Chapter 1: The Problem and its Background

1.1 Introduction

Difficulties in the work and family relationship are not new experiences, as much of the work-family literature indicates. Individuals have always been accountable for managing their family responsibilities in conjunction with maintaining employment. Challenges arising between the work and family domains were documented in earlier times and are recognised in social science disciplines (Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, & Sweet, 2006). Changes in family structure and the composition of the workforce, and the demographic characteristics of society further elevated the level of the discourse regarding work and family. Towards the end of the 20th century, the increased representation of dual-earning families and households headed by single parents became prominent (Marks, 2006). As the number of women entering the labour force increased, the conformity to the traditional family structure, of husband as primary breadwinner and wife as homemaker, decreased.

Organisational and technological changes have further transformed the ways in which individuals carry out their jobs (Valcour & Hunter, 2005). Structural changes within organisations have contributed to the erosion of boundaries between work and family roles. The stability of organisations is largely dependent on the global competitive demands of the economic landscape. Global competitive pressures have compelled organisations to downsize their workforce and streamline organisational operations. Competitive pressures have obliged organisations to provide customers with high-quality service levels. The need to deliver superior customer service and satisfaction has generated additional work role pressures for employees, and the reduction in the number of jobs has contributed to the increasing workload of those who are still employed (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997). A large proportion of an individual's time is now spent at work, contributing to role overload and conflict between work and family roles (Duxbury & Higgins, 2003; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997). Role overload contributes to the conflict

created in managing work and family roles; therefore it becomes increasingly important that organisations understand the impact that social and economic changes have upon work and family interaction (Demerouti & Geurts, 2004).

Work and family form two distinct parts of an adult's life, and each aspect provides a unique point from which to examine important qualities of human behaviour (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Work and family were previously believed to be separate entities, a belief that Kanter (1977) refers to as the myth of separate worlds. According to this belief, work and family operated by their own set of rules, and thus could be examined separately. The argument of separate worlds has, however, recently been supplanted by new thinking, in which the work and family relationships are regarded as interactive and reciprocal in nature (Demerouti & Geurts, 2004). For example, issues arising from the work domain influence the family domain, and family matters also have strong influences on work life (Huang, Hammer, Neal, & Perrin, 2004). A topic of particular interest to researchers is work-family conflict. Work and family research has indicated that work-family conflict has an unfavourable effect on an individual's work life, family life and general well-being (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). Work-family conflict is the product of numerous tasks and time requirements faced by individuals as they attempt to manage family and work responsibilities (Ciabattari, 2007). While this conflict may occur in both directions, in other words from work-to-family and from family-to-work, the main focus in organisational research has primarily been on work-to-family conflict (Boles, Howard, & Donofrio, 2001).

Men and women experience work-family conflict in different ways. One cannot assume that men and women have adopted an egalitarian perspective on work and family, as the roles that men and women occupy are deeply gendered (Toth, 2005). Differences in gender are further reinforced by the cultural assumptions that organisations make about men and women. Organisations stereotype women as being emotional, loving and nurturing, while men are characterised as logical and industrious (Santos & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). However, the numbers of dual-earner families are continually

increasing and more modern gender-role norms are beginning to prevail, in which both men and women are finding it important to take part in and contribute to work and family life (Ten Brummelhuis, Van der Lippe, Kluwer, & Flap, 2008).

1.2 Definitions of Constructs

1.2.1 Work-family conflict.

Much of the literature in organisational behaviour and industrial and organisational psychology uses the constructs "work-family" and "work-life" interchangeably to characterise the interface of individuals' personal, or family, lives and their professional, working lives (Hamilton, Gordon, & Whelan-Berry, 2006). Earlier conceptualisations of work-family conflict did not differentiate between the directions of conflict. In other words, no distinction was made between conflict caused by a work role interfering with family, and conflict caused by a family role interfering with work.

