberg et al., 2007), because members in the same group have ample chances for close and frequent observations, communications, and interactions with each other—unconsciously or consciously (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995).

Human beings are sensitive to threats in the environment (Abrams & Christ, 2003). This accounts for why proactive employees are likely to become targets of coworkers' social comparison, because proactive employees obtain control and dominance over other people.

Coworkers may proceed with *thinking about* the meaning of the social information to their work (Parrott & Smith, 1993). The comparisons of the relative standings of the targets (i.e., proactive employees) with coworkers' own standings further affect the direction of the social comparisons (i.e., upward or downward) as well as subsequent emotional and behavioral reactions (Wood, 1996). In organizations, the quality of relationship with supervisors and job performance represent two core factors that supervisors consider when allocating crucial rewards and resources among employees (Rynes, Gerhart, & Parks, 2005). Thus, proactive employees' relative standings on LMX and job performance are often utilized by coworkers as salient attributes at work in social comparison (e.g., Hu & Liden, 2013; Kim & Glomb, 2014).

The last stage involves emotional and behavioral *reactions* to the results of the social comparisons. Proactive employees' high RLMX and relative job performance may trigger coworkers' upward social comparisons, and in turn give rise to proactive employees' becoming targets of envy by coworkers. *Envy* is defined as a "painful emotion characterized by feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by an awareness of a desired attribute enjoyed by another person" (Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 46). Coworker envy may result in their withdrawing cooperation and enacting hostility toward proactive employees (Greenberg et al., 2007).

Indirect Effect of Employee Proactive Personality on Being the Targets of Coworker Envy through Employee RLMX and Relative Job Performance

Proactive employees tend to become the targets of coworker upward social comparison. The changes made by proactive employees may introduce uncertainties and challenges for the

coworkers (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). As proactive employees tend to gain control and dominance (Parker et al., 2019), their coworkers may experience a corresponding decrease in control over valued resources and a feeling of being dominated by proactive employees. Taken together, the uncertainties and potential loss of control faced by coworkers render proactive employees as targets of coworker upward social comparison (Taylor & Lobel, 1989).

Proactive personality and RLMX. We expect that proactive employees' relative standings on LMX and job performance represent two major manifestations of their securing control and dominance, which may serve as two forms of work attributes with which coworkers may compare themselves. Thus, employee proactive personality may have an indirect effect on being the target of coworker envy through RLMX and relative job performance. Research on LMX is based on the supposition that leaders formulate differentiated relationships with followers (Dansereau, Graen, & Hage, 1975; Dienesch & Liden, 1986). RLMX research originated from this premise with a focus on the group context. Employees with high proactive personality may cultivate a relatively high quality relationship with the leader. First, proactive employees tend to initiate and implement positive changes to the organization (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Supervisors control crucial resources in organizations. Hence, proactive employees are motivated to develop relatively higher quality relationships with supervisors to attain such resources (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000). Second, proactive employees are inclined to gain more control over the environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Considering that the flow of power and control in organizations often runs from supervisors to followers (Yukl, 2013), proactive employees may form relatively higher quality relationships with supervisors in order to gain latitude and control over their work (Yukl & Fu, 1999). Thus, although proactive behaviors may not always be appreciated by supervisors (Fast, Burris, & Bartel, 2014), research has shown a

generally positive relationship between proactive personality and LMX (Fuller & Marler, 2009), providing indirect support to this proposition.

Proactive personality and relative job performance. Similar to RLMX, *relative job performance* refers to the difference between one's own job performance and the average job performance of group members (Kim & Glomb, 2014). Proactive people have a tendency to make positive changes and to correct inefficient work procedures (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Furthermore, compared to less proactive employees, they have higher levels of persistence and thus are more adept at overcoming obstacles and barriers in achieving their change-oriented goals (Crant, 2000; Parker et al., 2010). As such, proactive people tend to outperform their less proactive counterparts, leading to a positive relationship between proactive personality and relative job performance. Meta analytic research has provided indirect support for this notion by showing an overall positive relationship between proactive personality and job performance (Spitzmuller et al., 2015; Tornau & Frese, 2013).

RLMX, relative job performance, and being envied by coworkers. The relatively higher standings on LMX and job performance of proactive employees in the group may impose threats on coworkers, which may in turn breed coworker envy. Envy represents an unpleasant and painful outgrowth of upward social comparison (Parrott & Smith, 1993). Organizational contexts are competitive and hierarchical (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Weber, 1978). Resource scarcity drives organizations to select the most valuable employees in whom to invest, and employees compete continuously for valuable rewards and resources to get ahead. Given that employees with high RLMX and relative job performance are valued by organizations (Rynes et al., 2005), they tend to receive more resources and better opportunities than other coworkers. It follows that such employees may become targets of coworker envy. Taken in concert, we predict that:

Hypothesis 1: Employee proactive personality is positively and indirectly related to being envied by coworkers via employee (a) RLMX and (b) relative job performance.

Coworker Behavioral Reactions: Helping and Social Undermining

Being envied and received coworker help. Coworker envy may further give rise to unfavorable coworker behaviors—reduced cooperation (e.g., received help from coworkers) and enhanced hostility (e.g., coworker undermining). The burgeoning literature on workplace envy suggests that to cope with envious feelings caused by upward social comparisons, envious coworkers may engage in either self-enhancing behaviors to improve their relative standings or other-diminishing behaviors to lower the target's relative standing (Smith & Kim, 2007; Parrott, 2016). Compared to self-enhancing behaviors, other-diminishing behaviors have been portrayed as a more direct and efficient strategy for the envier to alter his or her relative standing, because it takes more time for self-improvement strategies to take effect (Lee & Duffy, in press; Smith & Kim, 2007; Tesser, 1988). Accordingly, we focus on other-diminishing behaviors —reducing help and/or harming the envied person—as two major outcomes of coworker envy.

There are two reasons to expect a negative relationship between coworker envy and coworker help. Envy represents a painful experience stemming from upward social comparison (Smith, 1991). The envious may have a sense of inferiority compared to the envied. As such, envious coworkers may be unlikely to provide help to the envied proactive employees in order to cope with the frustration as a result of the sense of inferiority (Greenberg et al., 2007; Smith, 1991) and to maintain self-esteem (Tesser, 1988). Furthermore, envious coworkers may not help the envied proactive employees for the sake of conserving resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Because helping behaviors are resource depleting, providing less help to the target of envy may conserve resources for envious coworkers to achieve their own success. We thus predict that:

Hypothesis 2: Being envied by coworkers is negatively related to received coworker help.

Being envied and coworker social undermining. Envious coworkers may also engage in social undermining toward employees with relatively higher standings in the group. *Social undermining* is defined as behaviors "intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation" (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002, p. 332). Coworker envy and social undermining behaviors have been shown to be positively related (Kim & Glomb, 2014; Lee & Duffy, in press), because social undermining, "an instrumental form of aggression" (Duffy et al., 2012, p.646), is useful in enhancing oneself at the expense of others. Put differently, to maintain a positive self-image and reduce a sense of relative deprivation stemming from upward social comparison (Crosby, 1976), envious coworkers may attempt to harm the better-off proactive employees (Duffy et al., 2012). Thus, from the perspective of proactive employees, we propose that being envied by coworkers is positively related to their being the target of social undermining from coworkers.

Hypothesis 3: Being envied is positively related to being undermined by coworkers.

A Serial Mediation Model

We further propose a serial mediation model in which employee proactive personality has indirect effects on received coworker help and undermining via employee relative standings (RLMX and relative job performance) and then via coworker envy. Proactive employees likely initiate positive changes at work (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Thus they are motivated to forge relatively higher quality relationships with supervisors compared to coworkers. They persevere and are able to overcome obstacles, which in turn may contribute to their relatively higher job performance (Parker et al., 2006). Proactive employees' relatively high standings in the work group render them to become targets of coworkers' upward social comparison and envy. Because

being the targets of envy may elicit coworkers' withholding help and undermining, proactive personality may be indirectly related to coworker helping and undermining.

Hypothesis 4: Employee proactive personality is negatively and indirectly related to received help from coworkers via (a) RLMX and (b) relative job performance, and then via being envied by coworkers.

Hypothesis 5: Employee proactive personality is positively and indirectly related to being socially undermined by coworkers via (a) RLMX and (b) relative job performance, and then via being envied by coworkers.

