



How Women in Higher Education Negotiate Work and Home: A Study of Selected Women at a University in South Africa

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Abstract

The Council for Higher Education notes the lack of women doing research in South African universities. Focusing on the experiences of South African women academics, this article highlights the ways in which inequitable gender relations fuel women's marginalized position in higher education. The findings reported here include the gendered dimensions of negotiating home and work, pointing both to obstacles that limit women's agency and to prospects for hope by elucidating new possibilities for the development of women's agency. Being women in higher education and mothers is at the same time is regulated by restrictive understandings of gender. But women are not simply victims of this discourse. Hence, greater care must be taken in understanding women's gendered roles that inhibit their greater participation in research. Transforming gender relations and working towards equity are, therefore, crucial to women's success.

Résumé

Le Conseil de l'enseignement supérieur relève que très peu de femmes font de la recherche dans les universités sud-africaines. En se basant sur les expériences des femmes universitaires sud-africaines, ce document démontre la façon dont l'inégalité de genre augmente la marginalisation des femmes dans l'enseignement supérieur. Les résultats présentés ici comprennent les dimensions genre qui consistent à allier maison et travail tous deux démontrant les obstacles qui limitent l'activité des femmes et les espoirs qu'elles gardent en perspective en élucidant de nouvelles possibilités pour le développement de leur activité. Des compréhensions restrictives du genre réglementent les

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femmes qui sont à la fois dans l'enseignement supérieur et mères, mais les femmes ne sont pas simplement victimes de ce discours. Cependant une plus grande attention doit être prêtée pour comprendre le rôle des femmes dans le genre et ce qui les empêche à participer grandement à la recherche. Transformer les relations de genre et travailler pour l'équité sont essentiels à la réussite des femmes.

Introduction

Anuradha: ... the system has really used and abused us in many ways and ... you feel, as a younger women academic, you come in with a lot of hope that this is going to be a very empowering and facilitative environment, and it really just does the opposite. It tramps you down and makes you feel as if you are not good enough, all the time whatever you do is not enough...

Daria: ... in order to have a career in the academia, you need to publish ... what then happens, to squeeze more productivity out of you, your forty hours are filled up with admin and teaching ... your publishing actually, you take it from your private time ... and if you do not want to sacrifice your kids ... you start stealing it from sleep ... from all sorts of self care issues...

Sonali: ... you've got to cook the food ... you have got to clean the kitchen, you have got to sort the children ... the only thing I don't do is put the food in my husband's mouth

[Interviews conducted with women at a university in South Africa, April and May 2011].

Anuradha, Daria and Sonali are academics and mothers. They, like many other South African women in higher education, are largely invisible in research about gender dynamics and academic work in higher education (see Pillay 2007 as an exception). The position of women, as Anuradha, Daria and Sonali illustrate, is fundamentally about gender equality. While the roles of women traditionally aligned to cooking, cleaning and caring are weakening, the transcripts above point to gendered tensions which continually marginalize women in higher education. Recognising the persistent forms of inequalities, in August 2008, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa endorsed a declaration, calling for action to improve gender equality in higher education. Gender equality and employment equity policies in South Africa are pervasive and women's rising numbers in higher education are precisely the consequence of gender-friendly policies. The CHE has noted that in 2007, 43 per cent of the total permanent academic staff in public higher education institutions was made up of women. Employment equity policies have dented the male concentration of academics in South African universities, although gender inequalities remain apparent. Having a doctorate and conducting research is now regarded as critical to the research-led vision of universities in South Africa, but universities are full of examples of male domination in research.

The CHE (2009) notes that most of the research in South Africa is done by men. It adds that the proportion of all research output produced by women in universities in 2007 ranged between 14 per cent and 37 per cent.