One of the consequences of an individual's inability to manage the demands of work and family is the increasing level of conflict that the individual experiences. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define work-family conflict as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (p. 77). Examination of the literature brings to light three forms of work and family conflict: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. Time-based conflict refers to the numerous roles that compete for an individual's time. Strain-based conflict refers to strain produced by a particular role, and behaviour-based conflict refers to specific patterns of role behaviour incompatibility (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996) incorporated the two forms of work and family conflict (time-based and strain-based conflict) offered by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) in their conceptual definition of work-family conflict. Netemeyer et al. (1996) define work-family conflict as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the general

demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities" (p. 401).

The cumulative demands of participation in various roles result in two types of strain: role overload and role interference. Role overload occurs when the demands of different roles on an individual's time and energy exceed the individual's ability to perform either role proficiently. Role interference occurs when the demands from numerous roles conflict to such a degree that the requirements of none of them can be fully achieved (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). Role interference is recognised as bi-directional, and can be conceptualised as having two components: family interference with work, and work interference with family (Duxbury et al., 1994; Eagle, Icenogle, Maes, & Miles, 1998). Family interference with work arises when responsibilities of participation in the family role impede an individual's performance at work; for example when a sick child prevents a parent's work attendance. Work interference with family occurs when activities at work hinder the performance of family duties and responsibilities; for example when an individual is working long hours and not spending enough time with the family. Family interference with work and work interference with family are separate, although interconnected, components of work-family conflict (Gutek, Searle, & Kelpa, 1991; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992).

The conceptual definition of work-family conflict used in the context of this study is based on the definition by Netemeyer et al. (1996). The researcher of the current study adapted the definition to include the third form of work and family conflict (behaviour-based conflict) offered by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). Therefore, the definition of work-family conflict used to guide the definition construction in this study is "a form of inter-role conflict in which the general demands of time devoted to, strain created by, and behaviour required for the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities" (Netemeyer et al., 1996, p. 401; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p.77).

1.2.2 Family-work conflict.

Family-work conflict is also regarded as a type of inter-role conflict in which family and work responsibilities are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Limited definitions of family-work conflict are found in the work and family literature, as a large number of studies have focused exclusively on work-to-family effects (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). Regardless of the conceptual distinction between work-family conflict and family-work conflict, most researchers have focused entirely on the impact of work outcomes on family life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Frone, Russell and Cooper, (1992) found that family boundaries are more permeable than work boundaries; that is, demands from work roles interfere more easily with family roles. This may explain why limited research on the construct of family-work conflict is presented in the work and family literature.

According to Frone et al. (1992), family-work conflict is more likely to wield its negative influences in the family domain, thus contributing to lower life satisfaction and increased conflict within the family. Family-work conflict, like work-family conflict, is also associated with individuals' attitudes towards their jobs (Netemeyer et al., 1996). The study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding family-work conflict and to understand the interrelations between constructs: work-family and family-work conflict. The conceptual definition of family-work conflict used in this study is also based on that of Netemeyer et al. (1996). This definition, like work-family conflict, has also been adapted to include the third form of work and family conflict (behaviour-based conflict) offered by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). Therefore, family-work conflict is defined in this study as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, strain created by, and behaviour required by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities" (Netemeyer et al., 1996, p. 401; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77).

Based on the definitions of work-family and family-work conflict, the interface between work and family may be regarded as an interactional activity in which an individual's functioning in a specific domain is affected by the negative or positive load effects that have accumulated in another domain (Demerouti, 2004). If an individual is unable to function according to the requirements of various roles in work and family domains, there is a high likelihood that the individual will experience conflict between these roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict and family-work conflict are separate, but conceptually associated forms of inter-role conflict. Both forms of conflict are essentially a consequence of an individual's effort to satisfy a plethora of pressures originating from both the family and work domains (Boles et al., 2001).