Moderating Role of Prosocial Motivation in the Relationships of RLMX and Relative Job Performance with Being Envied

We further propose that the relationships between a focal employee's relative standings in a group (i.e., RLMX and relative job performance) and coworker envy may be buffered by the focal employee's prosocial motivation. Recent research on envy suggests that upward social comparison does not always result in feelings of envy toward people who are better off (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2007; Smith & Kim, 2007). In organizations replete with competition and status differentiation, targets of envy are often those who are good at achieving high status (e.g., high RLMX and relative performance), but not adept at getting along with others (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2007). This line of reasoning suggests that competent but cold employees are most likely to be perceived as threatening by coworkers. Stated differently, if an employee is able to both get ahead and get along with colleagues, he or she is less likely to become the target of envy by coworkers than those who are able to get ahead, but do not get along. Based on this logic, we expect that although proactive people are able to secure relatively high status in a group, they may not necessarily become the targets of coworker envy, especially if they are able

to get along well with and benefit coworkers.

There are three reasons to expect a moderating role of employee prosocial motivation in the relationships of RLMX and relative job performance with coworker envy. First, employees with high prosocial motivation are motivated to help coworkers (Batson, 1987). They take others' perspectives (Grant & Berry, 2011) and place great value on promoting others' welfare. Second, prosocial employees tend to attend to information outwardly (De Dreu, & Nauta, 2009). As such, prosocial motivation will encourage high status employees (e.g., those with high RLMX and relative performance) to identify multiple opportunities to protect and promote coworkers' well-being (Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Third, high status employees with high prosocial motivation tend to be perceived by supervisors and coworkers as behaving for the sake of benefiting other people, not serving their own self-interests (Grant & Berg, 2011). Taken together, prosocial motivation is likely to impede high status employees from being perceived as threatening, which in turn may decrease the chance for coworkers to select such high status employees as targets of upward social comparison. It follows that the positive relationships of relative high standings in a group with coworker envy may be attenuated by high employee prosocial motivation. Grant, Parker, and Collins (2009) found that supervisors were more likely to value proactive behaviors when employees' prosocial motivation was high rather than low.

> *Hypothesis 6*: Prosocial motivation moderates the positive relationships (a) between RLMX and being envied and (b) between relative job performance and being envied, such that these positive relationships are less pronounced when prosocial motivation is high rather than when it is low.

Moderating Role of Prosocial Motivation in the Serial Mediation Model

Integrating the moderating role of prosocial motivation proposed in Hypothesis 6 with the

serial mediation model (Hypotheses 4 and 5), we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 7: Prosocial motivation moderates the negative and indirect effect of proactive personality on received help from coworkers via (a) RLMX and (b) relative job performance, and being envied, such that the indirect effect is less pronounced when prosocial motivation is high rather than when it is low.

Hypothesis 8: Prosocial motivation moderates the positive and indirect effect of proactive personality on being socially undermined by coworkers via (a) RLMX and (b) relative job performance, and being envied, such that the indirect effect is less pronounced when prosocial motivation is high rather than when it is low.

Overview of the Three Studies

We conducted three studies in a progressive manner to examine our research questions. We first examined the serial mediation model in Studies 1 and 2. In Study 1, we investigated the indirect effect of proactive personality on received coworker help via the focal employee's relative standings (i.e., RLMX and relative job performance) and then coworker envy. In Study 2, we constructively replicated and extended findings of Study 1 by including coworker undermining (i.e., the whole serial mediation model), a more active form of negative consequence of being envied (Duffy et al., 2012). The moderating role of prosocial motivation in the whole moderated serial mediation model was examined in Study 3.

The three studies were designed to increase the robustness of the findings in two ways. First, we sampled from both for profit and non-profit organizations to enhance the generalizability of the research findings. Research suggests that the extent to which coworkers feel envious toward a better-off employee is influenced by organizational contexts (Dineen, Duffy, Henle, & Lee, 2017). Second, we tested being envied—the core mechanism—with both

coworker-report (in Studies 1 and 3) and self-report (in Study 2) measures. Lee, Duffy, Scott, and Schippers (2018) suggested that employee's perception of being envied and envy reported by coworkers may capture different aspects of the interactions between the envious and the envied. In this vein, it is important to test whether our results hold with both measures.

Study 1: Examination of the Serial Mediation Model with Coworker Help

Participants and Procedures

We administered the first wave of online surveys to 400 employees from 70 work groups in 17 for-profit companies in North China. In total, 375 employees from the 70 groups completed the Time 1 survey, with measures of employee proactive personality and demographic variables. Group leaders rated employee job performance. We administered the Time 2 survey one month later. At Time 2, 249 group members from 50 groups completed the survey. Employees reported their LMX, envy toward each of the other group members. Two months later, we administered Time 3 survey and measured received help from coworkers. This study (also Studies 2 and 3) has been approved by the Survey and Behavioral Research Ethics Committee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong ("A Multilevel Investigation Linking Proactive Personality and Envy," 21/09/2017).

Matching Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3 data yielded our final sample of 243 employees from 49 groups with a final response rate of 61% for employees. Of the employees, 43% were male, 89% had a bachelor's degree, and their mean age was 28.77 years old.

Measures

We followed Brislin's (1980) translation-back-translation procedure to generate the Chinese versions of the scales employed in this study. The items were rated on a response scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) unless otherwise noted.

Proactive personality (Time 1). We adopted the most-widely used ten-item scale by Seibert, Crant, and Krainer (1999) to capture employee proactive personality (α =.93). One sample item is "I am always looking for better ways to do things."

Leader-member exchange (Time 2). Employee LMX was assessed with the widely-used LMX-7 scale (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; α = .96). A sample item is "My working relationship with my manager is effective." Items were revised slightly to accommodate a strongly disagree to strongly agree response format (Bauer & Green, 1996).

Job performance (Time 1). Employee job performance was evaluated with four items from a scale by Pearce and Porter (1986). We dropped the item, ability to get along with others, because it was confounded with the outcome variable (i.e., received help from coworkers). Group leaders rated group members on their "overall performance in general", "ability to get the task done on time", "performance quality", and "achievement of work goals" (α =.91).

Operationalization of RLMX and relative job performance. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Graen et al., 1982; Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2008; Tse, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2012), we operationalized RLMX as one's LMX score relative to the mean of all the group members' LMX scores by using group-mean centered LMX scores in analyses. The same approach was used for relative job performance. This approach enables us to focus on individual level relationships (Bliese, 2000).

Being envied (Time 2). We followed Kim and Glomb's (2014) approach and captured the focal employee's degree of being envied with the average level of coworker envy (i.e., in-degree envy centrality) toward the focal employee reported by all other group members. To reduce participant fatigue, each group member was asked to indicate their level of envy toward all the other group members by answering the question "To what extent do you envy this

coworker?" on a 7-point scale (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *To a great extent*). To increase the accuracy of the interpretation of envy, we provided examples of envy based on instruction by Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim (1999): "For example, it is frustrating to see this person to be successful so easily and it makes you feel inferior". The intra-class correlation coefficients (ICCs) for coworker ratings of envy were sufficient (ICC(1) = .53 and ICC(2) = .82) to warrant aggregating all coworkers' ratings of envy as the target employee's score (LeBreton & Senter, 2008).

Received help from coworkers (Time 3). Following Venkataramani and Dalal (2007), we measured received coworker help by asking the extent to which the focal employee received help from each of the other group members: "On average, how many times has this coworker helped you last month?" We used the mean score across group members in analyses. Interrater reliabilities, ICC(1) = .34 and ICC(2) = .68, justify our aggregation of all coworkers' help to the focal employee as the indicator of the employee's received coworker help.

Control variables (Time 1). Employee sex and tenure with the leader may be related to social comparison (Hu & Liden, 2013; Vidyarthi et al., 2010). Thus, it seems reasonable to control the two variables in analyses. However, neither of them was significantly correlated to our study variables. Thus, we reported the results without controls (Becker et al., 2016).

Analytical Strategy

We adopted the multilevel structure equation modeling (MSEM) approach (Preacher, Zhang, & Zyphur, 2011; Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010) in hypothesis testing. This approach enabled us to simultaneously test all of the hypothesized relationships at the individual level, while controlling for group level variance. We used the "Two-level Complex" function with sandwich estimators in Mplus to deal with the issue of non-independence caused by employees being nested in groups. We employed all available data in our analyses with full-information

maximum-likelihood estimation (Newman, 2014). Following Selig and Preacher (2008), we used Monte Carlo bootstrapping to estimate indirect effects. As suggested by Preacher et al.'s (2011), 90% confidence intervals (CI) were used in testing indirect effects.

