

## **An Alternative to the Dominant Narrative of Academic Career Success: A Case Study on How Gender Identity Matters in Defining Women's Career Success in Sri Lankan Academia**

Even though women's participation in the labour force has been increasing throughout the world, the evaluation of women's career success continues to draw heavily on frameworks and conceptions derived from male-centered social constructions. This has led to offer an incomplete picture of women's career success. Thus, the purpose of this research was to explore the influence of gender identity in defining career success of female academics in Sri Lanka. The research was positioned in the constructivist-interpretive paradigm and the strategy of inquiry is an in-depth case study. It incorporated thematic analysis in analysing data using the manual coding technique. Interpretation of data was done utilising the theoretical lenses of Gender Identity Theory and Social Chronology Theory.

The primary finding of the research revealed that three properties of gender identity, namely, similarity, sense of common fate and centrality of identity play a vital role in defining women's career success. As per the analysis, women's career success is considered to be derived from accomplishments in two aspects of a career actor's life. On the one hand, it is related to a feeling of accomplishment at work, a factor linked to employment. On the other hand, it is related to a feeling of accomplishment gained when the expectations of womanhood crafted by society are achieved. The participants' views of career success highlighted the fact that successfully achieving the various 'stages' expected from them in their personal life as 'women in society' played a significant role in defining them as "successful career actors". Accordingly, women's career success was conceptualised in this study as 'a feeling of accomplishment within an individual's bounded social space and time, resulting from employment related activities and from meeting the social expectations of womanhood in the context of personal life.'

The extant literature recognises career success as an objective and/or subjective accomplishment related to an individual's work related experiences. However, this research shows that such a work-related notion is no longer valid in this study context. The participants' narrations emphasised that the traditional gendered roles—where women are regarded only as nurturers and care providers of the family—are still lingering in their attitudes towards their family, and consequently, affect their definition of career success. Therefore, most women feel that they are obliged to devote most of their time to their families and are primarily responsible for their families' well-being. It has also led them to incorporate socially constructed family life/personal life accomplishments in defining career success.

The novel conception of career success derived from this research can be related to the notions posited by Social Chronology Theory (SCrT). The proponents of SCrT call for the following contextualization: conceptualizing and measuring career success depends on understanding both the structure of the social space within which careers unfold and the complexity of conditions, as both change over time. Thus, this research makes a key contribution to Career Theory by presenting a more culture-specific and comprehensive picture of women's career success by considering the influence of gender identity.

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