

ROLE SALIENCE OF DUAL-CAREER WOMEN MANAGERS

ANTHONY V. NAIDOO

*Department of Psychology
University of Stellenbosch*

REYHANA JANO

*Department of Industrial Psychology
University of the Western Cape*

ABSTRACT

This study examines and contrasts the level of role participation, commitment and value expectation that dual-career women invest in contending work and family roles. While the 162 married women managers were found to participate significantly more in the work role, they indicated greater commitment to and value expectation from the home and family role. A significant positive correlation between the commitment to the work role and commitment to the home and family role suggests that dual-career women may experience work and home as complimentary rather than conflicting roles. For dual-career women, work salience and career salience were found to be moderately correlated.

OPSOMMING

In hierdie studie word die vlakke van rol-deelname, rol-toegewydheid en rol-waardeverwagting wat dubbelloopbaan vroue onderskeidelik in die werk-en familierol investeer, gekonstrasteer. Terwyl dit geblyk het dat 162 getroude vroulike bestuurders beduidend meer deelneem in die werksrol, het hulle hoër toegewydheid en waardeverwagtings teenoor die huis-en-familie rol getoon. 'n Beduidende positiewe korrelasie is gevind tussen toegewydheid tot die werksrol en toegewydheid tot die huis-en-familierol. Hierdie bevinding suggereer dat dubbelloopbaan vroue hulle werk en familie-rolle as komplimenterend eerder as konflikterend ervaar. Dit het verder geblyk dat werksrolbelangriktheid en loopbaanbelangriktheid matig gekorreleer is.

In the last half of the twentieth century a dramatic reconfiguration of the traditional family evolved concomitant to the changing status of women in society. Shifting economic and social circumstances and trends impacted significantly on the traditional family structures, gender role prescriptions, and the division of domestic labour. Married women began increasingly to engage in paid employment outside the home. Restructuring of personal relationships gave rise to the emergence of dual-career or dual-earner couples and families. Rosin (1990) defines dual-career status as a household where both spouses hold jobs that are personally salient, have a developmental sequence and require a high degree of commitment. Similarly, Mackinnon (1983) defines dual-career in terms of a family where both heads of the household pursue careers that require a high level of commitment and that have a continuous developmental character. The woman's employment is not seen as a temporary situation resulting from economic hardship. It is rather encouraged and endorsed by the family as a desirable mode of self-fulfilment for the wife or woman partner.

Notwithstanding this change in status, the primary responsibility for managing the home and family activities continues to rest with the woman in dual-career relationships, even when she is employed full-time outside of the home (Fox, 1975). In effect, Aldous (1981) avers that outside employment for a woman in a dual-career marriage results in two careers or a double shift for her; a paid one in the labour force and the other in the equally demanding role as housewife. The "problem" of the dual-earner couple typically has been framed as a woman's problem of balancing work and family (Spain & Bianchi, 1996, cited in Becker, 1999). Hence there has been a concentration of studies of dual-earner couples focusing on the second shift because women continue to retain the primary responsibility for housework and child-care (Brines, 1994; Hertz, 1986; Hochschild, 1989). There have also been studies that emphasise the higher stress and reduced occupational advancement for women in dual-career marriages or, conversely, examine the positive effects of employment for such women's

emotional and physical health (Barnett, 1994; Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Moen, 1992; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Other studies have focused on adaptive strategies in managing the experiences of family life for both men and women (Becker, 1999). These studies emphasise the processes through which family members actively construct and modify their roles, resources, and relationships (Moen & Wethington, 1992). It is evident that, while the dual-career life style offers women the potential of pursuing both career and family interests, it also presents tensions, difficulties and challenges affecting the salience of these roles and how these roles become balanced and integrated in their lives.

While a growing body of literature has documented the experiences and role of women in managerial positions, their place in the workforce and the interaction between their home life and work life (Grant, 2000), there is a paucity of South African studies in this regard (Puckrin, 1990; Spangenberg & Orpen-Lyall, 2000). Figures provided by Erwee (1994) confirm the growth in the number of women managers in the South African context during a period when the focus was on black male advancement. In 1985 women constituted 17% of all managerial, executive and senior administrative positions. This figure had risen to 20% in 1992. Comparative statistics from Australia indicate that in 1966 women held 12% of the management positions, whereas by 1991, women constituted 25% of all management positions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1966, 1991). To this extent, female managers and professionals are presenting a partial challenge to the "gender regime of the workplace". Research reported by Grant (2000) in Australia, Britain, and the United States indicates that in comparison to their male counterparts, women managers are likely to earn less, to have a lower status position (Blau & Ferber, 1987; Freedman & Phillips, 1988), to be childless or to have fewer children, and to be single, divorced, or separated (Alban-Metcalf & West, 1991; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Davidson & Cooper, 1984). For those who are married, they are far more likely to be in dual-career families, with one study reporting 88% of female managers and only 27% of male managers in such family structures (Wajcman, 1996). Whereas 66% of male managers report that their partners were primarily in a