Results of Study 1

Multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (MCFAs). We conducted MCFAs to test the independence of the measures. First, we tested a model in which proactive personality, RLMX, and relative job performance were treated as individual level factors, and coworker envy and helping were treated as both the individual level and group level factors. Referring to previous research (e.g., Williams, Vandenberg, & Edwards, 2009), we formed three item-parcels for proactive personality and RLMX. The model fit the data well (χ^2 (50) = 89.42, p < .001, CFI = .96, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .06, and SRMR = .05). This model generated better fit indices than two alternative models. In the first alternative model, all of the self-reported items (i.e., proactive personality, RLMX, and received help from coworkers) loaded on one factor (χ^2 (57) = 391.49, p < .001, CFI =.69, TLI =.59, RMSEA =.16, and SRMR =.16). The second alternative model was with all items loaded on one factor (χ^2(59) =626.66, p < .001, CFI =.47, TLI =.32, RMSEA =.20, and SRMR =.18). These results demonstrated that the variables used in this study represent separate constructs.

Tests of hypotheses. The means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables are displayed in Table 1. Table 2 displays unstandardized coefficients for direct and indirect effects. Figure 2 presents the results related to the hypotheses.

==== insert Tables 1 and 2 & Figure 2 about here ====

Hypothesis 1 stated that proactive personality was positively and indirectly related to being envied by coworkers though RLMX and relative job performance. Our analyses revealed a

significant positive indirect effect of proactive personality on being envied via RLMX (indirect effect = 0.04, 90% CI = [0.01, 0.08]) and relative job performance (indirect effect = 0.07, 90% CI = [0.02, 0.13]). Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 focused on a negative relationship between being envied and coworker helping. The results supported this hypothesis (coefficient = -0.54, $p < .05$; Table 2). The indirect relationship between proactive personality and received help from coworkers was the focus of Hypothesis 4. The indirect relationship from proactive personality to RLMX, being envied, and received help from coworkers was significant (indirect effect = -0.02, 90% CI = [-0.05, -0.003]). The indirect relationship via relative job performance and being envied was also significant (indirect effect = -0.04, 90% CI = [-0.09, -0.005]). Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Study 2: Test of the Serial Mediation Model with Coworker Help and Undermining

Participants and Procedures

We administered two-waves of online surveys in a non-profit organization in China in Study 2. At Time 1, 589 employees from 120 groups were invited to provide information on proactive personality as well as their demographic information. Among those invited, 443 returned their questionnaires. Approximately two months later, the same employees were invited to participate in the Time 2 survey with measures of LMX, being envied, and coworker helping and undermining. Four-hundred and forty-three employees completed the Time 2 survey. The final matched sample included 438 employees from 86 work groups (response rate was 74.36%).

Of the 438 employees, 63% were female, and 99% had a bachelor's degree. Their average age was 31.16 years old and had worked with their leaders for 31.72 months at Time 1.

Measures

As in Study 1, we translated and back-translated all the scales into Chinese following

Brislin's (1980) procedure. Unless otherwise noted, the items were rated on a response scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

Proactive personality (Time 1). We adopted the same scale (Seibert et al., 1999) as in Study 1 to measure proactive personality (α = .91).

Leader-member exchange (Time 2). As in Study 1, we assessed LMX with the LMX-7 scale (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; α = .92).

Job performance (Time 1). Job performance was rated by leaders with the four-item scale used in Study 1 (Pearce & Porter, 1986; α =.83).

Being envied (Time 2). We adopted the three-item scale by Lee et al. (2018) to measure employees' perceptions of being envied by coworkers. A sample item is "Because of my success at work, I am sometimes envied by my teammates" (α =.94).

Received help from coworkers (Time 2). Following Venkataramani and Dalal (2007), we captured received coworker help by asking employees to indicate the degree to which they had helped each of their coworkers in the same group ("How often have you helped this coworker during the past two months?") on the 7-point scale (1 =*Never*, 7 = *Very often*). We then calculated the mean score of received help from all the coworkers for the focal employee and used it in all analyses. Interrater reliabilities for this variable were sufficient (ICC(1) = .16 and ICC(2) = .60). These results justify our aggregation of all the coworkers' provided help to the focal employee as the indicator of the focal employee's received help from coworkers.

Being socially undermined (Time 2). Being socially undermined by coworkers was measured following the same approach we adopted to capture received help from coworkers in Study 1 (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007). Participants rated each of the other group members on the question "How often has this coworker insulted you during the past two months?" on a 7-

point scale (1 = *Never*, 7 = *Very often*). This item had the highest factor loading in the most-widely used measure of coworker undermining (Duffy et al., 2002). The mean of received undermining from all the coworkers in the group was used to reflect the focal employee's coworker undermining. Interrater reliabilities were high (ICC(1) = .67 and ICC(2) = .94).

Analytical Strategy

The multilevel structural equation modeling approach (Preacher et al., 2010, 2011) was employed in hypothesis testing. As in Study 1, we operationalized RLMX and relative job performance by group-mean centering LMX and job performance, respectively. The variances of other variables were estimated at both the individual and group level (Preacher et al., 2010, 2011). All the relationships were tested simultaneously via the "Two-level Random" function in Mplus. Indirect effects were estimated via Monte Carlo bootstrapping.

Results of Study 2

MCFAs. We ran MCFAs to test whether the scales in Study 2 were distinct from each other. We used the same item parceling strategy as in Study 1. RLMX and relative job performance were treated at the individual level, and being envied, received help from coworkers, and coworker social undermining were considered at both the individual and group level. The model fit the data well (χ^2 (93) = 153.21, $p < .001$, CFI =.98, TLI =.97, RMSEA =.04, and SRMR =.03). We then tested two alternative models. In the first model, the items for RLMX, proactive personality, and envy were specified to load on the same factor (χ^2 (105) = 1317.94, $p < .001$, CFI =.53, TLI =.41, RMSEA =.16, and SRMR =.13). In the second model, all the items were specified to load on one factor (χ^2 (110) = 1638.04, $p < .001$, CFI =.41, TLI =.29, RMSEA =.18, and SRMR =.16). Results show that the measurement model fit the data best.

Tests of hypotheses. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of the Study 2 variables, and their correlations. The unstandardized coefficients of the direct and indirect effects in the serial mediation model are displayed in Table 4. Figure 3 presents the unstandardized coefficients for hypothesis testing.

==== insert Tables 3 and 4 & Figure 3 about here ====

Hypothesis 1 was partially supported in Study 2, as the indirect effect of proactive personality on being envied via RLMX (indirect effect = 0.22, 90% CI = [0.13, 0.32]; Table 4) was supported, but the indirect effect via relative job performance was not significant.

Hypothesis 2 was supported, as the negative relationship between envy and coworker help was significant (coefficient = -0.05, $p < .05$). Findings of Study 2 also supported Hypothesis 3 on the relationship between coworker envy and undermining (coefficient = 0.22, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 4 predicted a negative relationship of proactive personality with coworker help via RLMX and relative job performance, and then via envy. The indirect effect via RLMX and being envied was significant (indirect effect = -0.01, 90% CI = [-0.02, -0.001]). The indirect effect via relative job performance was not. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 5 focused on the indirect effect of proactive personality on coworker social undermining. The indirect effect was positive and significant via RLMX and then being envied (indirect effect = 0.05, 90% CI = [0.02, 0.08]), but was not significant via relative job performance and being envied. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was partially supported.

Study 3: Examination of the Moderated Serial Mediation Model

Participants and Procedures

In Study 3, we invited 451 employees and their immediate supervisors from 90 work groups in five for-profit organizations to participate. Among those invited, 388 employees

returned usable questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 86%. Of the 388 employees from 88 groups in the final sample, 62% were female, and 84% had a bachelor or equivalent degree. Their average age was 32.45 years old.

Measures

All the items were rated on a response scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) unless otherwise noted.

Proactive personality. Due to the limit of survey length imposed by the participating organizations, we measured proactive personality with a six-item scale adapted from Seibert et al. (1999) (α =.77). The items were selected based on our discussion with HR managers. Short-version proactive personality scales have been adopted previously (e.g., Parker, 1998). We used an independent sample of 572 employees to validate the scale used in this study. The correlation between this scale and the scale by Seibert et al. (1999) was .91 (p <.001), providing preliminary evidence that the scale used in this study is a valid measure of proactive personality.

