

ABSTRACT

Even though the women's participation in the labour force is been increasing throughout the world, the evaluation of women's career success continues to draw heavily from frameworks and conceptions derived from those constructed based on men. This context has led to offer an incomplete picture about women's career success and it appeals researchers to explore a women's specific definition for career success which is drawn based on the women's career experiences. Thus, this research attempted to explore the influence of socio-economic career boundaries and gender identity in defining career success of female academics—who are categorised as boundaryless career actors in boundaryless career theory—in Sri Lanka. And, it led to set two (02) objectives to achieve in this research namely, to investigate how socio-economic career boundaries influence on defining career success female academics in Sri Lanka and to investigate the way in which the gender identity influences in defining career success of female academics in Sri Lanka.

This research used a qualitative approach of researching and positioned itself in the constructivist-interpretive paradigm. The strategy of inquiry in this research is an in-depth case study. It incorporated thematic analysis in analysing data using the manual coding technique. Interpretation of data was done using researcher's ontological stance and three theoretical lenses namely, Boundary Theory, Social Chronology theory and Gender Identity theory.

The findings portrayed the roles and characteristics of socio-economic career boundaries and gender identity play a vital role in defining women's career success. It was found that women's career success is a feeling of accomplishment which is multifaceted. Moving further, the researcher conceptualised women's career success 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.' Even though the academics are categorised as boundaryless career actors under boundaryless career theory, this research identifies that female academics are still bounded by socio-economic career boundaries. Thus, the findings in relation to the context are contradicting with the theory of boundaryless careers. Furthermore, the findings put forward an emergent relationship between perceived

characteristics of socio-economic career boundaries and roles of the socio-economic career boundaries.

Through bringing forward a more comprehensive definition for career success of female career actors—by considering the influence of socio-economic career boundaries and gender identity—this research made a significant contribution to the career theory. It also identifies that female academics are still bounded by socio-economic career boundaries and challenges the applicability of boundaryless career theory in its universal terms. Moreover, it proposes to revisit and rethink about the notion of boundarylessness in relation to careers. By researching on the simultaneous effect of multiple socio-economic career boundaries in structuring people's career success, this research contributes to the boundary theory. Also, an emergent relationship between characteristics and roles of the socio-economic career boundaries was found through this research. Thus, ultimately this research contributes to the career theory and boundary theory in the mode of theory enhancement.

This research suggests women give high priority to their achievements in personal life compared to employment related achievements. As a result, it leads female academics to be stagnated in terms of their knowledge, skills and attitudes. In this context, the management of universities needs to facilitate the female academics to grow themselves in both their academic life and personal life. On one hand, the management of universities should facilitate female academics with child care arrangements such as day-care centres within or nearby the University premises. Also, women's psychological and physical mobility should be encouraged. Facilitating the female academics to foster transferable abilities through mentoring networks, training programmes and workshops is a suggestion in this regard. The findings portray women pay high attention to their age and they lack career self-management behaviour. Thus, the management should develop career counseling mechanisms to plan their careers, enhance career competencies and facilitate appropriate career self-management behaviour.