Although clearly important in monitoring South Africa's legal regulation of gender equality, the examples of quantitative indicators above provide limited understandings of the gendered social processes through which women navigate higher education – a point noted by Pillay (2007). An understanding of gender patterns in higher education remains important in the pursuit of gender equality. The women in the transcripts above talk about the system that traps you down – children, husbands and gender roles – through which their lives are regulated and defined. Understanding the ways in which women give meaning to their positions as academic and mothers is important for the achievement of gender equality and especially significant in developing responses to women's continued marginalization in higher education contexts in South Africa. In the context of changing university environments in the country, particularly those that are research-led, doing research and having a doctorate are significant in university rankings in the global academic environment as regards calculation of profit, government subsidies, and accumulation (Jansen et al. 2007). Such pressures are increasing as university profit bases are aligned to research productivity. How women navigate the demands of being a mother and upholding the demands of the academia is a key focus of the article.

Turning to the experiences of women at a research-led university in South Africa, this article highlights the ways in which inequitable gender relations fuel women's marginalized position in higher education. This is in stark contrast to the legal expansion of gender equality which has produced new possibilities for the development of agency and the exercise of freedom. Women have new options; however, some options are not or cannot be taken up. Being a mother and being an academic, as this article shows, are regulated by restrictive understandings of gender at home, at work and through which women's gender roles and identities are reproduced. Gender relations are not static however (Connell 2011), and within the constraints of gendered environments, women are actively transforming gender relations both at home and work whilst reproducing them. These gendered tensions, as articulated in a close-focus study of women, are the main thrust of this article.

The article gives analytical priority to three areas that it argues come together to produce these gendered tensions, reproductions and transformations. The first is gendered arrangements in the family which point to women's greater role in childcare. The family and home life continue to support the maintenance of gender insubordinate relations (Connell 2006). Patterned gendered relations position women on the side of domestic labour (Connell 2005). Whilst South Africa has witnessed a dramatic transformation in policies that support gender

equality and employment equity, there appears to be some inevitability, although contested, about women's role in cooking, cleaning and childcare. A second factor is the gendered environment through which women experience both agency and restrictions in their academic contexts. Universities are gendered institutions and they embed a gendered division of labour, gendered cultures and gender hierarchies of power (Finch 2003; Bailyn 2003). Women are not simply victims of these power relations whether at home or work. Their roles as women clearly show gendered processes as they are reflected upon. A final factor is women's agency in transforming gender relations. A central argument made in this article is that women approach work/life contexts, not as victims of patriarchal privilege. Women are active in changing relations at home and work, producing better possibilities in navigating work/life contexts but they do so in ways that not only challenge patriarchal structures but also reproduce them. Skjortnes and Zachariassen (2010) indicate that little is known about the effects of higher education on women in the South. Understanding the gendered effects in the lives of women is crucial if higher education is serious about addressing, promoting and monitoring the equal participation of women (see CHE 2009).

The Study: Context and Method

This study is based on a National Research Foundation (NRF) funded project that seeks to investigate how women in three different countries in the South (India, South Africa and Brazil) negotiate their power within gendered environments at home and at work. In the South, whilst there is a growing body of work around gender and education, there is less focus on women's experiences within the academic environment (Pillay 2007; Skjortnes and Zachariassen 2010). This article focuses on the South African experience of being an academic mother at a research-led university. The comparative study is the focus of other work in this project. Qualitative focus group interviews were the basis in this study which highlighted how academic mother negotiated their academic roles and their lives as mothers and parents. This article is based on qualitative material, drawing from focus group interviews with eight women at a university in South Africa. The main criterion for selection was finding women who were mothers and women who reflected the social landscape of South Africa.

Interviews were conducted in May 2011 using a semi-structured interview guide. The sample consisted of one coloured, two African, two white and two Indian academics.¹

The approach taken in this study was to ensure that the experiences of women were foregrounded. It was therefore concerned with listening and seeing the world from the perspective of the participants. Thus, the approach taken proceeded to encourage women to talk about the ways in which they position themselves in relation to the higher education institution and how they

negotiate the world of work and home. Focus groups were very useful as, through the interactions with the research and other participants, data were generated in ways that enhanced the gendered ways through which women were positioned, and positioned themselves.