Leader-member exchange and job performance. We assessed LMX (α = .90) and job performance (α =.94) with the same instruments as in Studies 1 and 2.

Being envied. We measured being envied via the same approach as in Study 1 (Kim & Glomb, 2014). We calculated the average of coworker reported envy toward the focal employee as the indicator of being envied. The ICC values indicated that the aggregation of data was appropriate (ICC(1)= .11 and ICC(2)= .48).

Received help from coworkers. Following Study 1, we measured received help from coworkers with the mean of focal employee reported help received from all the other group members. Values of ICCs warranted the aggregation (ICC(1) = .38, and ICC(2) = .83).

Being socially undermined. We captured coworker social undermining by the three

items with the highest factor loadings from the social undermining scale by Duffy et al. (2012) (α = .86). One sample item is "My coworkers insulted me".

Prosocial motivation. Prosocial motivation was assessed with the 4-item scale by Grant's (2008) (α = .91). A sample item is "I work because I care about benefiting others through my work".

Analytical Strategy

Because participants of Study 3 were from 88 groups, we used the "Two-level Complex" function in Mplus to obtain robust estimates. We group-mean centered LMX, job performance, and prosocial motivation (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). We examined the hypotheses using the MSEM approach (Preacher et al., 2010) in two models. In Model 1, we tested the serial mediation model (Hypotheses 1-5). In Model 2, we tested the moderated serial mediation model (Hypotheses 6-8). Indirect effects, moderated mediation effects, and conditional indirect effects were estimated with Monte Carlo bootstrapping (Preacher et al., 2010).

Results of Study 3

MCFAs. We conducted MCFAs to examine the distinctiveness of the measures used in Study 3. A seven factor model (i.e., proactive personality, RLMX, relative job performance, being envied, received help from coworkers, being socially undermined, and prosocial motivation) fit the data well (χ^2 (320) = 572.97, $p < .001$, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .05, and SRMR = .04). This model fit the data better than two alternative models: A model in which RLMX and relative job performance items were loaded on one factor (χ^2 (326) = 1618.58, $p <$ .001, CFI = .70, TLI = .65, RMSEA = .10, and SRMR = .11), and a one-factor model with all items loaded on the same factor (χ^2(342) = 3104.01, $p < .001$, CFI = .36, TLI = .29, RMSEA = .14, SRMR = .16). Results show our study variables represent different constructs.

Tests of hypotheses. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study variables appear in Table 5. Figure 4(a) presents unstandardized path coefficients testing Hypothesis 1-5 (i.e., Model 1). Figure 4(b) shows the path coefficients for the moderated serial mediation model. Indirect effects and conditional indirect effects are displayed in Table 6.

==== insert Tables 5 and 6 & Figure 4 about here ====

We first tested Hypotheses 1-5 again. The indirect effects of proactive personality on envy was significant via relative job performance (indirect effect = 0.02, 90% CI = [0.003, 0.03]), but not via RLMX (indirect effect = -0.01, 90% CI = [-0.02, 0.03]), lending partial support for Hypothesis 1.

The results also supported Hypotheses 2 and 3 by showing a significant relationship between being envied and coworker help (coefficient = -0.34, $p < .01$), and a significant positive relationship between being envied and coworker undermining (coefficient = 0.10, $p < .01$).

Results partially supported Hypothesis 4 by showing a significant indirect relationship of proactive personality with coworker help via relative job performance and envy (indirect effect = -0.005, 90% CI = [-0.008, -0.001]), but the indirect effect was not significant via RLMX (indirect effect = 0.002, 90% CI = [-0.01, 0.01]). The indirect relationship between proactive personality and coworker undermining via relative job performance and envy was significant (indirect effect = 0.001, 90% CI = [0.0002, 0.004]), while the indirect effect through RLMX was not (indirect effect = -0.001, 90% CI = [-0.003, 0.002]). Hypothesis 5 was partially supported. The nonsignificant indirect effects of proactive personality via RLMX may be partially explained by the moderating role of prosocial motivation, which was the focus of Hypotheses 6-8.

Results (Figure 4b) showed that the moderating effect was significant on the relationship between relative job performance and being envied (coefficient = -0.10, $p < .05$), but not on the

relationship between RLMX and being envied (coefficient = -0.07, p = .16). Simple slope analyses (Figure 5) show the relationship between relative job performance and envy was positive and significant (simple slope = 0.29, p < .01) when prosocial motivation was low (e.g., - 1 *SD* below the mean), but not significant (simple slope = 0.10, p = .21) when prosocial motivation was high (e.g., + 1 *SD* above the mean). Hypothesis 6 was partially supported.

==== insert Figure 5 about here ====

Hypotheses 7 and 8 focus on the moderating role of prosocial motivation in the serial mediation model. The moderated mediation effect of prosocial motivation on the indirect relationship between proactive personality and received coworker help via relative job performance and being envied was significant (moderated mediation effect = 0.003, 90% CI = [0.0004, 0.005]). When prosocial motivation was high, the conditional indirect effect was nonsignificant (= -0.003, 90% CI = [-0.01, 0.001]), but when prosocial motivation was low, the indirect effect was significant (= -0.007, 90% CI = [-0.011, -0.002]). The moderated mediation effect of prosocial motivation on the indirect relationship from proactive personality to RLMX, envy, and then to received coworker help was not significant (= 0.01, 90% CI = [-0.002, 0.02]). Hypothesis 7 was partially supported.

The moderated mediation model predicted in Hypothesis 8 (i.e., proactive personality → relative job performance × prosocial motivation→ being envied → being socially undermined) was significant (moderated mediation effect = -0.0008, 90% CI = [-0.0013, -0.0001]). When prosocial motivation was high, the conditional indirect effect of proactive personality on coworker undermining through relative job performance and being envied was not significant (= 0.001, 90% CI = [-0.0002, 0.003]). The indirect effect (= 0.002, 90% CI = [0.0004, 0.01]) was only significant when prosocial motivation was low. The moderated mediation effect proposed in

the indirect relationship through RLMX (i.e., Proactive personality → RLMX × Prosocial motivation→ Being envied → Being socially undermined) was not significant (= -0.003, 90% CI = [-0.01, 0.0004]). The results partially supported Hypothesis 8.

General Discussion

Implications for Theory and Research

Drawing upon social comparison theory, the current research examined coworker-related outcomes for employee proactive personality. The results of three field studies suggested that proactive personality exerts a negative and indirect effect on received help from coworkers. The findings also revealed positive and indirect effects on coworker undermining. The indirect effects became realized through sequential mediators: RLMX or relative job performance, and then via being envied by coworkers. The indirect effects (e.g., through relative job performance and then being envied) were significant only when employee prosocial motivation was low rather than high. Thus, the present research provided further support to the notion that proactive personality is not always beneficial, especially when coupled with low prosocial motivation.

The primary contribution of this research lies in providing a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the influences of proactive personality in organizations. Prior research has primarily shown that proactive personality is beneficial (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Tornau & Frese, 2013). Yet, examining the potential cost of being a proactive person has been suggested by many scholars (e.g., Bindl & Parker, 2010; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008), though with limited attention in empirical research. The limited research on possible negative effects of proactive personality has primarily focused on performance-related outcomes (e.g., Chan, 2006; Wihler et al., 2017; see Crant et al., 2016 for more) and has only recently tapped into well-being outcomes (e.g., Fay & Hüttges, 2017; Strauss, et al., 2017). The present research builds on, but

diverges from, the prior research by focusing on *coworker* affective and behavioral reactions (e.g., Bolino, Turnley, & Anderson, 2010; Parker et al., 2019). The current investigation is in alignment with the recent trend in organizational research looking at negative outcomes of positive individual characteristics (e.g., Côté et al., 2011; Grant et al., 2011; Kim & Glomb, 2010) and other constructs such as leadership (e.g., Li, Schaubroeck, Xie, & Keller, 2018). The current investigation offers support for the notion of paradox of traits (Judge et al., 2009) by suggesting that paradoxical effects of personality traits also apply to proactive personality. The findings that proactive personality have both negative and positive effects is also consistent with previous research showing that coworkers may show high levels of helping and undermining toward the same employee to achieve their distinct goals of connectedness and self-protection (Campbell, Liao, Chuang, Zhou, & Dong, 2017; Duffy et al., 2002; Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008). Campbell et al. (2017) concluded that "social relationships rarely lie on a continuum from negative to positive but rather comprise of simultaneously helpful and harmful experiences and interactions" (p. 848). Such findings are also in keeping with research on triadic relationships among a focal employee, coworker, and supervisor (Sherony & Green, 2002) and on harming high performers (e.g., Kim & Glomb, 2014), such that under certain conditions, superior relationships with supervisors may result in coworker undermining.