supportive role, only 2% of the women report such an arrangement (Alban-Metcalf & West, 1991). Gendered expectations of domestic, social, and child care for women mean that marriage puts increased demands on female managers who already work long hours in demanding jobs (Grant, 2000).

The work and home interface creates much conflict for the dual-career woman because of the different role expectations and demands on her time. It is not surprising that dual-career women suffer from role conflict and role overload (Puckrin 1990). O'Leary (1977) describes role overload as the inability to satisfy all role expectations in the time available, despite recognising the legitimacy of all the demands. Dual-career women do not have time to perform the tasks of the different roles incumbent on them resulting in a compromise of some degree in one or more roles. This tends to have an impact on either their work or personal life. It was found that in general, the partners of successful women do not help with household chores or childcare, and the added demand of family roles is viewed as a hindrance to a woman's career. Research has found that the majority of successful women do not report role conflict, however, role overload does have an impact on their lives (May, 1999; White, Cox & Cooper, 1992). Piorkowski (1979) found that successful women worked so hard on their careers that they do not have the psychological or physical energy left to invest in their personal lives. To manage the conflict between work and family roles, women practised compartmentalisation as a means of separating work and home lives. This was achieved by carefully planning or by physically distancing work from home (i.e., working late at the office to avoid taking work home). Hall (1972) views this as a dysfunctional approach to coping with role conflict. Whether women work or not, they are still expected to perform most of the household work (Hall & Hall, 1980; Puckrin, 1990; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976). A study done by White et al. (1992) found that although successful women in their study took responsibility for the domestic chores, 71% employed outside help. The women in the study did attempt to change the demands of their housewife role but still had to take responsibility for the domestic chores and for supervising employed help to assist them in this.

The current study explores the role salience of dual-career women in managerial positions. Role salience refers to the relative importance and commitment that individuals attribute to a particular role in their life. Super (1980) introduced the notion of the individual transitioning through various major roles across the life span. At any stage, one role may be more salient than other roles as individuals seek to balance contending roles salient at that time in their life. According to Cook (1994), role salience can be assessed in terms of three criteria: (a) commitment, referring to one's emotional attachment to a role; (b) participation, or actually spending time and energy in a role; and (c) knowledge, gained through direct or vicarious experience in a role. The emerging picture suggests that women in professional positions are likely to have greater difficulty in striking a balance in terms of their participation, commitment and value expectations in the work and family domains (Jano, 2001; May, 1999). Hence the following research questions were investigated in this study using standardised measures:

(1) Do dual-career women participate more in the worker role than in the home and family role? (2) Are dual-career women more committed to the worker role than to the home and family role? (3) Do dual-career women have a higher value expectation of the worker role than the role in home and family? (4) Is there a positive correlation between work salience and career salience for dual-career women? (5) Is there an inverse relationship between commitment to the work role and commitment to the home and family in dual-career women?

METHOD

Respondents

The respondents targeted in this study were dual-career women in managerial positions in a large national financial institution. To meet the dual-career status criterion, respondents had to be employed in a full-time managerial position and had to be married or cohabiting. Arguably divorced, widowed and single mothers also experience the duality of the work and domestic roles. However, we opted to focus only on married and cohabiting women to obtain relevant data regarding spousal/partner support. Of the 5000 employees in the organisation, women constitute 70% of the work force, 54% on the clerical level and 16% at junior to senior management levels. The racial composition of the organisation's full complement of 832 female management staff consists of 765 (92%) White, 36 (4%) Coloured, 17 (2%) African, and 14 (2%) Asian managers. Of the 500 research questionnaires sent to women managers in the organisation, 210 completed questionnaires were returned. However, based on the inclusion criteria the final sample consisted of 162 dual-career women managers.

The racial composition of the sample comprised 12 (7%) Coloured and 150 (93%) White respondents. Their ages ranged between 22 and 58 years ($M = 36$, $SD = 6.9$ years). While the majority (70%) had more than 5 years tenure with the institution, 74% had been less than 5 years in their current positions. Forty percent of the respondents had a post-matric qualification.

