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UNDERSTANDING THE CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF BLACK FEMALE ACADEMICS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the career trajectories of Black South African female academics at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Their lived experiences continue to include the political uncertainties of race and gender. Global scholarship on the challenges experienced by Black women in academia is palpable; the South African landscape is distinctive, resultant from the complex intersections of apartheid and the 2004 higher education transformation process. Fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 black female academics from five different campuses at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. They were invited to recount their lived experiences as academics. Notable themes that emerged when examining race and gender included the old boys' network, the leadership paradox of feminised leadership versus the "queen bee" as well as the impact of stress. The theoretical framework that underpins this paper is social constructivism with a specific focus on intersectional theory. The intersectional theory will give context to race and gender identity in the experience of academics. The South African government documents intersectional experiences recorded in legislation that addresses disparities that existed during apartheid; nonetheless, these intersectional experiences of disadvantage are perpetuated. The dimensions of race and gender play a critical role in academia, while transformational legislation is responsible for facilitating gendered targets. These findings seek to provide a tool of support for Black women, as they continue to be exposed to innumerable challenges, including perfunctory appointments, remuneration incongruence and inconsistencies in the apportionment of research funding.

Keywords: *old boys' network, race, black women, academic, gender, South African higher education, queen bee, stress, intersectionality*

1. INTRODUCTION

The South African higher education story is a unique one. The transforming political landscape, national imperatives of race and gender empowerment, as well as changes in the country' higher education institutions, created

expectancies for Black female academics. With the changes and merges that took place within higher education in 2004, a more balanced racial picture was presented (Cloete *et al.*, 2004). Historically, Black female academics experienced division based on intersecting factors of gender and race. Almost two decades of post-higher education transformation and employment equity legislation continues to force alignment of gender development within higher education. Irrespective of the legislation and attempts to equalise the higher education sector from a race and gender perspective, Black female academics continue to undergo challenges based on race and gender (Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan, 2020). This paper explores the career trajectories of Black female academics by investigating and understanding their lived experiences.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The social construction of reality and intersectionality are valuable theoretical contributors to this context. Imbued in the study are intertwined experiences of gender and racial incongruences foisted on black women in the academy. The authority of intersectionality augments the long-standing legacy of multiple forms of gender oppression. Traditional research is male-centred and overriding; insufficient endeavours have been initiated to cognise the varied viewpoints of the lived experiences of female subjugation (Ramnund, 2019). The social stock of knowledge includes the knowledge of an individual's situation and its limits (Berger & Luckmann, 1979: 56). Knowledge, perceptions and constructs of race and gender are critical paradigms upon which this study reposes. Berger and Luckmann's (1979) rationalisations of how institutionalisation sculpts our lives are suitable for transformed higher education and the traditional institution of the old boy's network.

The leadership paradigms for male-centred and feminine leadership values are based on the foundations of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1979). Doused in the leadership archetypes and intersectional accounts is the framework for power, which is the undertone throughout this study. Ivancevich *et al.* (2013) stated that power is an individual's ability to reward a follower for compliance with orders. Reward power occurs when an individual possesses a resource that another individual wants and is willing to exchange that resource in return for specific behaviour. Followers will obey orders, requests and instructions if they value the rewards that managers are eager to give. If an award has no value to the follower, it will not influence the follower's behaviour (Ramnund, 2019).

3. BACKGROUND: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

The encounters experienced by women in tertiary institutions grow exponentially alongside their combat for egalitarianism. Badsha (2001) alleges that the causes of the slow progress of women into management at higher education institutions are directly linked to policy factors that impact on women's advancement. There is a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation at universities (Ramnund, 2019). Owing to South Africa's separatist laws, women continue to struggle to fight systems that support their subjugation. Albeit the equality, politically, black women endure significantly more prejudice within higher education institutions.

Higher education statistics pre-2004

In 2004 higher education in South Africa was reorganised. Statistics were announced regarding the numbers pertaining to the period before 2004. Bailey and Mouton (2004) indicated that in the former "Technikons", gender disparities seem less pronounced with five per cent of

women and ten per cent men at associate director level, and 22 per cent women as opposed to 28 per cent men at the senior lecturer level. Comparatively, in the university sector, women dominated in numbers at junior lecturer levels. However, at associate professor level there were seven per cent women as opposed to 13 per cent men, and at Professor level there were seven per cent women as opposed to 26 per cent men (Bailey & Mouton, 2004). The number of women declined along the career trajectory in the academy. This is consistent with various studies led by the American Association of University Professors, precisely of the work of Euben (2005) and Perna (2000). The scholarship by Cummins (2012) maintains that female academics are consistently overlooked for promotion as they advance to a stage with increased family commitments and their responsibilities to motherhood (Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan, 2020).

