

### **Chapter 3: Research Objectives, Research Argument, and Research Questions**

#### **3.1 Research Problem**

The phenomenon of multiple-role participation is the underlying theme of the current study. Existing theories addressing the consequences of multiple-role participation fail to explain the persistence of gender differences in men and women's lives. Earlier research conducted from various theoretical approaches focused on the role-accumulation hypothesis developed by Sieber (1974). The role-accumulation theory suggests that individuals elect to participate in various roles in exchange for rewards. Sieber's view is that the accumulation of roles is positive and that its benefits outweigh the stress related with role conflict. According to the role-accumulation theory, the more roles individuals participate in, the more engaged and enriched they may be.

However, within the context of this study, it is suggested that multiple-role participation may not necessarily lead to enrichment, as Sieber (1974) proposed. One can argue the opposite of enrichment; that is, that occupying multiple roles may not always be beneficial, especially for working women with children. The current research explores individual experiences of demands relating to the pressures of multiple-role participation. Participating in several roles such as work and family can be very demanding and time consuming. Multiple-role participation accompanied by limited time and energy creates increased conflict between various roles and ultimately leads to undesirable work-related outcomes such as burnout and lower job satisfaction. The meaning of work and family roles has significant bearing on the current study, which also investigates the possibility that role identities may result in greater conflict for working women with children.

The net effect of demographic changes, according to Mostert (2009), is a feminisation of the South African labour market. The majority of working women with children continue working, despite their domestic obligations and demands (Brusentsev, 2002). However, despite women's increased

participation in the labour force, there appears to be no change with regard to gender-role expectations within society. Traditionally, men have experienced greater sanctions for non-conformance with work-role demands than with family-role demands. Women, on the other hand, have been subjected to greater sanctions for non-conformance with family demands (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In view of the extent to which work and family roles are perceived as interdependent for men and independent for women (Simon, 1995), one can assume that the combination of these roles gradually produces more conflict for women than for men. The specific nature of work and family roles has certain implications for individuals, as some roles may contribute to more overload than others. Such overload depends on the associated obligations of the role (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010b). Men enact their roles in succession (that is, work then family), while women, because of structural expectations, are challenged by simultaneous role demands (work and family) (Hall, 1972). Nevertheless, although Hall's (1972) comment may imply that women experience greater conflict than men, such an expectation is not explicitly supported throughout various research studies.

To effectively account for the differences of role identity, the researcher of the current study seeks to understand the self-in-role of the identity of working women with children. The concept of self-in-role encapsulates such women's assumed identity in various life roles, and such differences are more effectively understood by the social roles that women occupy. The concept of self-in-role, within the context of this study, refers to beliefs regarding what constitutes an ideal employee and an ideal mother. More importantly, working women with children may view the roles of employee and mother as independent rather than interdependent. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), individuals who regard one role (for instance family), as significantly salient above another role (for instance work) contribute a disproportionate amount of time and energy to that particular role. Because the mother-role identity is assumed to be significantly more salient than the work role for women with children, it is therefore more representative of woman's self, and

consequently her definition of self reflects the salience of the mother-role identity.

This raises questions as to whether working women with children experience role salience differently from other working women, and how they experience the effects of such salience. Consequently, the meaning related to being a mother closely corresponds to the meaning associated with the general self, and therefore affects the overall evaluation of self of working women with children. The assumption that working women with children experience greater work-family conflict than family-work conflict is further reinforced by the fact that family is regarded as more salient than work for women (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This raises the question of whether women who regard the mother-role identity as more salient will experience greater work-family conflict.

### **3.2 Objectives of the Research**

The primary objective of the research is to investigate the manifestation of work and family conflict in working women with children and to explore potential relationships of such conflict with undesirable work outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction and burnout. The research also explores the effects of role identity and the salience of such identity on the manifestation of family-work conflict in working women with children.