Measuring Instruments

Four instruments were used to obtain the relevant data for the study.

- A demographic questionnaire was used to solicit the relevant biographical data of respondents and aspects of their family and work circumstances.
- The Life Role Inventory (LRI) (Langley, 1993) was used to measure of the degree to which respondents participate in, are committed to, and have value expectations of the work and family roles. The LRI items are rated on a 4-point scale from 1 (Never/rarely/little/none) to 4 (Always/almost always/a great deal). The Participation Scale is behavioural in content and assesses what the individual does or has done recently with regard to the role. The Commitment Scale measures attitudes toward roles by gauging the degree of affective commitment to the role. The Value Expectation Scale measures attitudes toward the roles indicating the degree to which major life satisfactions or values are expected to be found in the respective roles. (See Langley (1993) for a description of the standardisation and normative data for the LRI).
- The Work Salience Questionnaire (WSQ) and Career Salience Questionnaire (CSQ) of Allen and Ortlepp (2000) were used to assess work salience and career salience respectively. Recent research found support for the scales' face, content, convergent and divergent validity, as well as internal reliability of 0.83 for the CSQ and 0.80 for the WSQ (Allen & Ortlepp, 2000). Convergent validity of the scales was established using Greenhaus' (1971) Career Salience Scale. Correlations ranged from 0.66 to 0.84 for the CSQ and between 0.26 and 0.55 for the WSQ.

Procedure

Respondents were informed by e-mail about the purpose and goal of the research study. The research questionnaires were sent via internal mail to potential respondents. A cover letter explained the purpose of the research project, the anonymous and voluntary nature of the study and guarantees about the confidentiality of the information obtained. Questionnaires were returned in a sealed envelope.

RESULTS

The majority (97%) of the respondents were working mothers of whom 43 (27%) considered themselves to be the breadwinners in their family. Composite data indicate that 40 (24%) of the respondents had one child, 40 (24%) had two children, 65 (41%) had three children, 8 (5%) had four children and 4 (3%) of the respondents had more than four children. Five (3%) of the respondents had no children. The sample was relatively evenly split over whether child rearing jeopardised their career development. Sixty-eight (42%) of the respondents felt that child rearing had jeopardised their career development - contrasted with 71 (44%) who indicated no impediment. However, twenty-three (14%) of the respondents did not respond to this question.

In terms of spousal support, 151 (93%) of the respondents indicated that their husbands/ partners supported their career, however, only 43 (27%) indicated that they had a formal agreement with their husband/partner regarding the division of household chores. Specifically, 16 (10%) indicated that their husband/ partner had no involvement in the household chores, 60 (37%) that their husband/partner were involved to some extent, 44 (27%) that their husbands/partners were moderately involved, and 42 (26%) indicated that their husbands/partners were fully involved in household chores. Most respondents indicated that they had household assistance of some sort. Twenty respondents (12%) had a live-in maid, 93 (57%) had domestic assistance at least one day a week, and 19 (13%) had assistance from a family member or other source.

Regarding their career satisfaction, only 11 (7%) of the respondents felt that their current job did not meet their career aspirations. Similarly, only 39 (24%) indicated that they were encountering career barriers in their progress in the company. Nevertheless, 116 (72%) respondents indicated that they experienced tension or conflict between their work role and home and family role to the extent that 11 (7%) respondents felt that the role conflict/tension affected them severely and 36 (22%) moderately.

Hypotheses Testing

The zero-order correlations, means, standard deviations and alpha coefficients for the Life Role Inventory (LRI) are presented in Table 1 and for the Work Salience Questionnaire (WSQ) and the Career Salience Questionnaire (CSQ) in Table 2. Results of the t-test analyses are summarised in Table 3.

TABLE 1
PEARSON CORRELATIONS, MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF THE LIFE ROLE INVENTORY SCALES

	PHF	PWR	CHF	CWR	VHF	VWR
PHF	1.00					
PWR	.24**	1.00				
CHF	.47**	.22*	1.00			
CWR	.09	.61**	.31**	1.00		
VHF	.52**	.09	.50**	.12	1.00	
VWR	.28**	.49**	.24**	.64**	.44**	1.00
M	28.60	30.15	37.49	34.76	47.36	43.90
SD	5.07	4.65	3.63	5.07	6.39	7.85
N	157	157	161	161	155	154