The Bailey and Mouton (2004) study is pertinent in that it took place ten years post-democracy but before the higher education restructure and reorganisation. Between 1992 and 2001, there was a ten per cent increase to 40 per cent of women in academia. In 2001, 60 per cent (143 out of 240) of the academics were younger than 25 years of age, 50 per cent (1559 out of 3124) were from the 25–34 age category and 42 per cent (1830 out of 4342) from the 35–44-year age category. In 2001 in South Africa, 42 per cent of women completed undergraduate studies, 51 per cent completed lower postgraduate studies, 42 per cent Master's degrees and 27 per cent at a Doctoral level (Bailey & Mouton, 2004:31). The legacy of apartheid was prevalent as 76 per cent of doctoral graduates were white women.

The statistics on academic publications continue this austere trajectory. While less than a third of women published research within natural science fields, 47 per cent published within the humanities and social sciences. In the Science and Engineering field, most of the research publications belonged to men. Concomitant to the publication record is the research funding statistics. Bailey and Mouton (2004) indicated that between the years 1990 and 2001, female research outputs were significantly fewer than those of men. In 2001, women received only 21 per cent of research grants and 42.5 per cent for Master's and Doctoral scholarships, which inadvertently inferred that the majority of these grants and scholarships were awarded to men (Bailey & Mouton, 2004).

Chesterman's (2000) study of ten academic institutions in Australia shows that women form 50.4 per cent in a junior academic role, 27.8 per cent in a senior lecturer capacity and only 15.4 per cent in higher academic ranks. Payroll data in this study confirmed that declining female academic numbers occur in permanent job stature and senior roles. The lack of research support, policy formulation and implementation, also affirmed by Badsha (2001), as well as reward systems, impede women's development in tertiary institutions (Chesterman, 2000). These statistics are consistent with the South African trends as well as American studies by Euben (2001) and Euben (2005)

Higher education statistics post-2004

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's holistic employment equity profile as at 2015 as published in the annual report reflected the following racial picture from 2012 to 2015. It confirmed that academic staff at UKZN was 28 per cent African in 2015 compared to 20 per cent in 2012. This was an improvement from 16 per cent African academics in 2004. There were 34 per cent white academics in 2012, which decreased to 28 per cent in 2015, while Indians and Coloureds remained constant at 30 per cent and two per cent respectively.

Some discrepancies existed with the gender reporting statistics for UKZN from their 2016 annual report and the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training in Parliament. The latter was headed up as a government imperative and was represented by all higher education institutions. In the annual report, the figures for women indicated 55% for 2015, whereas at the committee it was reported that women made up 48 per cent of the academic staff, an improvement from 41 per cent in 2004. Indian, foreign nationals and white men and women were over-represented in the employment equity profile of 2016. The number of academic staff who obtained a PhD increased by three per cent to a total of 50 per cent. African men and women were under-represented at the higher academics ranks of professor (5.17%) and associate professor (15%). However, the number of African women at professor level increased from 0.85 per cent in 2015 to 1.72 per cent in 2016 and African female associate professors rose from 7.14 per cent in 2015 to 8.57 per cent in 2016.

In South Africa, considerable improvements in numbers were visible from 1992 to 2001. However, these numbers were not consistent in senior academic ranks. A typical illustration of this is that there was only seven per cent female professors as opposed to 26 per cent male in 2001. A further challenge to the numbers of women was the emigration of skilled professionals. Between 1990 and 2000, women formed the highest number of skilled emigrants within the education sector (Bailey & Mouton, 2004). There are stringent and prescribed criteria for the progression into senior academic management roles (irrespective of gender) dictated by the South African Department of Education, where an academic Head of Department or Faculty Dean cannot progress into those roles without specified academic qualifications, research outputs and/or leadership experience. Hence, the declining numbers of female academics at the associate professor and professor level already indicate a slow progression of women into management roles, as per the prescribed criteria.