Table 1: Details of Respondents

| Name | Race | Age | Marital Status | No. of children | Age of children | Department | Qualification |
|----------|----------|-----|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Anahle | African | 39 | Married | 2 | 13 and 5 | Social Work and Social Studies | Registered for PhD |
| Anuradha | Indian | 40 | Married | 2 Own (+2 sibling's children) | 13 and 5 (11 and 7) | Social Work and Social Studies | PhD |
| Chloe | White | 46 | Married | 2 | 14 and 18 | Dietetics and Human Nutrition | Registered for PhD |
| Daria | White | 42 | Divorced | 2 | 10 and 9 | Social Work and Social Studies | Registered for PhD |
| Lirotshe | African | 38 | Married | 2 | 3 and 1 | Social Work and Social Studies | MA |
| Marie | Coloured | 34 | Married | 2 | 3 and 7 | Clinical Anatomy | Registered for PhD |
| Roshana | Indian | 40 | Married | 2 | 5 and 12 | Chemistry | Registered for PhD |
| Sonali | Indian | 37 | Married | 2 | 3.5 and 6 | Clinical Anatomy | Registered for PhD |

A significant point with respect to women is the sense of isolation, of feeling unsupported and yet there is an overwhelming need for finding another similar voice (see in particular Bassett's 2005 study of women). In fact, the participants were amazed that their issues were considered, as they put it, for the first time since they were at the university. The multiple views presented in the interview provided an environment for sharing and revealing not only the multiple sites of inequalities but also the sites of resistance.

‘As Women, It’s Your Job’: Home Arrangements

In all contemporary societies, women’s position in relation to domestic and care work remains stubbornly on the side of femininities (Connell 2002). For women in this study, their home arrangements continue to reflect the gender imbalance in domestic and care labour (Connell 2005). Mothers, like other women in paid work, do have social and economic capital. However, there is an inevitability of a greater burden in the home and childcare responsibilities. Whilst the participants in this study had children of different ages, with one being a single mother, the gender arrangements at home were familiar, with housework and childcare being concentrated mainly in their hands, leading Amahle to state, ‘I just do everything’.

Amahle: It’s my role ... there’s an assumption that now I’m a teacher, then I must know all the subjects ... like he’s [husband] helping ... he makes me feel guilty ... As far as he’s concerned, this is my role ... when he helps here and there, he is doing me such a big favour ... the thinking even in this day and age that it is a woman’s job to bring up the kids, at least for him, dominates his thinking; so it’s very difficult ... I actually don’t ask anymore, I just do everything on my own. Perhaps and when he chooses to help, then he helps ... then it’s great, but ... I hate that kind of thinking where you can sense that the person is not fully committed ... so when he does it, then great; but over and above that, I just do everything.

Rooted in unequal gender relations, Amahle points to the position of women worldwide – being accountable for the welfare of her children. Amahle finds it difficult to accept such domination of thinking through which her power is circumscribed. Despite having these gripes against her husband, in the final analysis, she says, ‘I do everything’. Most of the participants pointed to their frustration and unhappiness about being overburdened as mothers as they navigated the world of academia:

Sonali: ... when I go home I try and do all my motherly activities ... all the homework ... the reading and the other bits that you have to do as a mother and then the kids go to bed at about half past eight ... say nine o’ clock and then that’s when I start my work like ten o’clock ... work till about half past twelve and pass out and that’s basically how I run my life...

Like Sonali, the usual situation for women in this study is that they do most of the domestic work. Even if there was sharing in the household, they were inevitably tied to domestic chores. Resistance to the inevitability of gender roles was variable. Maria, who drew on her husband’s gendered pattern of upbringing, resisted his patriarchal conduct which impacted on sharing of duties at home:

his mom ... she did everything in his home ... she would cook and clean and make sure that there was dinner on the table at a certain time ... I don’t think he realised you are now in your own home and your wife ... is not going to do

the same things like your mom ... so we fought a lot on this issue ... he says this all the time, that's not his job but it is. I have to demand from him to actually be part of that so I haven't got it completely ... still haven't got him into the kitchen washing dishes but he does like help with making supper and he does make sure he helps with the kids because I'll constantly be on his case and tell him: when we get home you need to do this and you need to help me. But I feel like why do I have to tell you all these things, you need to just know what your role is, which is quite frustrating for me ... I think it's because of the roles in his family life where his mom did all these things and she did it not because she had to but also because it's part of them to be that way.