### **3.3 The Research Argument**

Given the socialisation of roles that men and women occupy in society and the assignment of different meaning to such roles (Hochschild, 1989), it is plausible to assume that men and women may react differently to experiences of work and family conflict. The examination of current research on multiple-role participation takes into account the entire constellation of roles that individuals take part in. However, the current study focuses on only two role possibilities: work and family role identities. Although such a selection may be

viewed as a limitation, the researcher took into consideration two of the most significant life roles that are applicable to the current study: employee-role identity and parent (mother) role identity.

Identity theory elucidates the relationship of the role to the self and, in so doing, offers a distinct way of examining conflict. From this perspective, a source of stress would be conflict between behaviours that confirm different identities. An even greater source of conflict would be an apparent choice between actions that confirm identities with different levels of salience (Stryker, 1980). Under such conditions, one would expect an individual to act in a manner that corroborates the more salient identity to which he or she is committed. However, if individuals are faced with a choice between role behaviours that corroborate identities of similar salience and dedication, stress and conflict may materialise (Stryker, 1980). Therefore, if working women with children consider the mother-role identity as significantly salient, maintaining a single role identity in an organisational setting may come at a considerable cost, because in the workplace another identity with related characteristics is expected.

In order to purpose a sound research argument, the chapter needs first to present the basic tenets of Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) work-family conflict model (Figure 4). Role salience and the effect on conflict were initiated by utilising deductive reasoning, and enriched by an interest in the work and contribution of Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) work-family conflict model.