Our research also sheds light on important precursors and boundary conditions for workplace envy. Proactive employees may become the targets of upward social comparison, which in turn may breed coworker envy. This is because of their relatively superior standings on LMX and job performance in the group. Organizational research has primarily focused on consequences of envy and thus "relatively little is known about the specific organizational antecedents that may elicit organizational envy" (Duffy et al., 2008, p. 169). Investigating the

roles of proactive personality and prosocial motivation enhances our understanding of what, how and when individual characteristics may affect workplace envy and social comparison.

Furthermore, our results expand the knowledge on person-related antecedents of RLMX. Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, and Ferris (2012) showed that compared to research on consequences, much less attention has been devoted to the antecedents of LMX, let alone RLMX. Results of the present research suggest that one's relatively stable tendency to initiate environmental change is an important factor that may drive RLMX. LMX research has long recognized the significance of subordinate characteristics in the development of differentiated relationships with supervisor (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Scandura, 1987). In this vein, the present research provides further support to this notion by showing the influence of an agentic personality trait on RLMX.

Although results of this research generally support our hypotheses, findings across the three studies were not always consistent. The indirect effects of proactive personality on received help through both RLMX and relative job performance and then coworker envy were supported in Study 1. The results supported only the mediating path through RLMX in Study 2. We suspect that there might be two explanations. First, we assessed envy through a coworker-report scale in Study 1, but a self-report scale in Study 2. Although self-report and other-report envy are significantly correlated (Lee et al., 2018), they may reflect different aspects of the social interactions between proactive employees and coworkers. As we found in Study 3, a second explanation is that the relationship between relative job performance and envy is moderated by prosocial motivation. Similarly, the relationship between RLMX and coworker envy was not significant in Study 3. This might be due to differences in study contexts or samples among the three studies, different measures of envy we used or other moderators. For example, research has

revealed that justice climate moderates the relationship between RLMX and coworker helping (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010). Future research could explore such possibilities in greater depth.

Findings of this research raises a broader question on how to reconcile the seemingly contrasting positive and negative effects of proactive personality. Given that research on negative effects of proactivity is still in its infancy (Belschak, Den Hartog, & Fay, 2010; Fay & Hüttges, 2017; Strauss et al., 2017), we are not aware of any research integrating both positive and negative effects of proactive personality. As suggested by Cangiano, and colleagues (2019) and Fay and Hüttges (2017), proactivity fluctuates over time and positive and negative effects may operate through distinct mechanisms and timescales. Thus, the net effect of proactivity may also fluctuate, contingent on other factors, such as whether proactivity is expressed wisely according to social and interpersonal contexts (Parker et al., 2019). Our findings show that the potential negative effects of proactive personality were contingent on prosocial motivation. The conditional negative effects of proactive personality might be short lived, and thus may not necessarily translate into long-term detrimental effects on career success (Pingel, Fay, & Urbach, 2019). Yet, our research still provides a cautionary note for proactive employees to deal with potential negative coworker reactions in order to sustain their proactivity. This is consistent with research showing that proactivity needs to be accompanied by adaptivity (Strauss, Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2015), and that employees need to manage their affects to sustain proactivity (Bindl, 2019). Envy research has shown that the envied may provide help to the envious (van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2010). Such prosocial behaviors may be adopted as appeasement strategies by proactive people (e.g., Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010). Parker et al. (2019) recently put forth a novel construct, *wise proactivity*, defined as "initiating goals to make 'wise things happen,' and then pursuing these goals in a wise manner, effectively managing the tensions

across different interests that arise" (p. 239). Future research could utilize wise proactivity as a starting point in integrating the positive and negative effects of proactivity.

Study Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

The current research has several strengths. We conducted three studies in private sector organizations (Studies 1 and 3) and a non-profit organization (Study 2) to examine our theoretical model. We collected data from multiple sources—employee, supervisor, and coworker—across different time points. Such strengths point to the robustness of our findings.

Nevertheless, the current research has its limitations, which suggest directions for future studies. First, as with the majority of research on proactive personality, LMX, and envy, this research was essentially cross-sectional in nature. Recent research suggests that relationships between proactivity or personality and work outcomes may be reciprocal (Li, Fay, Frese, Harms, & Gao, 2014; Li, Li, Fay, & Frese, 2019), and thus longitudinal studies are needed to reveal more delicate relationships related to proactive personality, and interactions between proactive employees and coworkers. Second, following previous research (e.g., Duffy et al., 2012), we studied envy as a unidimensional construct. Recent theorizing suggests that envy may be manifested in two forms—malicious envy and benign envy (van de Ven et al., 2010). Future research may examine how proactivity and relative standings play their roles in shaping the two different types of envy. Third, we focused on contrast effects of upward social comparison, building upon previous social comparison studies in organizational contexts (e.g., Dineen et al., 2017; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). Contract effects focus on differences with the better-off person, while assimilation effects focus on similarities with the social comparison target. Yet, a recent meta-analysis (Gerber, Wheeler, & Suls, 2018) has found that contrast effects are dominant in social comparisons. Future research may explore the conditions that can cultivate

assimilative reactions in organizational contexts.

Fourth, although social comparison may include both automatic and motivated processes (Gilbert et al., 1995; Greenberg et al., 2007; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002; Wood, 1989), we did not distinguish between the two processes given our already complex moderated serial mediation model. We encourage future research to explore automatic versus controlled processes within the context of social comparisons. Fifth, although our proposed mechanism through coworker envy was supported, it is possible that our examination of the mediating mechanism is not exhaustive. For instance, coworkers may react negatively to proactive employees' change-oriented behaviors, as suggested by research on system justification and resistance to change (Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005; Kaltiainen, Lipponen, & Holtz, 2017; Sung et al., 2017) [3]. Future research may scrutinize more alternative mechanisms and examine their relative importance. Sixth, consistent with most of research on proactive personality (e.g., Fuller & Marler, 2009; Tornau & Frese, 2013), the effect sizes recorded in the current research were small in magnitude. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that our findings have little practical significance (Prentice & Miller, 1992), given the broad and long term influences of proactivity on employee attitudes, behaviors, work characteristics, and well-being (Crant et al., 2016). Future research should explore suitable environments that may amplify and sustain the influences of proactivity. Last, we conducted this research in China, characterized by high power distance and collectivism. The nature of work is influenced by country culture (e.g., Taylor, Li, Shi, & Borman, 2008). Future research should examine the relationships in other cultural settings.

Practical Implications

Our findings offer critical implications for organizations and employees to manage the

[3] We are grateful to our anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

costs of proactivity and differentiated treatment by leaders. Specifically, our results serve as a cautionary note for organizational selection, because the majority of the proactive personality research has demonstrated its beneficial effects, which is consistent with the tendency for organizations to select highly proactive job candidates. Our findings introduce an intriguing dilemma facing organizations. On the one hand, proactive people tend to outperform those with lower levels of proactive personality. On the other hand, however, proactive people may be envied by their coworkers, because of their relatively high status in work groups, which may then prompt coworkers to withdrawal prosocial behaviors and/or enact aggressive behaviors. Thus, organizations need to balance the benefits and costs associated with hiring proactive employees. For example, ensuring that the uneven distributions of rewards and resources are well justified may be one useful way to deal with such situations (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2010).

Our findings also have important implications for proactive employees to reap more benefits for their career development. Given the negative effects of being proactive, proactive employees need to better manage their interpersonal and social relationships with coworkers, to avoid potential negative reactions enacted by envious coworkers. Caring about coworkers' welfare and engaging in prosocial behaviors may be helpful (Parrott, 2016). A recent study on coworker envy (i.e., Lee & Duffy, in press) suggests that instead of socially undermining an envied employee, the envious may also seek advice from the envied to learn how to improve their relative standings. Proactive employees may take this approach to achieve greater career success and to sustain their proactivity in the long run.

Conclusion

The majority of the proactive personality research has portrayed proactive personality as a positive personality trait that mostly brings about benefits to employees and organizations.