Lirotsho: ... It doesn't make a difference, working or not it's still your responsibility ... you visit the in-laws and you see exactly where the thinking comes from and the dynamics ... it is that kind of thinking that as women it's your job alone and I don't care if you working you know ... we have these conversations, 'yes I'll be more supportive' ... it will happen for day or two and then it reverts back to the same old...

Lirotsho, like Sonali, Maria and Amahle, are registered PhD students. Gendered relations at home are manufactured in ways that reflect the broader social inequalities through which male privilege is reproduced and impacts on their ability to manage the demands of the academia and completing a PhD. There was some level of contestation. Maria has constantly to remind her husband of easing her workload at home. In other cases, like Amahle, Lirotsho and Sonali, contestation yielded little:

Sonali: ... I have to say he helps with the kids ... when he's at home ... he helps wash up the dishes ... if things are broken and stuff like that he will fix it up ... but it's like ... so your role is as a wife and as a mother ... my husband likes his hot, home cooked food ... he's been brought up like that because his mother spoiled him so that's what I've had to deal with ... it's very hard to change my husband ... He is stubborn, very stubborn ... he is a very strong personality ... strong personality so I can't change him ... I've tried ... the men at work are just the same ... it's frightening actually.

Women, by virtue of their education and social class positioning and economic bargaining power within the household, could allow for greater negotiation of household chores and child care. At best, the participants talked of how their husbands eased the workload, not shared it, and at worst as Sonali above indicates, there was stubborn resistance to change. Gender roles are challenged and resisted, but for Sonali there are limits to such challenges. Maria, for example, forces change despite the overwhelming privilege of patriarchy through which men (and her husband) have lived, and continually do so. Sonali however reminds us of the stubborn one-sidedness of gender inequalities and the familiar expectation of entitlement and male privilege.

Home tensions, as some participants noted, included the pressures of the extended family and cultural expectations:

Amahle: Like we call it *umsebenzi*, like they slaughter a goat ... for ancestor's purposes ... My family now lives in Richards' Bay and now you need to come a day before the ceremony because the ancestors should see you as a family and it's like ... it won't be properly done if not all members of the family are present at a certain time and you cannot leave immediately after and I think my family are starting to understand that I'm always with my laptop and my mother said she has never seen an oppressive job like this one ... she always has to apologise on my behalf ... to her that is too much ... they always ask for me ... we have big family clan from my father's side and there are always functions and ceremonies which as a member of the family I should attend and she feels that its now her responsibility to apologise on my behalf ... its cultural pressure that's really not worked well with me as an academic.

Amahle, like Lirotsho and Anuradha, talked about the power of education in the extended family. Being an academic was seen as positive and praised; however, as Amahle states, there were certain cultural expectations that impacted on their ability to balance work/life demands. Amahle talks about the cultural practice of *umsebenzi*. This ritual, usually after the birth of a child or a marriage in the family, is in praise of ancestors and involves the slaughter of a goat or cow, the making of sorghum beer, and involves all family members in the acknowledgment and worship of ancestors. These cultural rituals are regular features in the extended family but have not worked well for Amahle as she tries to complete her PhD. The strong family identity is not rejected however. As Skjortnes and Holt Zachariassen (2010) note, the extended family and women's academic careers present women with different obligations and demands. Here, Amahle is respectful of the large extended family and the ceremonies and functions to which she is invited and feels obliged to attend. At the same time however, her work as an academic is filled with different obligations which prevent her from attending these rituals and ceremonies. Gender relations are dynamic and as Lirotsho states that she cannot attend all cultural ceremonies, 'I'm beginning to become assertive about what I need to do because I'm not coping ...'.

The cultural expectation of being present at ceremonies is now being altered, as Lirotsho shifts the established ideas by being 'assertive', changing gender arrangements and creating new possibilities for her to cope with academic work and family.