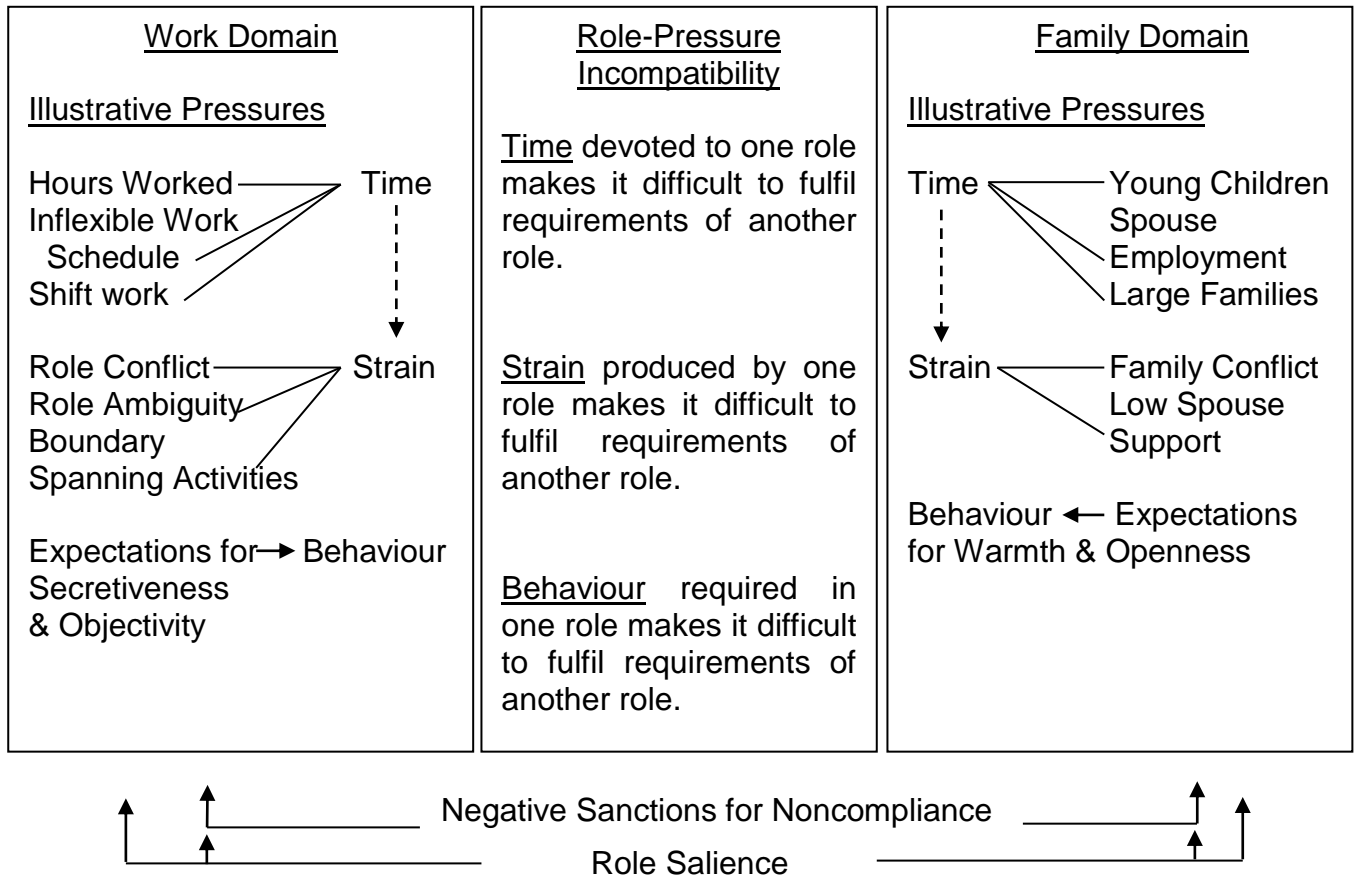


Figure 4. Model of work-family conflict

Note. From "Sources of conflict between work and family roles", by J.H. Greenhaus and N.J. Beutell, 1985, *Academy of Management Review*, 10, p. 78. Copyright 1984 by Copyright Holder. Reprinted with permission.

Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) theoretical model provides a synopsis of how work and family conflict are manifested in individuals' work and family life. The work-family conflict model indicates the three sources of work-family and family-work conflict. This model takes into account an individual's constraints regarding time and role participation. Moreover this model highlights the fact that role demands and pressures are particularly accentuated when the work and family roles are salient or fundamental to an individual's self-concept and identity (Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002). According to the work-family conflict model, role-pressure incompatibility exists and is derived from opposing work and family roles. Role salience has various implications for an individual's engagement in a specific role. Such implications materialise when a limited amount of time and energy is available for an individual to invest in a

particular role (Stryker, 1980). The role characteristics that influence an individual's time, strain, or behaviour within a role can generate conflict between those particular roles, as well with other life roles. The research study therefore incorporates Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) work-family conflict model and Stryker's (1980) role identity research, which leads to the research argument summarised in Figure 5 that is applicable to individuals in general, thereafter a more specific conceptual framework for working women with children will be discussed (Figure 6).

The researchers' intention is not to test any of the frameworks in either Figure 5 or Figure 6. Rather, both these figures are used illustratively to clarify and demonstrate the conceptual thinking that formed conceptual frameworks of potential relationships that may exist between the work-family conflict as the independent variable and other dependent variables (burnout, job satisfaction and role identity).