* p<.05
** p<.01

Internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha): 0.96

- PHF Participation in Home and Family Role
- PWR Participation in the Work Role
- CHF Commitment in Home and Family Role
- CWR Commitment in the Work Role
- VHF Value Expectation in Home and Family Role
- VWR Value Expectation in the Work Role

TABLE 2
PEARSON CORRELATION, MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF THE WORK SALIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE AND CAREER SALIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

	WSQ	CSQ
WSQ	1.00	
CSQ	.69**	1.00
M	32.14	36.38
SD	5.23	6.31
N	159	162
Alpha	0.84	0.83

** P < 0.01

WSQ Work Salience Questionnaire
CSQ Career Salience Questionnaire

Hypothesis 1

To test the research hypothesis that dual-career women participate significantly more in the worker role than in the home and family role, a t-test for paired samples was used. A significant result was obtained: $t = -3.36$, ($df = 154$), $p = 0.00$. Since the probability value was less than 0.01, the null hypothesis was rejected with 99% confidence indicating that dual-career professional women tend to participate more in the work role ($M = 30.14$) than in the home and family role ($M = 28.53$).

TABLE 3
PARTICIPATION, COMMITMENT AND VALUE EXPECTATION OF DUAL CAREER WOMEN IN THE WORK, HOME AND FAMILY ROLE

	Mean	S.D.	t-test
Participation in the Work Role	30.14	4.65	
Participation in Home and Family Role	28.53	5.03	-3.36**
	Mean	S.D.	t-test
Commitment to the Home and Family Role	37.49	3.63	
Commitment to the Work Role	34.76	5.07	6.59**
	Mean	S.D.	t-test
Value Expectation in the Home and Family Role	47.34	6.41	
Value Expectation in the Work Role	43.82	7.87	5.65**

** p < 0.01

Hypothesis 2

A t-test for paired samples was used to explore the hypothesis that dual-career women are likely to feel more committed to the worker role. The results yielded a significant $t = 6.59$, ($df = 160$), $p = 0.00$. The results were surprising, indicating that dual-career women scored significantly higher on commitment to the home and family role ($M = 37.49$) than on commitment to the work role ($M = 34.76$).

Hypothesis 3

A t-test for paired samples was used to explore the research hypothesis that dual-career women have greater value expectations from their work role. A significant result was obtained: $t = 6.09$, ($df = 152$), $p = 0.00$. The results indicate that dual-career women have greater value expectations of their role in home and family ($M = 47.34$) than of the work role ($M = 43.82$).

Hypothesis 4

It was hypothesised that there would be a significant inverse or negative relationship between commitment to the work role and commitment to home and family. The Pearson correlation coefficient obtained for this relationship was $r = .31$, ($df = 161$), $p = 0.00$. This indicates a significant, albeit, marginal, positive correlation. An increase in commitment to the work role is associated with a slight increase in commitment to the role of home and family contrary to the expectation that these roles would be inversely related for dual-career women.

Hypothesis 5

To test the hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between the work salience and career salience of dual-career women, the Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated between the two variables. The results indicate a significant moderate, positive relationship, $r = .69$, ($df = 159$), $p = .00$, between work salience and career salience (refer to Table 2). For dual-career women, work salience and career salience are moderately positively correlated. An increase in work salience is likely to be associated with an increase in career salience.

DISCUSSION

The present study yielded an interesting background context in understanding the profile of dual-career women managers. The majority of women managers (93%) was white, reflecting a disparate, racial imbalance at management level; held largely specialist and junior management level positions (74%) with only 5% in senior management positions; were working mothers (97%), and a quarter (27%) considered themselves to be the breadwinner in the family. While their husband/partners supported their career, only 27% indicated having a formal agreement regarding assistance with household chores and children. To cope with their dual roles, most of the respondents relied on household assistance of some sort. Significantly, though 93% of the respondents indicated that their current job was meeting their career aspirations, 72% indicated that they were experiencing tension/conflict between their dual roles. This profile confirms Chi-Ching's (1995) depiction of dual-career professional women as "superwomen" trying to actualise themselves in the work place while continuing to carry the major responsibility for the role in home and family with minimal support from their partners.