1.2.3 Role identity and social identity.

The concept of identity is applicable in both the social and behavioural sciences (Ng & Feldman, 2007). As a result, various theoretical disciplines have investigated the concept, resulting in numerous conceptualisations of the term (Burke, 2003). Identity theory helps to explain the role-related behaviour of individuals and focuses on the individual's sense of self as constituting the basis of his or her role identity (Burke, 2003). Social identity theory, on the other hand, seeks to explain processes that occur within groups and in inter-group relations (Veer, Becirovic, & Martin, 2010). Social identity theory presumes that an individual's identity is related to the social group to which he or she is affiliated (Burke, 2003).

Role identities act as a framework which individuals utilise to translate an assortment of social situations; thus they affect role-related behaviour by conforming to behavioural expectations (Burke & Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1991). Role identities are self-formations and self-referent insights that individuals assign to themselves as a result of the structural role positions that they occupy as members of specific social groups (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Essentially, role identities can be defined as the meanings that individuals

ascribe to themselves within specific situations. These meanings enclose a set of intentions that determine applicable behaviour within a particular role-related position.

1.2.4 Work and family.

There has been much debate over the definition of work, especially the issue of whether work is restricted to tasks associated with paid employment or includes task-related activities that are not related to financial gain, such as housework (Eby et al., 2005; Zedeck, 1992). Work is usually associated with employment, and is identified by activities that are prescribed for individuals to perform on a contractual basis for remuneration. Work characteristically involves membership in an employing organisation or market that remunerates the individual for his or her contributions (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Work is defined as the converse of rest and encompasses the original goal of engaging in activities to obtain goods and services essential for survival (Parker & Smith, 1976, as cited in Drenth, 1991, p. 125). Because part of the focus of this study is on the interface between paid employment and family activities, the definition of work will be restricted to "full-time paid employment". In other words, work is any activity that involves a relationship of exchange of effort, knowledge, or other contributions for financial rewards (Eby et al., 2005).

Family can be understood as a universal social unit, which consists of people who are directly linked by "kin" relationship or connection, where members are accountable for childcare responsibility; a social group characterised by shared residence, economic co-operation and reproduction (Duncan, 2001). Like work, family implies membership within a social organisation to which an individual contributes (Zedeck, 1992, as cited in Edwards & Rothbard, 2000, p. 179). However, such contributions are not planned to receive goods and services, but rather to uphold and improve the well-being of the family (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). For the purposes of this study, family is defined as two or more individuals (who may include dependent children) who reside

together or apart and are related by birth, marriage or adoption. However, committed but unmarried partners who may (or may not) have children together will also form part of the definition used in this study.

1.2.5 Working women with children.

In this study, the term "working women" refers to women who are part of the labour force and who receive remuneration for the work that they perform. Women who have children and are engaged in permanent formal employment (Lupri, 1983) are included in this definition. In the context of this study, working women with children are women who are engaged in formal employment and who have children (biological, adopted or inherited, and conceived in or out of wedlock) who are dependent on them emotionally or financially.

1.2.6 Job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is probably one of the most researched constructs in management literature, and has attracted a substantial amount of research. By 1990 more than 12 000 job satisfaction studies had been published and since then hundreds more have been made available (Ghazzawi & Smith, 2009). Understanding the construct of job satisfaction is of fundamental significance in understanding and predicting the behaviour of individuals at work (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992).

Job satisfaction is related to how adequately individuals feel their wants and needs are being met at work (Sellgren, Ekvall, & Tomson, 2008). Research has shown that there are individual differences in people's vocational needs with respect to the resources that are accessible for the satisfaction of needs (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). For the purposes of this study, job satisfaction is defined as the attitudes that an individual has towards several aspects of work and the work environment (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1999).

1.2.7 Burnout.

According to Winstanley and Whittington (2002), burnout is a dynamic process, associated with stress and deriving from a combination of low coping mechanisms and a high workload. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) postulate that burnout is caused by the heavy workload that has resulted from modern lifestyles and demands from work-related pressures. Burnout has been conceptualised as consisting of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Emotional exhaustion constitutes the stress dimension related to burnout and typically leaves the individual feeling drained of energy (Maslach et al., 2001). Depersonalisation affects the interpersonal situation, and refers to a negative approach towards other people and a tendency to treat them as objects (Maslach et al., 2001). Reduced personal accomplishment represents the component of self-evaluation and denotes low levels of sufficiency in relation to individual job performance (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & De Clermont, 2003).