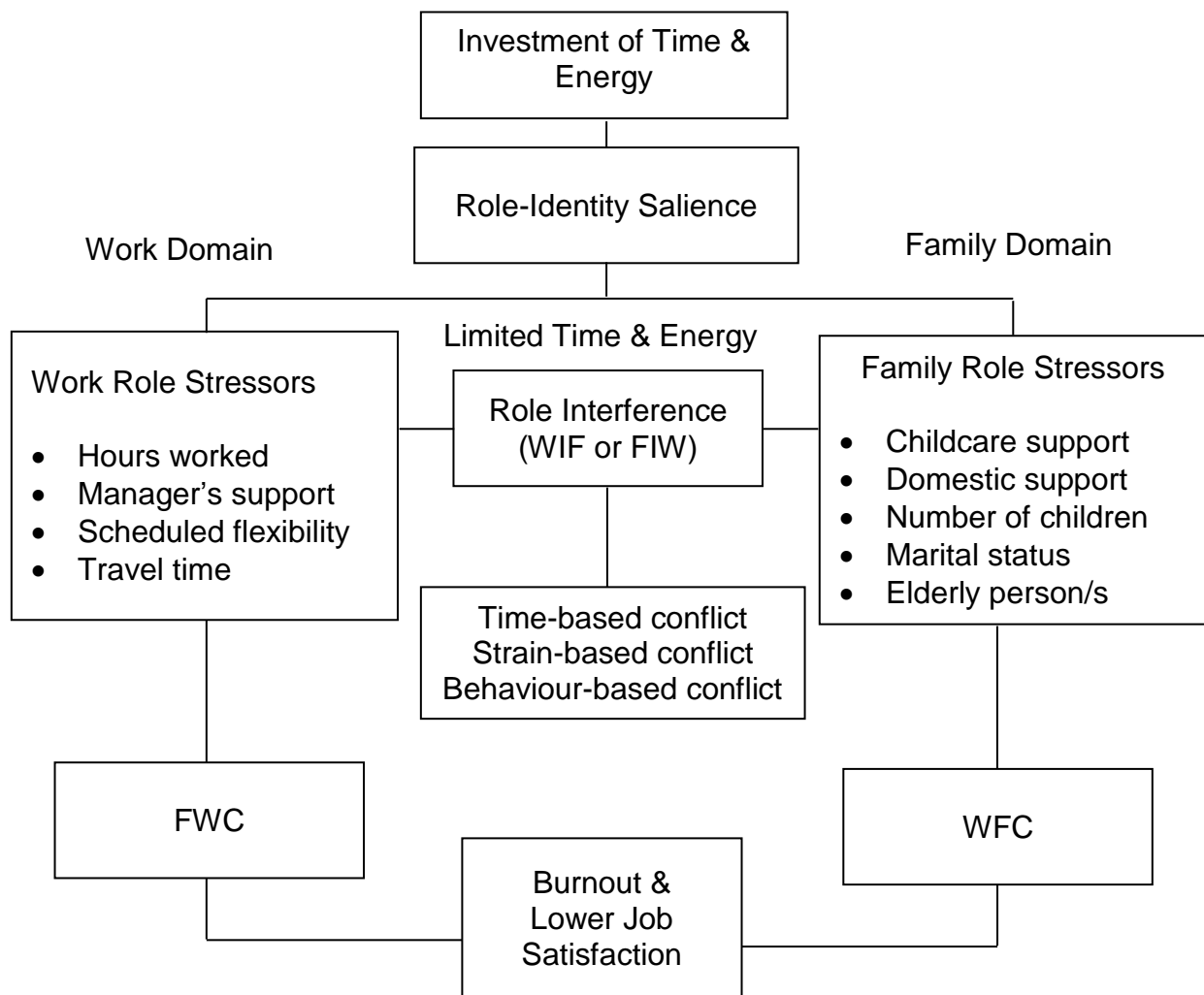


Figure 5. Summary framework of the research argument

According to Stryker (1980), the investment of time and energy in various life roles may be due to individuals' desire to maintain and reinforce their self-identity to provide meaning and purpose. Depending on the role identity that an individual regards as more salient, participation in that role (work or family) is accompanied by various role stressors. Role stressors are inherent in a specific domain: work or family domain. For instance, if working women with children regard the family role as more salient than the work role, they are most likely to be exposed to an array of family role stressors such as childcare or domestic responsibilities. Therefore, the more working women with children participate in the family role, the greater exposure to family-role stressors they will experience. Continued exposure to family-role stressors is

further intensified because of the limited amount of time and energy that working women with children have to participate in other life roles. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and Stryker (1980), individuals decide on the amount of time and energy that will be invested in a role, depending on the salience of that role. Such an investment of time and energy may lead to interference with another role. An individual therefore experiences role interference as a result of the demands from another role, to the extent that the requirements of neither role can be achieved (Duxbury et al., 1994). Role interference is recognised as bi-directional, and in this case can be conceptualised as having two components: FIW and WIF (Duxbury et al., 1994; Eagle et al., 1998). Role interference is further intensified when certain role characteristics affect the time dedicated to, strain created by, and the behaviour required for, participating in a role. This may lead to conflict between that role and another role.

