



Office or kitchen? Wellbeing consequences of role participation depend on role salience



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ABSTRACT

In light of the emerging trend of men and women sharing work and family roles, the goal of this study is to investigate which individuals will experience a role as depleting or enriching their energy levels. We apply self-discrepancy theory and propose that role salience explains when a role will lead to exhaustion versus engagement. Exhaustion is likely when participating in a role for which salience is low, while engagement is likely when spending time on a role for which salience is high. We test this idea using a diary study whereby participants logged time spent on work and family tasks on seven consecutive days, while reporting feelings of exhaustion and engagement in the morning. For individuals with high work salience, time spent on work increased exhaustion less, and increased engagement more, as compared to individuals with low work salience. Spending time on family tasks increased exhaustion less, and increased engagement more, when work role salience was low as compared to high. Our findings suggest that wellbeing consequences of role participation depend on work role salience. We discuss how these findings advance theoretical thinking in the work–family literature and give leads for managerial practice.

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The work–family research field developed in response to the changing roles of men and women. The exponential increase of women participating in paid labor started around 1950 (Costa, 2000) and men soon after began to increase their participation in childcare and household tasks (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). In early work–family studies, it was assumed that for women, the work role would add to their stress level while for men, participating in family tasks would cause more stress, because these roles would conflict with role participation as expected by traditional gender role norms (Pleck, 1977). However, research that has examined gender differences in wellbeing outcomes related to combining dual roles has been mixed in support of these ideas. For example, work hours do not increase exhaustion more in women than in men (Ten Brummelhuis, Van der Lippe, Kluwer, & Flap, 2008), and both men and women may gain energy from participation in multiple roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

These findings may come as no surprise given the rise of more egalitarian gender roles worldwide (Cha & Weeden, 2014). Egalitarian roles consider women and men equally suitable for the work and family role. In societies with egalitarian norms, women do not feel that having a paid job conflicts with role expectations and men's participation in the family role is not frowned upon either. Egalitarian norms thus allow men and women to choose roles that align with their preferences. Hence, neither gender nor gender role norms, but the individual's preference for a role is likely to determine whether role participation has a positive or negative impact on wellbeing. The goal of this study is to test this idea. We investigate if the degree to which daily participation in a work or family role impairs or contributes to wellbeing depends on the individual's salience for that role. Role salience refers to the extent to which a role is an important means of self-definition and personal satisfaction (Amatea, Cross, Clark, & Bobby, 1986). Role salience, importance, role centrality and sometimes role involvement, are all terms that capture

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this idea of the psychological investment individuals make in particular roles and are used interchangeably in the literature (Bagger & Li, 2012; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). We use a diary study to examine the daily effects of time spent on work and family tasks (i.e., household and care tasks) on next morning exhaustion and engagement. In such a design, we make within-person comparisons, testing for instance if a person who works more hours on Tuesday than usual (his/her daily average), feels more exhausted than usual on Wednesday morning. Next, we compare whether these relationships differ between individuals high and low on work and family role salience.

We contribute to theoretical models in the work–family literature in two ways. First, our assumptions regarding the effects of participation in a role are based on conflict and enrichment perspectives (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). According to these perspectives, role participation can drain employees' energy, leaving too little energy to perform optimally in the other role (depleting process), but on the other hand, role participation may also lead to gains in fulfillment and energy (enriching process; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007), facilitating performance in the other role. In this study, we focus on the first step, whereby a role affects the individual's energy levels. This step is crucial as it explains the mechanism by which one role can deplete or enrich the other role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Little is known about the conditions that could diminish or fortify the impact of role participation on derivation or loss of energy (Greenhaus, 2008). We extend this line of research by investigating if role salience explains when role participation is more likely to increase exhaustion, thereby initiating a depletion process, versus engagement, eliciting an enriching process.

Second, we propose self-discrepancy theory as a useful lens to understand better when role participation leads to exhaustion versus engagement. Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) suggests that individuals compare their ideal self (e.g. hopes, aspirations), to their actual self (i.e., actual behavior). Exhaustion is particularly likely when the individual participates in a role for which salience is low, while engagement particularly occurs when spending more time on a role for which salience is high. We hope to increase our understanding of why some individuals derive energy from a role while others feel exhausted, by applying self-discrepancy theory to the work–family literature.

We solidify these contributions by using a daily diary design to examine the wellbeing consequences of role participation. A daily approach is more accurate than comparing the effects of average role participation (e.g., weekly work hours) on wellbeing (e.g., over the last month) between persons with high versus low salience, because memory loss or accuracy is less of an issue with daily reports as opposed to estimating how much time one spends weekly, on average, on a role. Our daily, within-person design fits in with the recent trend in the OB literature to examine phenomena at smaller units of analysis (Christian, Eisenkraft, & Kapadia, 2014; Dalal, Bhawe, & Fiset, 2014; Parker, 2014), as those smaller units of analysis (e.g., days) do more justice to what actually happens in daily life than between-person comparisons.

Gaining more insight in the wellbeing consequences of role participation is important for employees and employers. Employees might benefit from this knowledge by adjusting their time allocation over work and family roles if they know which role increases their wellbeing most. Or, if time adjustment is not possible, they can seek extra support for roles that drain energy. Likewise, it is important for organizations to understand which time allocation helps employees to start the workday with plenty of energy. Happy and energetic employees are more committed and productive employees (Bakker, 2009) and they are less likely to call in sick, or get burnt out (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009).

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Depleting and enriching role participation

The conflict approach (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and enrichment approach (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) explain when role participation might deplete energy or might increase energy levels (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). These two models have been recently integrated in the Work–Home Resources (W–HR) model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). The W–HR model assumes that participation in a role can have advantages and disadvantages, because a role involves possible demands (e.g., task overload), while also entailing possible contextual resources (e.g., social support from the spouse). Therefore, participation in a role can induce a depleting as well as an enriching process. Depletion is described as a process whereby demands in a role drain personal resources such as physical energy and time, thereby limiting the personal resources that are left for optimal performance in the other role. An example is an employee who worries about family matters (Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005). Worries and ruminative thoughts consume emotional and cognitive energy, making it more difficult to focus on work (Nohe, Michel, & Sonntag, 2014). Another example is a complex task at work that requires so much cognitive energy and resilience that the employee may have too little energy left to participate actively in family activities after work (Ilies et al., 2007). These examples show that participation in a role, either work or family, can deplete employees' energy levels. We apply the insights on the depletion process as described by the W–HR model to daily role participation. Note that we focus on the first step of the W–HR model whereby domain characteristics affect personal resources. The second step would be to apply those personal resources in the other domain. Based on the depletion process described by this model, we assume that daily time spent on work and family roles costs personal resources. We focus specifically on depleted energy, indicated by increased feelings of emotional exhaustion, as this volatile personal resource is assumed to fluctuate from day to day (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

Enrichment, on the other hand, refers to the process whereby participation in a role is an opportunity to gain personal resources, such as skills, perspectives, and advice, which employees can use to improve performance in the other role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). For instance, spending a relaxing day with family members may give the employee personal resources such as fulfillment and gratefulness (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). When employees

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