

## **Title: The Life Rope: a transactional approach to exploring worker and life role development**

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**Major Finding: The metaphor of a Life Rope is useful in understanding role changes after a traumatic injury and the redevelopment of a worker role.**

### **Participants:**

- 16 participants with paraplegia to tetraplegia as a result of SCI
- Time since injury 1-14 year range; Average time of unemployment 5.8 years (1-12 year range)
- Age range: 21-45 years; Gender: 2 female, 14 male
- Race: 8 Caucasian, 4 African-American, 2 American Indian, 2 foreign students
- Education: 13 High School degree, 3 pursuing postsecondary education, 1 Master's degree

**Method:** Data were gathered over 4 years with ongoing participant observation, videotaping, computer-based participant journals, open-ended interviews, visual maps, archival document review, performance assessments, and quantitative technical skills testing.

**Analysis:** Data coded for emerging themes using constant comparative approach and multiple reviewers included co-researchers and participants.

### **Findings:**

- Parallels were identified between what participants were experiencing in their lives and the unraveling of a rope.
- The life rope is composed of several layers and strands within those layers (e.g., the core "identity" strand, a layer of "basic survival role" strands, one or more layers of "elective supportive roles").
- Contextual links and issues (e.g., support systems, environmental opportunities, constraints and demands) have an impact on the way the life rope is woven from layer to layer.
- There is a cyclical life role development process that includes: death or loss of life role, emotional reaction over loss, acknowledgement/acceptance/rebirth of role, test and explore role, establish competence in role, and adapt role to fit self and context.

**Conclusion:** The life rope can be used as a framework for exploring the dynamic nature of role development, examining internal and external factors that impact upon this development, and creating plans of action to continue to grow to achieve and maintain role competence.

**Implications for future research:** Further development of the Life Rope tool for understanding the personal perspectives of individuals in other populations and contexts as well as those who acquire a disability at birth or in early childhood.

### **Evidence-based practice implications:**

- **Role strands and their respective levels in the life rope are defined by both the client and external factors.**
- **A symbolic approach to investigating role perspective facilitates greater understanding of the meaning and importance a client places on specific roles. Clients can employ the life rope to better visualize how important roles can again be interwoven with previous or existing roles.**

Hammel, J. (1999). *The life rope: A transactional approach to exploring worker and life role development. Work, 12, 47-60.*