The type of conflict that working women with children may experience is typically associated with increased time spent in a specific domain (work or family domain), which results in either WFC or FWC. Consequently, if the family role is regarded as more salient to the role identity of working women with children, then they are more likely to experience WFC, because they will not allow work to interfere with their family responsibilities. One can therefore assume that working women with children may experience more WFC than FWC because they prefer to spend their time and energy on family activities; this in turn prevents work demands from being satisfied. On the other hand, if the work role is regarded as significantly more salient to the role identity of working women with children, then they are more likely to experience FWC. The cost of such multiple-role occupancy is most often evaluated in terms of organisational outcomes such as burnout and lower job satisfaction. The researcher's intention is not to test the model (Figure 5) but to test the relationships depicted in the model.

Because of the unique characteristics of working women with children, a more specific conceptual framework was developed to understand how such women experience burnout and job satisfaction from other working women



and men. This framework was deduced systematically from various work and family theories that were studied in the research. Such a conceptual framework illustrates how role identity is manifested in work-family conflict for working women with children (Figure 6). This conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 6 and forms the premise of the research questions.

Although the conceptual framework would lend itself to Structural Equation Modelling, it is important to note that the researchers' intention is not to test the conceptual framework presented in Figure 6. Rather, the figure represents an illustrative conceptual framework that is presented to clarify the conceptual thinking of that formed the deduction of the potential relationships and differences that working women with children specifically experience.