Women and Work

Academic environments are gendered institutions (Jonnergård et al. 2010; Pillay 2007). The gendered practices within the academic environment embed relations of power and gendered division of labour and gendered cultures. The participants

in this study provided unsurprising evidence of the struggles within the academic environment that contributed to their subordination:

Sonali: ... our department is very poorly managed and there is not enough support given to female staff ... there are only three academic female members ... the rest of them are all male ... all of their wives have been at home ... I just absolutely firmly believe that no extra support is given to us and they just load us with the damn work ... I actually get very cross and yesterday I even phoned one of them and I actually said ... 'I'm not doing this anymore!', then he phoned me back at 11 o'clock at night and said 'OK ... forget about the marking, I'll do it tomorrow' ... six males and all fuddy duddies...

Sonali points to the gendered cultures in her department which sustain male domination. Sonali is completing her PhD. Her department burdens her with excessive marking in relation to more senior male academics with doctoral qualifications. She is aware that she is dealing with men she describes as 'fuddy duddies' who have 'wives at home' in relation to her position as a working mother and an academic. Being overloaded with marking was, in her view, an issue of gender justice. Sonali has to manage the marking with pressures of being a mother and in a family context where she struggles to negotiate equality with her husband. Daria too focused on the lack of support from senior academics:

Daria: ... In our department we've talked about how we can assist younger academics in terms of accomplishing their PhDs but ... it will mean the senior academics need to absorb your work in order to assist you ... maybe they could be supportive but there is no support, and you can tell, especially in our school people are busy planning their retirement ... my PhD supervisor who's a known feminist and I said 'I cannot cope' and the response that I got was, 'Well Daria, we've all had it hard' and I think possibly it was ... an abortive attempt at kind of being empathetic ... think almost there is such a level of disillusionment that people just don't care ... the truth is women who move up the ladder very often do move because they also have decided to comply with the patriarchal structures and we see it in the university ... at the end of the day, the kids are your problem.

The shortage of senior academics within the department meant that there were limits to the support for younger academics like Daria to complete their PhDs, as senior academics were not willing to be burdened with more work. Daria notes too that her supervisor was caught in the patriarchal matrix with little empathy for the difficulties experienced in managing being an academic, doing a PhD and having children, leading her to state that the 'kids are your problem'.

Travel and conference attendance was another source of concern for women. Daria stated that travelling to conferences as a single mother was difficult as she had no source of family support at home. She noted too that it

was expensive to take her children with her, so she arranged with her Head of School to allow her to use her research funds to pay for her children:

Daria: ... what do I do with my kids ... the Deputy Dean for research with a big no ... I got this e-mail you know ... that I should be knowing the rules and family members are not supposed to travel ... so I wrote back to the Deputy Dean for research and I said you know ... the request was for my minor children and if you say the rules do not permit it, then let the rules be changed and if you need my assistance in making a proposition of how the rules should be changed, I'll be of your service ... needless to say, I never got a reply ... my loyalty to this institution is so low ... I think I've run the obstacle course and ... I don't owe anybody and that's very very sad to reach that conclusion in your midlife.

Research funds are allocated only for academic travel, and funding children's travel is not permitted. Nonetheless, Daria made suggestions to change the policy that prevents children being funded but received no response.

Daria suggested that completing her PhD and producing research articles was a bargaining chip through which she could negotiate her stay at the university:

...the university wants money out of it ... we've become such a production line ... I've always had enough publications, so that's never been in question with me; but then when I worked out how much of money the university gets from my publications, I realised I've got a draw card and then the PhD itself becomes a draw card and, for me, a big turn around in my negotiating my position ... I bring in more than I cost ... I've created a niche for myself ... I'm engaged in these international conversations ... I can't travel but I can use the computer and you know what I found is my international work has become really nice because ... I can impact discourses, I can write a policy statement ... we can send that all around the world and it's given me my own playground. And when things get too hectic here, I just close my door and I write some e-mails and I found it's giving me respite. I think on a very tangible level, there is a way of doing the system; but then you've got to first meet the demands, and meeting the demands is sometimes hard. But if you come out of that ... once you bring in money I think it is a tangible thing and seeing where power is more dispersed... It's a bargaining chip.