The most influential definition of burnout has been offered by Maslach (1982, p. 20), who characterises burnout as "a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity", bearing in mind that burnout is defined as a state of mind that is related to work characteristics. Therefore, burnout is defined in this study as a three-dimensional condition of emotional exhaustion, cynicism and low professional efficacy, with the possibility of these resulting in a combination of continued stress at work and ineffectual ways of coping (Ahola, Honkonen, Virtanen, Aromaa, & Lönnqvist, 2008).

1.3 The Research Problem

Consideration of gender is fundamental to the study of work and family because work and family roles within society are largely based on gender expectations (Rothausen, 2009). Gender stereotyping takes place within the family and work context, where the social ideals of femininity are what reflect a "good mother" or "ideal employee", and the social ideals for masculinity are what constitute a "good father" or "ideal employee" (Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005). However, the rise of dual-career couples and households headed by single parents, and the changes in the traditional structures of single-breadwinner families signify that accountabilities for work, domestic duties, and childcare are no longer restricted to conventional gender roles. More and more, individuals are struggling to cope with the challenging demands of combining work and family roles (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

According to Eagly and Carli (2007), the masculine roles of the family provider and the ideal employee are interdependent and complementary for men. In contrast, the feminine roles of the family nurturer and the ideal employee are independent and conflicting for women. Based on Eagly and Carli's (2007) proposition, one can assume that men and women therefore assign different meaning to their work and family roles. Simon (1995) contends that work and family responsibilities are far more interdependent for men than they are for women. It is likely that the more roles a woman occupies, the greater the amount of pressure she will experience on her time, energy and other resources. As a result, the cumulative pressures of participation in various roles may result in role interference (work interference with family conflict or family interference with work conflict). The psychological cost of multiple-role occupancy is most often evaluated in terms of organisational outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction and burnout. Burnout and decreased job satisfaction may both be dependent on the importance an individual places on a particular role identity. In other words, if a working woman with children regards her family role of being a mother as more salient than her work role as an employee, she is more likely to experience conflict in the form of work

interfering with family. This is consistent with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) postulation that over-engagement in the family domain may adversely affect the work domain. It is likely that the increase in interference from work-to-family ultimately leading to work-family conflict may affect burnout and job satisfaction levels among working women with children. In a study conducted by Pitt-Catsouphes et al. (2006), women who participated in various roles, especially women with children who took on the additional role of employee, were frequently exhausted, greatly vulnerable to stress-related issues and not capable of managing the various demands of their work and family lives.