Providing a more balanced view, the current study revealed that being proactive may also result in negative coworker reactions through high relative standings in the group and coworker envy. Our results indicate the complexity of proactive personality in the context of work groups. Future research should integrate potential positive and negative effects of proactive personality longitudianlly.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables (Study 1)

	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Proactive personality	5.12	0.84				
2. RLMX	0.00	0.57	.20**			
3. Relative job performance	0.00	0.60	.33**	.07		
4. Being envied by coworkers	2.56	1.15	.14	.26**	.28**	
5. Received help from coworkers	3.52	2.52	.04	-.01	-.02	-.12**

Note: N = 194-243 individuals. *SD* = standard deviation. LMX = leader-member exchange. Correlation results indicated the individual-level relationships among variables
*p<.05. **p<.01.

Table 2
Summary of Results of Testing the Serial Mediation Model (Study 1)

Effect type	Coefficient	*SE*	CI
Direct paths			
Proactive personality → RLMX (1st stage of H1a)	0.17**	0.04	[0.09, 0.25]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance (1st stage of H1b)	0.29**	0.11	[0.08, 0.50]
RLMX → Being envied (2nd stage of H1a)	0.23*	0.09	[0.05, 0.40]
Relative job performance → Being envied (2nd stage of H1b)	0.24**	0.09	[0.07, 0.42]
Proactive personality → Being envied	0.004	0.04	[-0.08, 0.09]
Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H2)	-0.54*	0.21	[-0.95, -0.13]
Proactive personality →Received help from coworkers	0.19	0.23	[-0.25, 0.64]
Indirect effects			
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied (H1a)	0.04	0.02	[0.01, 0.08]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance → Being envied (H1b)	0.07	0.04	[0.02, 0.13]
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H4a)	-0.02	0.01	[-0.05, -0.003]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance → Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H4b)	-0.04	0.03	[-0.09, -0.005]

Note: N = 243 individuals. *SE* = standard error; CI = confidence interval. RLMX = relative leader-member exchange.
Confidence intervals for indirect effects were estimated via Monte Carlo bootstrapping; 95% and 90% CIs were reported for direct and indirect effects, respectively.
*p<.05; **p<.01.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables (Study 2)

	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Proactive personality	5.17	0.99					
2. RLMX	0.00	1.04	.28**				
3. Relative job performance	0.00	0.81	.25**	.24**			
4. Being envied by coworkers	3.74	1.68	.10	.45**	.08		
5. Received help from coworkers	4.18	1.01	-.10	-.26**	-.14*	-.21**	
6. Coworker social undermining	2.42	1.59	-.03	.26**	-.09	.31**	-.25**

Note: N = 399−438. *SD* = standard deviation. LMX = leader-member exchange. Correlation results indicated the individual-level relationships among variables
*p<.05. **p<.01.

Table 4
Summary of Results of Testing the Serial Mediation Model (Study 2)

Effect type	Coefficient	*SE*	CI
Direct paths			
Proactive personality → RLMX (1st stage of H1a)	0.33**	0.08	[0.18, 0.48]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance (1st stage of H1b)	0.23**	0.09	[0.06, 0.41]
RLMX → Being envied (2nd stage of H1a)	0.66**	0.06	[0.54, 0.78]
Relative job performance → Being envied (2nd stage of H1b)	-0.05	0.08	[-0.20, 0.11]
Proactive personality → Being envied	-0.04	0.10	[-0.23, 0.16]
Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H2)	-0.05*	0.02	[-0.09, -0.002]
Being envied → Being socially undermined (H3)	0.22**	0.05	[0.11, 0.32]
Proactive personality → Received help from coworkers	-0.01	0.04	[-0.09, 0.08]
Proactive personality → Being socially undermined	-0.11	0.10	[-0.30, 0.09]
Indirect effects			
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied (H1a)	0.22	0.06	[0.13, 0.32]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance → Being envied (H1b)	-0.01	0.02	[-0.02, 0.04]
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H4a)	-0.01	0.01	[-0.02, -0.001]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance → Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H4b)	0.001	0.001	[-0.001, 0.003]
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied → Being socially undermined (H5a)	0.05	0.02	[0.02, 0.08]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance → Being envied → Being socially undermined (H5b)	-0.002	0.004	[-0.01, 0.004]

Note: $N = 438$ individuals. *SE* = standard error; CI = confidence interval. RLMX = relative leader-member exchange. Confidence intervals were estimated via Monte Carlo bootstrapping; 95% and 90% CIs were reported for direct and indirect effects, respectively.
*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables (Study 3)

	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Proactive personality	5.14	0.67						
2. RLMX	0.00	0.78	.27**					
3. Relative job performance	0.00	0.61	.08*	.01				
4. Being envied	2.20	1.03	.10	.01	.19**			
5. Received help from coworkers	3.85	1.17	.11	.24**	.03	-.18**		
6. Coworker social undermining	1.61	0.89	.00	-.17**	-.08*	.06*	-.08	
7. Prosocial motivation	4.71	1.10	.26**	.32**	.03	.06	.25**	-.05

Note: N = 370−388. *SD* = standard deviation. RLMX = relative leader-member exchange. Correlation results indicated the individual-level relationships among variables
*p<.05. **p<.01.

Table 6
Summary of Results for Testing Indirect Effects, Moderated Mediation, and Conditional Indirect Effects (Study 3)

Effect type	Coefficient	*SE*	CI
Direct paths (testing the serial mediation model)			
Proactive personality → RLMX (1st stage of H1a)	0.35**	0.08	[0.20, 0.49]
Proactive personality → Relative job performance (1st stage of H1b)	0.08*	0.04	[0.003, 0.15]
RLMX → Being envied (2nd stage of H1a)	-0.02	0.05	[-0.12, 0.09]
Relative job performance → Being envied (2nd stage of H1b)	0.19**	0.05	[0.09, 0.29]
Proactive personality → Being envied	0.09	0.07	[-0.05, 0.23]
Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H2)	-0.34**	0.09	[-0.51, -0.17]
Being envied → Being undermined (H3)	0.10**	0.02	[0.06, 0.13]
Proactive personality → Received help from coworkers	0.12	0.14	[-0.16, 0.40]
Proactive personality → Being undermined	0.07	0.04	[-0.02, 0.15]
Indirect effects (testing the serial mediation model)			
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied (H1a)	-0.01	0.02	[-0.02, 0.03]
Proactive personality → Relative performance → Being envied (H1b)	0.02	0.01	[0.003, 0.03]
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H4a)	0.002	0.01	[-0.01, 0.01]
Proactive personality → Relative performance → Being envied → Received help (H4b)	-0.005	0.002	[-0.008, -0.001]
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied → Being undermined (H5a)	-0.001	0.002	[-0.003, 0.002]
Proactive personality → Relative performance → Being envied → Being undermined (H5b)	0.001	0.001	[0.0002, 0.004]
Moderated mediation and conditional indirect effects (Moderator: Prosocial motivation)			
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied → Received help from coworkers (H7a)	0.01	0.01	[-0.002, 0.02]
Proactive personality → Relative performance → Being envied → Received help (H7b)	0.003	0.001	[0.0004, 0.005]
High prosocial motivation (+1 SD):	-0.003	0.002	[-0.01, 0.001]
Low prosocial motivation (-1 SD):	-0.007	0.003	[-0.011, -0.002]
Proactive personality → RLMX → Being envied → Being socially undermined (H8a)	-0.003	0.002	[-0.01, 0.0004]
Proactive personality → Relative performance → Being envied → Being undermined (H8b)	-0.0008	0.001	[-0.0013, -0.0001]
High prosocial motivation (+1 SD)	0.001	0.001	[-0.0002, 0.003]
Low prosocial motivation (-1 SD)	0.002	0.002	[0.0004, 0.01]

Note: N =388. *SE* = standard error. CI = confidence interval. RLMX = relative leader-member exchange. *p<.05. **p<.01.
95% and 90% CIs were reported for direct and indirect effects based on Monte Carlo bootstrapping.