Daria shows that, despite the context of powerlessness, power can be used and exerted through getting a PhD and producing research articles. Whilst she states that getting there can be a 'catch 22' in recognition of the gendered institutional cultures, the possibility of changing the context from powerlessness to power is precisely to ensure the production of research to generate university monetary subsidies. Contributing to the generation of economic capital provides leverage, power and a bargaining chip.

Negotiating Home and Work

Whilst the position of women was one of constant struggle and difficulty, there were also views that showed how motherhood could be managed and how the requirements of work could be negotiated:

Anuradha: ... I must admit the kind of flexibility of being a woman in this academic environment is you can some days work from home and then also leave a bit earlier ... I always kind of work till about two when my kids get home from school and then I do my domestic stuff...

The academic environment and the flexibility in work hours allow for attention to children and domestic life, as Anuradha shows. In fact, all the participants did not indicate that they would leave the university, indicating that they had a great passion for teaching, completing their doctorate and fulfilling their research agendas. Sonali aspired to become an associate professor in five years time, notwithstanding the home/work challenges, by exerting her agency and power within an overall patriarchal context.

As with Connell's (2005) study, many of the women described the negotiation between home and work as 'juggling'.

Chloe: ... I think I'm quite lucky, and I've got a husband whose work environment is far more flexible than my own ... my juggling has been more related to the fact that yes I am a mother but in our discipline we've had many constraints ... staff shortages and I was acting head of discipline so there have been times when I had to stay at work very late ... we talking of 8 or 9 o'clock at night ... I've been very lucky that my husband has been able to step in if need be but it is a constant juggle and school functions or prize-givings or special events ... I believe the devil works overtime because those always coincide with an important academic event.

Whilst Chloe talked about her husband's gender sensitivity, there is still the expectation that she is accountable for managing the home and her work as her husband 'steps in if need be'. Ultimately, women have to juggle the demands of the discipline, late nights and attention to children. Chloe's ability to negotiate being a mother and an academic was subject to being lucky and having a husband who had work flexibility. Chloe, like Roshana however, also noted that being a good mother was important:

Chloe: I went to a seminar on women and research where one speaker from the University of the Western Cape said that she has a PhD, she's a very well published researcher and she said that she actually tells everybody straight that her child comes first and whether it's an important meeting, she just excuses herself and I am not that assertive as yet ... but there have been occasions where I've actually just said I cannot because you can only miss so many school related activities ... I feel that it's very important to me to be a good mother to our children.

Roshana: For me it's family first, I will go to the awards day, I don't care what meeting is on ... I will not be there, I will go to my child's functions for school ... even if it's an important exam meeting or it's like if you don't attend the meeting you won't get paid whatever they can throw at me ... everybody knows that about me and that's the first thing – my children.

Chloe refers to the women and gender research seminar and illustrates how other successful academics make decisions that put 'children first'. Noting that

she is not yet assertive, she does nonetheless negotiate and assert her agency where necessary in the interests of being a good mother. Roshana on the other hand, takes a firm stance and puts family first, 'the first thing is my children'. Roshana was also able to obtain her mother's support. Her mother lives with her and takes care of the cooking and she has successfully negotiated her role at home:

You know his [husband] primary focus is making sure that the kids get their homework done, that I get the help that I need, that my PhD is done on weekends ... I tell him 'listen, I have to mark' ... you know I have to mark at home ... my lab is at work so I have to leave the marking for home so that I can do the lab work at work so he's fine with that and he says so you go ahead and he'll see to the kids... well obviously the food part ... my mom does the cooking but I have to do the feeding, that's how it is.