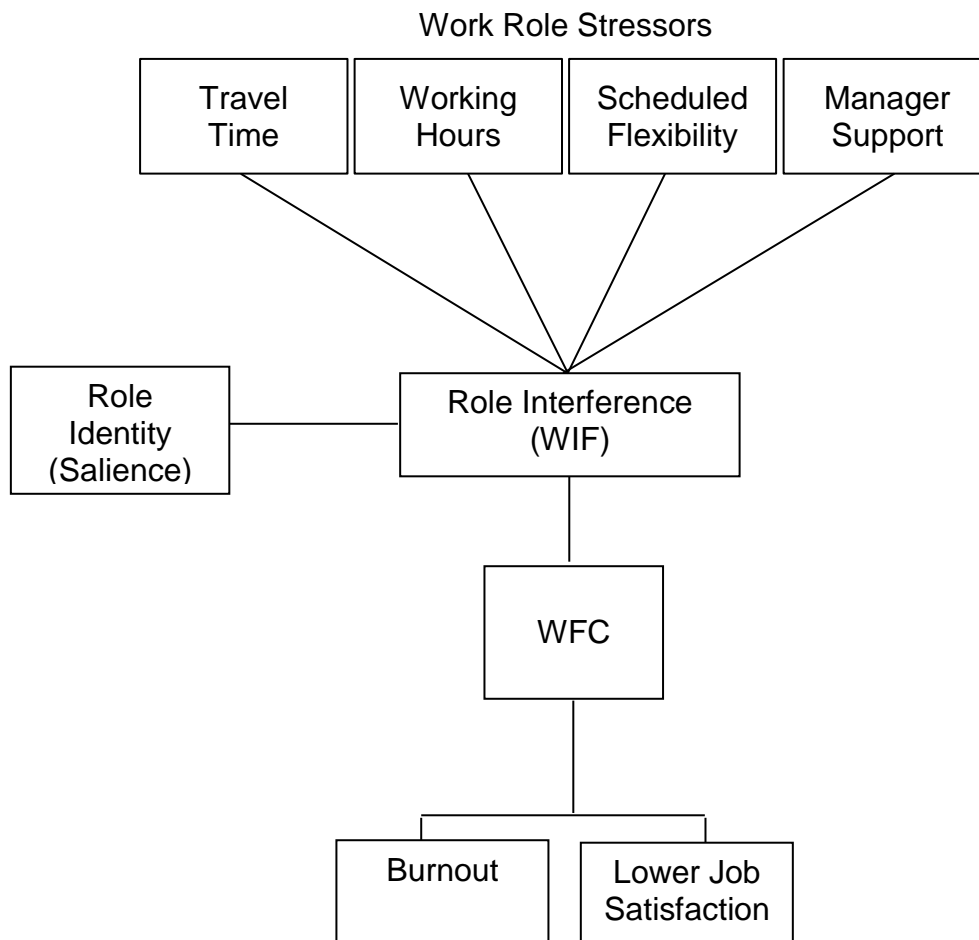


Figure 6. Conceptual framework for working women with children

According to Thoits (1991:105), the “more salient the role identity, the more meaning, purpose and behavioural guidance the individual should derive from its enactment, and thus the more that identity should influence psychological well-being”. Role identities may govern certain aspects of the self, taking preference over other role identities and thus affecting the general actions and perceptions of the self (Callero, 1985). By applying the underlying framework of the role identity theory by Stryker (1980), one can understand that the mother-role plays a vital part in working mothers’ self-concept. Mothers’ experiences outside the family domain may to some extent promote women’s identification with the mother-role identity.

The argument proposed in Figure 6 states that a working women with children may regard a particular role identity as salient, for instance either the mother-role identity or the employee-role identity. Working women who identify more with the mother-role identity (self-in-role) may experience greater role interference than do others who do not identify as strongly with this identity. Such role interference is further exacerbated by the presence of work stressors that generate additional strain for these women. An example of a work stressor that creates interference between work and family roles is a mother' rigid working schedule that prevents her from attending a child's extra mural activity. Existing role strains may, however, be perceived as less threatening if managers are seen to allow scheduled flexibility and are supportive towards these working mothers.

Therefore, the kind of interference experienced by working women who identify closer to the mother-role identity is therefore negative in nature because of the constant exposure to the various work-role stressors. For instance, working women with children who respond to simultaneous role demands by dedicating increased time to their families at the expense of work are likely to perceive work as interfering with family in a negative way. If working women who identify with the mother-role identity regard family as more important than work, then not only will WIF but also WFC be greater for them than for individuals that do not identify with this identity. A reason for this is that women who identify with the mother-role identity will avoid work activities that interfere with their family life.

One can therefore expect such working women to be more vulnerable and susceptible to the effects of burnout and experience lower job satisfaction. The degree to which these women regard their jobs as unsatisfying largely depends on the extent to which their paid job is perceived as a threat to their family life. In this case, the social roles of women who identify with the mother-role identity may be threatened, and the source of the threat may be perceived in a condescending and negative manner, thus lowering their satisfaction on the job. For instance, such women search for jobs that will

offer minimal interference with their family, especially in their roles as mothers (Mackey & Coney, 2000). If work demands and pressures interfere with family activities, women that identify with the mother-role identity are more inclined than other women to experience negativity towards their jobs. Such a proposition is illustrated in Figure 6 and can be reinforced by the structural factors that contribute to women's commitment to and identification with the mother-role identity.

### **3.4. Research Questions**

The research objectives under investigation are to explore the manifestation of work and family conflict in working women with children and understand the potential relationships of such conflict with undesirable work outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction and burnout. The effects and salience of role identities on the manifestation of conflict among working women with children are investigated. In order to effectively achieve the research objectives, the following measurable research questions are proposed and investigated within the context of this study:

1. To what extent is there a relationship between biographical-type variables/characteristics and work-family conflict?
2. Is there a relationship between family-work conflict, work-family conflict and burnout?
3. Is there a relationship between family-work conflict, work-family conflict and job satisfaction?
4. To what extent do working women with children experience higher burnout than other working women?
5. In what ways do the role identities of working women with children differ from the role identities of other working women and men?
6. Do working women who identify with the mother-role identity experience higher family-work conflict or work-family conflict?

7. Do working women with children experience more negative family interfering with work or negative work interfering with family than other working women and men?
8. To what extent is there a relationship between spouse/partner support and family-work conflict among working women with children, other working women and men?