ROLE SALIENCE TRENDS, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND THE ELABORATED MODEL

ROLE SALIENCE: GENERAL TRENDS

During the interviews, participants were asked which roles they considered to be most salient to their self-concept. All but two of the 21 participants identified their parental role as the most salient to their identity. One female participant mentioned the role of manager as most salient, and another female participant mentioned her spousal role as most salient. Four participants ordered their work role prior to their spousal role in listing the top roles associated with their identity. One participant indicated that her most salient role changes according to the context in which she is located; outside of the office, she thinks of herself as “mother of [x number of children]”, while in a business context, she considers herself “Head of Group/MBA”. Another participant did not separate her work and family roles, noting that she sees herself as a “working mom”. Also worth noting is that very few participants included roles other than those of parent, spouse, or manager when listing the roles most salient to their identity. Two participants included the role of ‘child’, and one participant included ‘sister’ among their most salient roles.

HOW MULTIPLE ROLES IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

All 21 participants indicated that occupying multiple roles enriches their quality of life. This is consistent with Super’s (1940; 1990) notion that life roles can be extensive (i.e., supportive and supplementary) in the life space. When asked at the beginning of the interview, participants provided several reasons why their multiple roles made their lives better, to be described in turn below. Included among these reasons is the construct of work-family enrichment itself, indicating that this construct may indeed be an elaboration of one of Super’s earliest ideas.

Work-family enrichment. The concept of work-family enrichment itself was spontaneously expressed by participants as a means by which occupying multiple roles improve one’s quality of life, consistent with Super’s (1940; 1990) idea that “one life theatre can enrich the other”. The following statements represent participant descriptions of how resources are transferred from one domain to the other, improving performance in those roles:

Excerpt 1:

Participant (P): The pieces inform each other…the relaxation you experience when you’re at home makes it easier to go to work the
next day...the use of my mind at work makes it easier to apply my mind to other things at home...the pieces reinforce each other.

Excerpt 2:

P: You’re able to bring dimensions of each of the roles into the other domain. With your children, there’s a lot of learning patience; and there’s a ‘stopping to smell the roses’...to appreciate detail or see things from a different perspective...There’s that not having a lot of time, needing to be organized and be efficient that you bring into your day-to-day work role... you learn you need to be patient; strategies that work with different people; negotiation; different tools and stuff that you can bring because you have the two roles... one helps you with the other.

Excerpt 3:

P: Having multiple roles definitely improves the effectiveness of the roles I play.

Excerpt 4:

P: Being a mother is the most important thing to me. I want to be successful at that the most. But I also think that the fact that I enjoy my job so much makes me a happier person, so I’m a better spouse and a better mother for it.

One participant described a commonly mentioned aspect of work-family enrichment to be described later when categories of performance improvement are presented; that is, the ability to teach and guide their children:

P: Being a female who is intellectually stimulated at work, who understands what’s going on in the world- issues, politics, business... I think we bring a lot to the table for our children. A lot of awareness... I look at my children and try to forecast... they’re at a crucial age where their personalities are coming out... What I want to try to do is to gear them toward a vocation that is in line with who they are...So it’s that guidance and that coaching and that mentoring, and I can do it now. And I was not in that position when I was growing up... My parents could not offer that.

Personal Growth and Development

Participants also mentioned that their quality of life is improved by virtue of occupying multiple roles because of the opportunities therein for developing and growing as individuals:

Excerpt 1:

P: Well, among a number of our friends, their wives are stay-at-home mothers. Even though it would probably make my life easier in some