'You go ahead' is, in the final analysis, an aspect of male power but also within a context of changing gender relations and negotiations. Not one of the participants stated that gender equality had been achieved at home or work. However, negotiation was significant in changing gender relations:

Roshana: I used to do the cooking, the cleaning ... I was doing the honours so I think it made me stronger, it made me manage my time more effectively ... I'm no longer on contract but you know you needed a job because you need two salaries to run a home, we had just bought a house and I was not working for three years prior to that and I know what it was like ... bond rate went up to 24 per cent, we were living like from hand to mouth at that time, so I needed a job and so if my contract said you have to have honours, I had to have it by that time and to have your masters in two years I had to have it because I needed to keep my job so it was difficult, there were so many challenges but I think I am glad for having gone through all of that because it has now made me who I am.

Roshana illustrates the ways in which she was positioned over the years from wife at home, taking care of children, to completing her PhD. She noted her economic struggles but also noted how being unemployed affected her relationship at home, leading her husband to accuse her of not supporting the household financially. The support from her mother however, and her contribution to the financial upkeep of the home since she was permanently employed, allowed a greater flexibility and easier negotiations in the home front. At work however, at times administrative overload, teaching larger numbers of students and dealing with a gendered environment that took little heed of women's particular needs, made the negotiations difficult.

Conclusion

The formal recognition of gender equality in South Africa has created new pathways for women academics. Increasing number of women now enter higher education as academics (CHE 2009). Nevertheless, the formal recognition of equality has not provided women with an indisputable agency. The study

indicates how gendered patterns function in ways that are reproduced and contested and how women position themselves within these patterns. In the context of increasing demands placed on universities in South Africa, including the demand for increased research productivity and increasing the number of academics with doctoral qualifications, the focus on the experience of women within this nexus is required. This study shows that any attempt to promote women's agency and equality of opportunity in higher education, endorsed by the CHE (2009), will stumble without parallel attempts to undo the social environments through which women's roles in relation to household and care arrangements are positioned within the broader social context. This is a gender justice matter. Women's ability to negotiate and work with the demands of academia and the demands of child care and home arrangements depend on their ability to exercise power in both contexts. The findings of the study suggest how marginalization is reproduced, the difficulties and struggles through which the academia is navigated. The home and work are social arenas that manifest unequal relations of power. In attempting to do research and complete their doctoral qualifications, many of the participants struggled. At the same time however, changing gender relations are becoming apparent. At home, for example, Roshana spoke about the changes to her position from unemployed to a position where she has successfully negotiated the work/life struggles. Contestations can produce positive changes and changing forms of masculinity are noted in her home environment. This is not evenly the case as women like Sonali struggle and resist with little effect. Gender relations can be stubbornly one-sided but they are also open to change. At work, Sonali too notes that, despite her contempt for 'fuddy duddy' male academics she has resisted.

Higher education institutions must recognise the specific ways in which women's positions work against equality. Programmes and policies aiming to increase women's participation in higher education, increase women's research output and doctoral qualifications have a clear responsibility to challenge the subordinate positioning of women, both within and outside the institution. Research budgets should be gender budgets. Women should be allowed to travel with their children and such travel should be paid for by funds generated from the research rewards system.

Departments in the university must become more aware of how gender manifests itself and of the perpetuation of masculine academic identities which position women in marginal ways. However, gender patterns are such that even women in senior positions need to be reminded of the gendered imbalances. This is a gender justice matter. All the women wanted to be good mothers, but good mothers meant that they had to align within the normative gender order and responsible for care and household arrangements. The pervasiveness of gender roles and identities limits the opportunities for women. Shedding the assumption

that they are solely responsible will go some way towards increasing women's power within academic and home environments. Women are not simply acted upon by patriarchal systems but they reproduce (as they challenge) unequal gender relations. As Pillay (2007) notes, it is important for women academics to challenge 'the socially constructed notion that mothers are responsible for nurturing'.

Note

1. Race categories remain important in South Africa. The four racial categories – white, Indian, African and coloured – are important in post-apartheid South Africa as they reflect social and historical inequalities. The promulgation of employment equity policies has meant that increasing number of women and black women in particular now enter into higher education, although the majority of academics remain male – and depending in the context of the university many remain white and male.

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