Yet individuals participate in a number of social roles within work and family. Participation in roles provides meaning and purpose in their lives. The salience of a particular role identity has certain implications for an individual's engagement in a role. These implications become apparent when individuals have a limited amount of time and energy to invest in a particular role identity that they occupy. The investment of time and energy in various family or work roles may be due to the desire that individuals have to maintain and reinforce their self-identities to provide meaning and purpose. This proposition is deeply rooted in the scarcity theory, which posits that individuals have finite amounts of time, energy or resources at their disposal (Marks, 1977). This proposition is represented in Figure 1, which was developed from the literature by the researcher of the current study, and is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The researchers' intention is not to test the proposition; but the figure is rather used to clarify and illustrate the conceptual thinking that formed a framework 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).
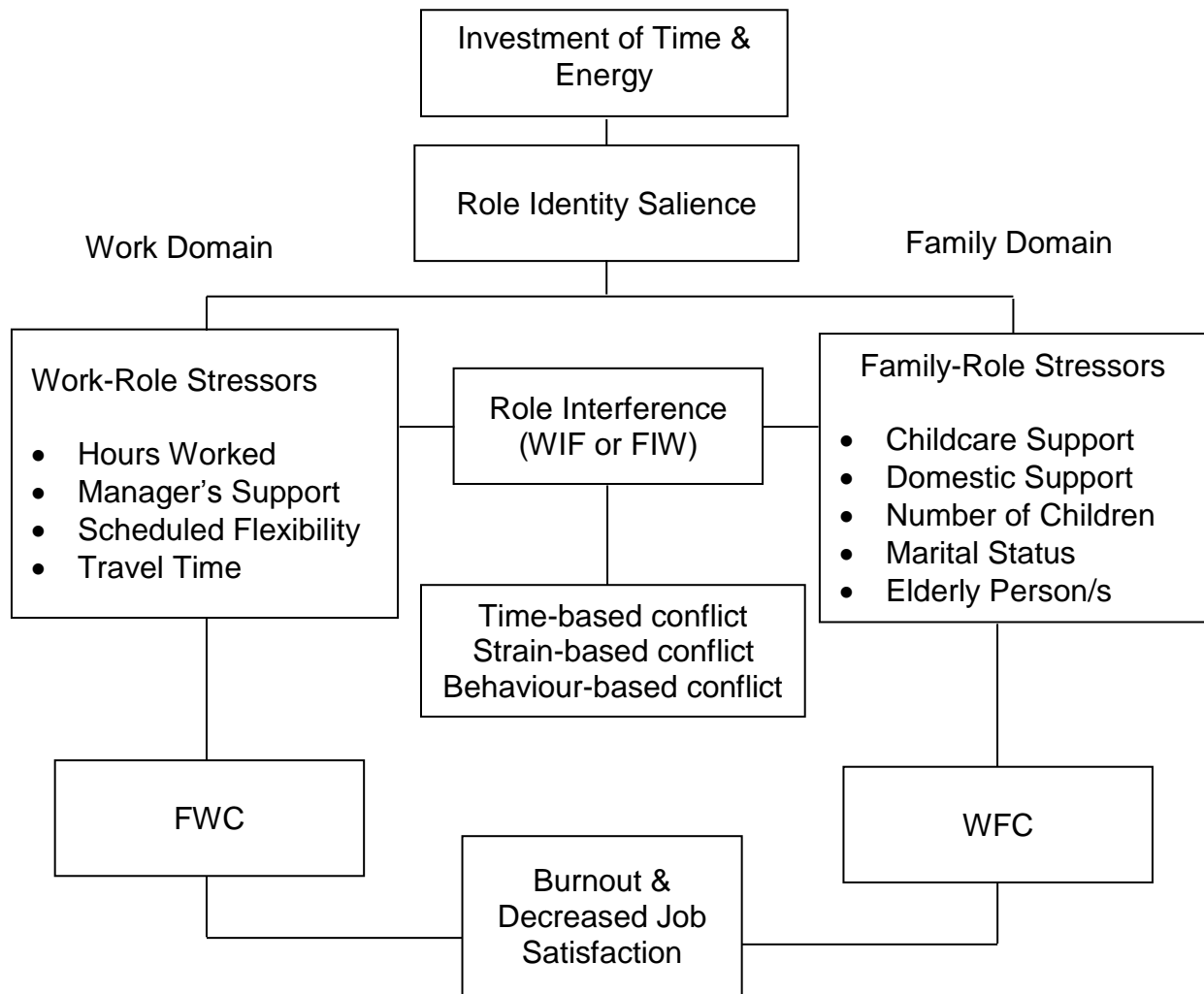
Figure 1. Conceptual framework, linking role identity, conflict, burnout and job satisfaction

Figure 1 shows that, depending on the role identity that is regarded as significantly salient to an individual, participation in that role identity is accompanied by various role stressors. For instance, if the employee role is regarded as salient, individuals will be exposed to various work role stressors such as inflexible working schedules, long working hours and little or no support from their managers. Taken together, such stressors that are inherent to a specific domain (work domain stressors or family domain stressors) intensify because of the limited amount of time and energy an individual has at his or her disposal, and eventually causes interference between roles.