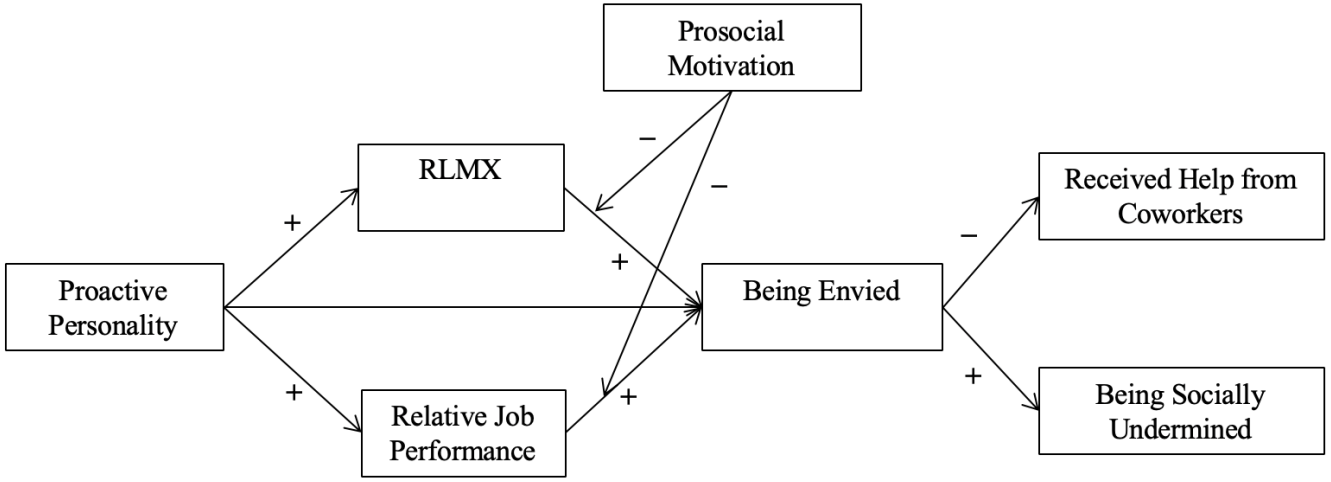


Figure 1. Overall research model.

RLMX= relative leader-member exchange. Being socially undermined was examined in Study 2 and Study 3. Prosocial motivation was tested in Study 3. All the other parts of the model were examined in the three studies.

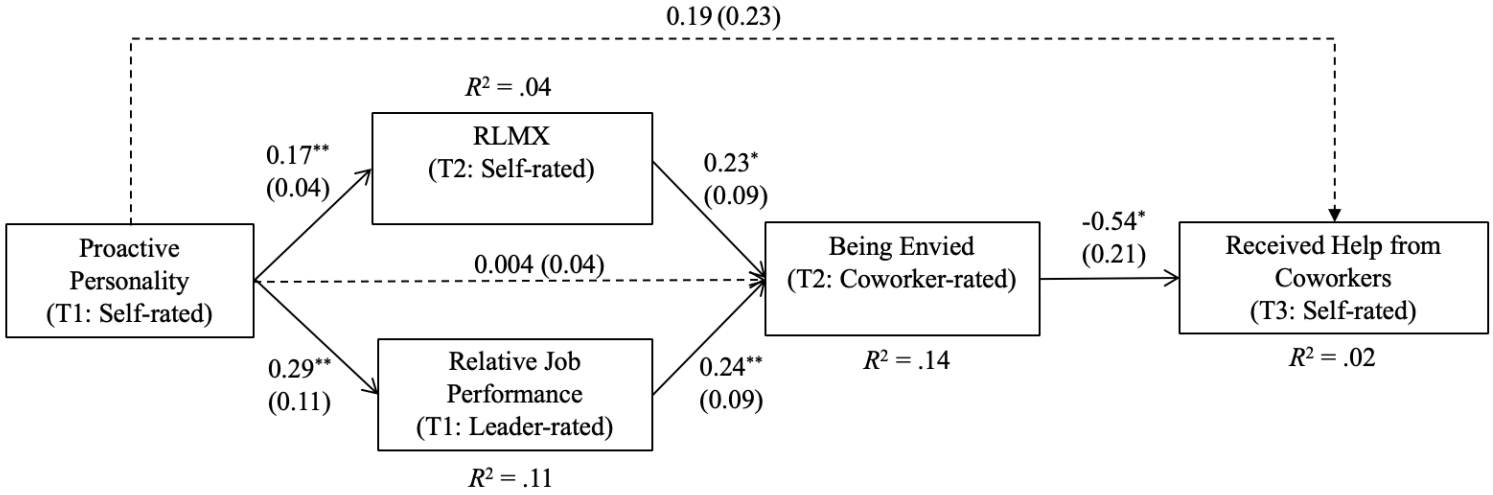


Figure 2. Results of testing the serial mediation model (Study 1).

N = 243 individuals. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3=Time 3. RLMX= relative leader-member exchange. Unstandardized path estimates are reported. The dashed lines indicate nonsignificant relationships. Standard errors are presented in brackets.

$^{*}p<.05$; $^{**}p<.01$.

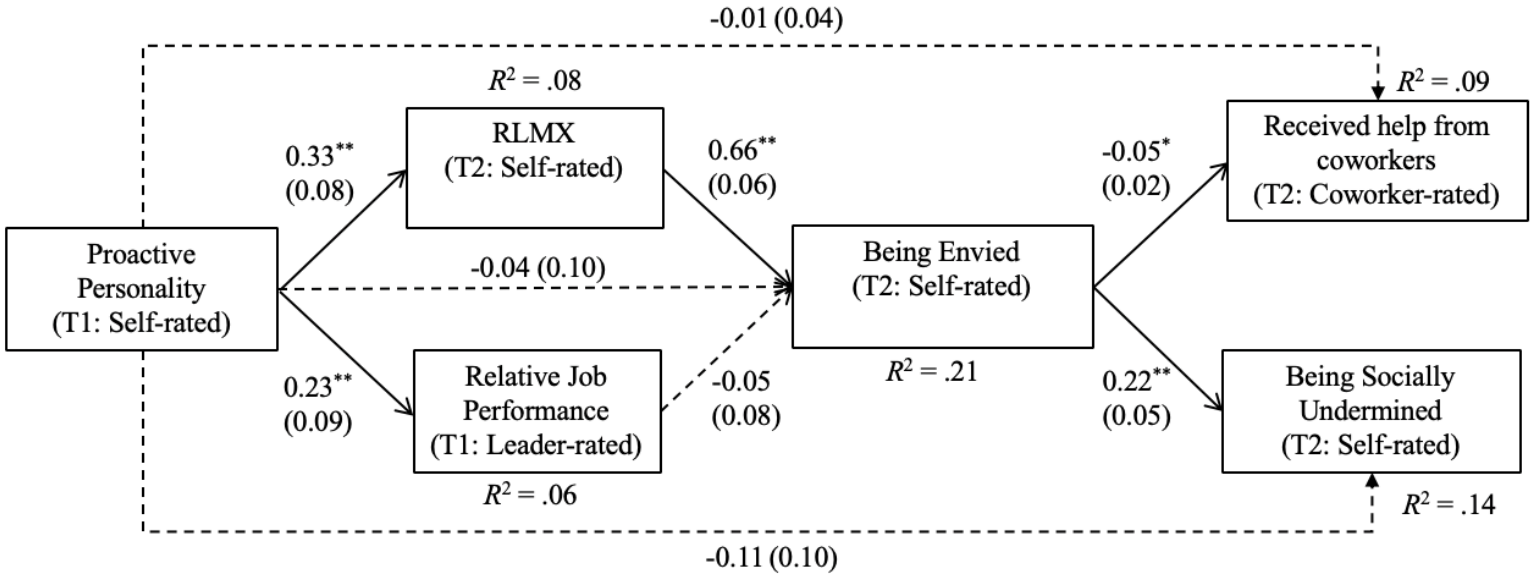
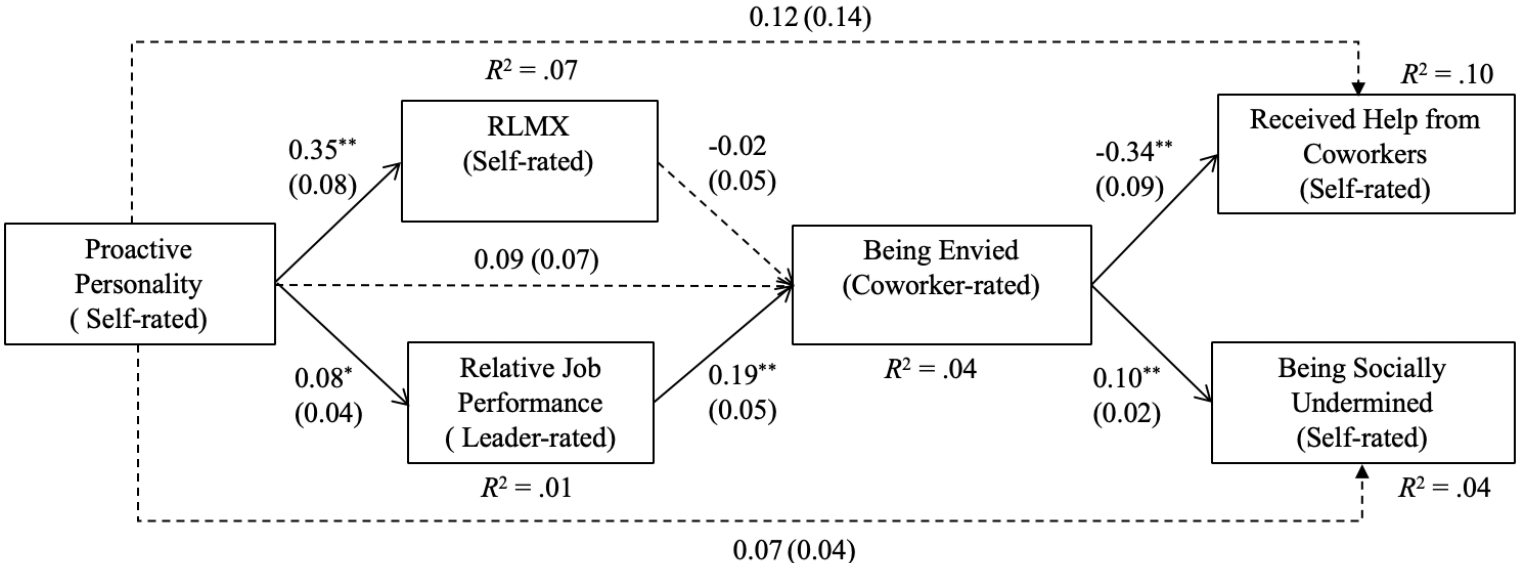