The results of the current study indicated that professional women participate significantly more in the work role than in the role of home and family. This would be in line with the job expectation that as managers, women would be devoting their time and energies meaningfully to their work. A recent study at an educational institution found that women academics also participated more in the work role than in the home and family role (May & Naidoo, 2000). Similar to the women academics, the women managers are relatively consolidated in their careers and enjoyed higher career salience. To accommodate the demands of a career, dual-career women reduce their involvement in a number of household tasks. They rely on assistance outside or within the family to cope with household tasks. The present study indicated that majority of women managers (74%) had household assistance while others had some sharing of responsibilities with their partners. Research indicates that spousal support is related to marital satisfaction and is considered an important element in the success of dual-earner families (Scarr, Phillips, & McCartney, 1989). Kessler and McRae (1982) reported that employed mothers whose husbands assisted in child care derived a greater sense of self-esteem from their paid work.

In dual-career families, both partners need to be sharing the domestic responsibilities.

The results of the present study confirmed that while dual-career women participated more in the work role, they reported greater commitment to the home and family role than to the work role. It could be speculated that since all the respondents were married or in a cohabiting partnership, they were likely to view home and family as a valued and salient part of their life. A study on the levels of marital adjustments among dual-career couples found that wives ranked family as first and career as second in importance (Hardesty & Betz, 1980). Despite their high career salience, May (1999) found women academics also to be more committed to their home and family role. It may well be that, while women invest more time in their work role, they derived more significant emotional satisfaction from their traditional role. Naidoo, Bowman and Gerstein (1998) speculated that the individuals are likely to feel affirmed (and hence more committed) in roles that afforded self-actualisation that those that produce dissonance in their lives. Another explanation is offered by DiBenedetto and Tittle (1990). They found women view their preferences for commitment to work and home as a trade-off. When confronted with parenting and work-role choices, the women indicated that they would make choices based on their preferences for one role relative to the other and would consider how much responsibility they desire in their lives relative to both roles. Even though the present study indicated that dual-career women were more committed to the home and family role, there were indications that they, indeed, experienced role conflict in the trade-off.

Significant, too, was the finding that dual-career women have greater value expectations of the home and family role than of the work role. Personal factors such as stage of career development or age, work salience and job satisfaction may influence women's value expectations. That women managers report higher value expectations from the home and family role may also be linked to contextual factors in the organisation and in the world of work (such as the frustration of a glass ceiling) that hamper the career development and advancement of women. Women may have greater value expectations from roles that are affirming, self-fulfilling and that promote their personal development.

The present study found that there was a significant positive correlation between the commitment to the work role and to the home and family role. This finding indicates that women may seek to integrate these roles rather than construe them as being inversely related or in conflict. Depending on the situation and their own need, dual-career women might decide how much time and commitment to devote to a role. They learn, therefore, to adjust or balance these into complimentary rather than conflicted roles (DiBenedetto & Tittle, 1990).

For the present study, a significant strong positive relationship was found between work salience and career salience. This finding supports similar results obtained by Allen and Ortlepp (2000). An increase in work-role salience (expressed for example through greater participation in, commitment to, or stronger value expectations of the work role) is likely to lead to an increase in career salience. Dual-career women do not only consider the work role as highly salient but are invested in furthering their career development. Programmes of career development need to take into account the different spheres of a woman's life and the role conflict implicit in the multiple roles they have to juggle. With more and more women entering full-time employment further research is required to understand how women cope with the tensions and barriers they experience within both the work role and the home and family role and in attempting to integrate these roles. While

employment equity legislation will help to strengthen women's position in the workplace, companies should be proactive in developing support structures (child-care facilities, maternity and paternity leave) and flexible mechanisms (flexi-time, home-based office) and contracts within their organisation to accommodate the role demands on dual-career women and to facilitate their career development. Results of the present study may be particularly important in understanding the career development of women. It is proposed that if career counsellors are attempting to help women clients make informed vocational choices, their major task may be to help women deconstruct their perceived role expectations and strengthen their career-related efficacy expectations (Hackett & Betz, 1981). The male dominated value system that pervades organisations also needs to be challenged. Transformation in this regard will be expedited when more women become part of the decision-making echelons of their corporations.

The present sample comprised predominantly white women managers in dual-career relationships within one organisation, hence limiting its generalisability to lower work levels, other races or to women in other organisational settings. Constraints were also experienced in obtaining a random sample of women managers. Further research is needed to understand the experience of black women managers whose culture may impose very different gendered role prescriptions. Understanding how the evolving dual-career life styles are maintained might help to suggest better and more egalitarian coping strategies for dual-career families. Research also needs to explore how investing in a full-time career impacts on the life choices of young single women. While the dual-career life style offers women the potential of pursuing both career and family interests, it also presents tensions, difficulties and challenges affecting the salience and interplay of these roles and how these roles need to be constructed, negotiated and reconciled in their lives with both their spouse and employer.

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