Role interference, regardless of direction (from work to family or from family to work), is further exacerbated when role characteristics affect the time dedicated to, strain created by and the behaviour required for participation in a particular role. This eventually leads to conflict between two roles: work role or family role. Individuals create boundaries around work and family domains; these boundaries are most frequently defined in terms of their permeability (Clark, 2000), which refers to the extent to which a role or domain interferes with another role or domain. According to Pleck (1977), men are more likely to allow the work domain to interfere with the family domain; in contrast, women are more likely to allow the family domain to interfere with the work domain.

In summary, in this research study (and as shown in Figure 1) it is argued that burnout and decreased job satisfaction result from the conflict experienced when too much time and energy is invested in one particular role (family). Individuals need to determine their own levels of engagement in a variety of different roles depending on the salience of the particular roles. Role pressures are intensified when the work and family roles are salient or fundamental to the individual's self-concept and when strong negative sanctions for nonconformity with role demands are present. The incompatibility of the work and family roles due to the different norms and responsibilities that each role represents causes interference and spillover from one role into another (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). That is, involvement in one role (work or family) is made more complicated by virtue of involvement in another role (work or family) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), which causes an individual to experience conflict. Empirical research has indicated that increased transitions from one role to another lead to an increase in conflict between those roles (Desrochers, Hilton, & Larwood, 2005; Matthews & Barnes-Ferrell, 2006).

An overarching premise of this study is that work and family should not be seen as separate worlds, but that both domains compete for scarce resources such as an individual's time and energy (Marks, 1977). A number of

researchers agree that work-family conflict and family-work conflict should be seen as distinct but interrelated forms of inter-role conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Khan, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Work interference with family and family interference with work are also regarded as separate, albeit interrelated, forms of work-family conflict (Gutek et al., 1991; O'Driscoll et al., 1992).

1.4 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The research objectives of this study 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. Furthermore, this research investigates whether working women with children who identify more closely with the mother-role identity experience greater work-family conflict than individuals who identify more closely with the employee-role identity. This raises the question of whether working women with children experience role salience differently from other working women, and how they experience the effects of such salience. 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 interference with work or negative work interference 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?

As far as could be established, no previous research could be found that has investigated the levels of work and family conflict among working women with children, the association between various role identities and experiences of burnout, and the significant impact of this conflict on the level of job satisfaction. The study builds on, and contributes to, the existing literature pertaining to the work and family interface by broadening family-work conflict literature with empirical data and insight.

1.4 The Structure of the Dissertation

In order to investigate whether relationships exist between family-work conflict, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, burnout and role identity, the research study began with a literature review. It was essential to cover and examine a wide range of pertinent topics derived from various disciplines, which included organisational behaviour, psychology, sociology and anthropology. The literature review consists of two main parts. The first part deals directly with the diversity of working families and the challenges they face in the 21st century. A multidimensional approach fosters perspectives regarding work, family and role identity. The second part of the literature review deals with job satisfaction and burnout. Only appropriate theories and constructs of job satisfaction pertaining especially to working women with children are included in the literature review.

In Chapter 3, the research argument is developed. This chapter is devoted to the integration and analysis of the literature discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter does not repeat theory or information offered in the literature review, but integrates the theory to develop the research problem, research goal and research objective. This chapter also includes a set of research questions developed from the literature study and the research argument discussions.

Chapter 4 deals with the research methodology. This chapter describes the sampling methodology and the participants, the research instruments and the statistical analytical procedures used in the study.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the different statistical analyses in order to provide answers to the eight research questions that underpin the current study. The study concludes with a discussion chapter (Chapter 6), in which the results of the study are interpreted in relation to the conceptual model, research objectives and research questions developed in Chapter 3. Limitations of the research study and recommendations for future research are also discussed in Chapter 6. A reference list and appendices follow Chapter 6.