Figure 3. Results of testing the serial mediation model (Study 2).

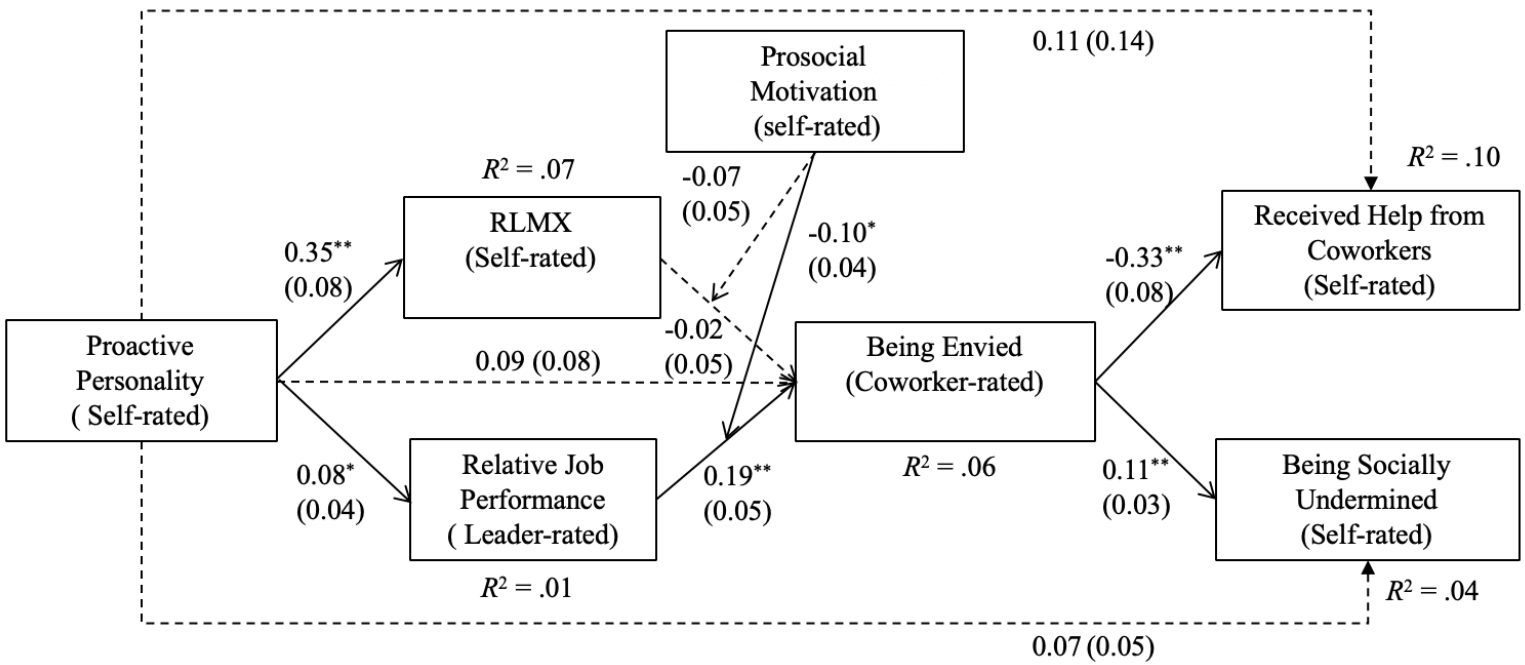
N =438 individuals. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2. RLMX= relative leader-member exchange. Unstandardized path estimates are reported. The dashed lines indicate nonsignificant relationships. Standard errors are presented in brackets. $^{*}p<.05$; $^{**}p<.01$.



Panel A. Replication of findings of Studies 1 and 2.

Figure 4. Results of Study 3.

N =388. RLMX= relative leader-member exchange. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Standard errors are presented in brackets. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant relationships. $^{*}p<.05$; $^{**}p<.01$.



Panel B. Results of testing moderating role of prosocial motivation in the serial mediation model.

Figure 4. Results of Study 3.

N =388. RLMX= relative leader-member exchange. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Standard errors are presented in brackets. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant relationships. $^{*}p<.05$; $^{**}p<.01$.

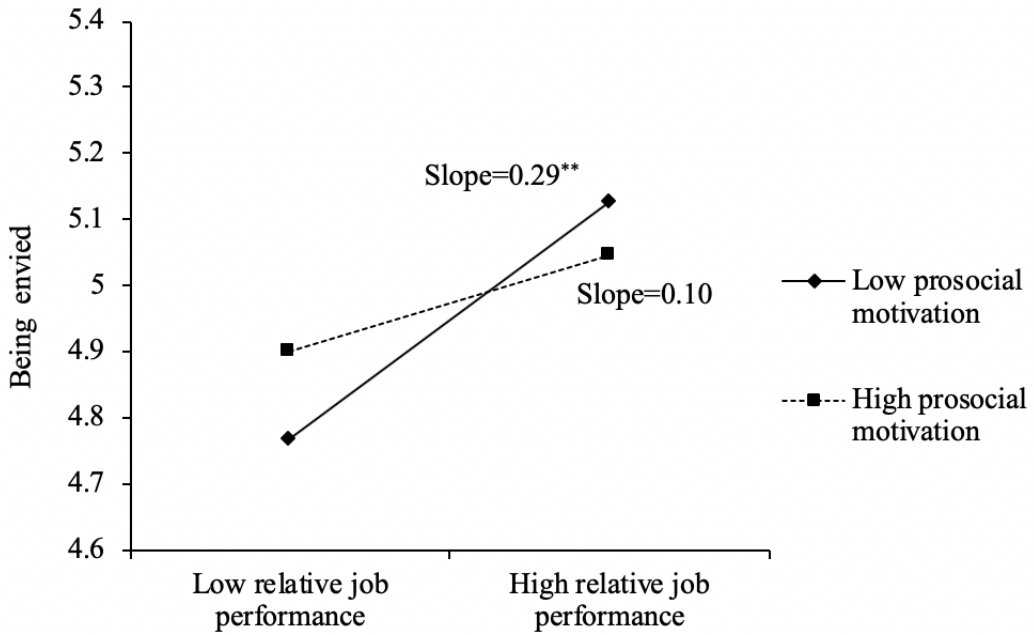


Figure 5. Results of simple slope tests for the moderating effect of prosocial motivation (Study 3).

N =388. $^{**}p$<.01.