4. METHODOLOGY

Fourteen qualitative interviews were conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. To understand the lived experiences, interviews were selected as a research tool. "Research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017:5). The primary aim of the interviews was to understand the lived experiences of female academics, with specific emphasis on challenges related to gender and race. Interviews were conducted with female academics from five different campuses of UKZN and at different levels in their career, in an attempt to understand their career trajectories. The five campuses include Howard College, Medical School, Edgewood, Westville and Pietermaritzburg. The authors are conscious that the number of participants is low but given the sensitivity of the area of research and the vulnerability of their positions, only women who volunteered to speak out could be reached. While 14 participants are not a representative sample, it provides a glimpse into their lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews are considered as the most appropriate research method for assembling evidence for the views and understandings of the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The authors utilised non-probability, purposive and snowball sampling to reach the participants. While participants were pleased to share their proficiencies, they did not want any private data revealed, as they were apprehensive of being identified by management. Ethical clearance was obtained from the research ethics committee and a gatekeeper's letter allowed for the study to be conducted. All participants also signed an informed consent document.

Among the participants who participated in the interviews, the ages ranged between 30 and 50+ years. Ten of the participants were married and had children while two were single with no children. Two were married with no children. The historical data will be presented first, followed by an analysis of the experiences of Black women academics based on gender and race.

Table 1: Biographic data of participants

Campus	Designation	Highest qualification	Race	Age	No. of children
Pietermaritzburg	Lecturer	Masters	Indian	30–40	0*
Pietermaritzburg	Lecturer	PhD	Indian	30–40	0
Pietermaritzburg	Lecturer	PhD	African	30–40	1
Howard College	Lecturer	Masters	African	41–49	1
Howard College	Lecturer	PhD	Indian	50+	0
Westville	Senior Lecturer	PhD	Indian	41–49	1
Westville	Lecturer	Masters	Indian	41–49	2
Westville	Lecturer	PhD	Indian	30–49	0
Medical School	Academic Coordinator	MBChB	Indian	41–49	2
Medical School	Professor	MBChB	Indian	50+	Adult
Medical School	Professor	MBChB	Indian	50+	Adult
Edgewood	Professor	PhD	Indian	41–49	2
Edgewood	Head of Department	PhD	Indian	41–49	1
Edgewood	Lecturer	PhD	African	41–49	3

*Single participants with no children were caregivers of family members – elderly/sick/frail parents

Participants with adult children recounted their experiences when their children were minors and living at home.

Table 2: Breakdown per race and career level

RACE	NUMBER	CAREER LEVEL	NUMBER
African	3	Lecturer	12
Indian	11	Professor	4

Table 3: Breakdown per age and number of children

AGE	NUMBER	CHILDREN	NUMBER
30–40	4	Adult children	2
41–49	7	0	4
50+	3	Children	8

The interview data was recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed. NVivo, as well as manual coding, was used to determine themes for the study. The themes were subsequently analysed and the findings were presented. “External validity is the transferability or generalisation of results, and could also pose a threat to the validity of the data. This means that generalisations

of the research could be made to include a wider population group” (Ramnund, 2019:113). All judicious steps were adhered to ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the research.

5. INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER AND RACE – A SUMMARY OF THE SCHOLARSHIP, FINDINGS AND THEMES

The most significant challenges to the career trajectory of Black female academics is the old boys’ network and the queen bee syndrome. These challenges directly influence stress. Power disguises itself in almost every facet of life (Ramnund, 2019), women in academia experience this within their departments, their faculties and the decision-making structures that affect promotions, funding and policy. The old boys’ network is an example of gender-based exploitation that is masked in several ways by the increased pressure and manipulation of female academics.

The old boys’ network

The challenges faced by women are age-old and date back to the 19th century. Arguably, the question remains whether women have advanced within the sphere of higher education. The non-feminised faculties fall under the spotlight where an increased number of women in the Science, Engineering and Technology faculties seem to be a positive shift. These numbers do not preclude the increased number of barriers and the lack of support that women face in these sectors specifically. Although the 2001 statistics (Laafia & Larsson, 2001) of European countries indicated a 12 per cent representation of women in Engineering and Technological faculties, this needs to be interpreted with caution as women are still over-represented in highly feminised faculties such as Humanities and Social Sciences. Notable reference should be made to the statistics after the 1969 Carnegie Commission (Ladd & Lipset, 1975), where female numbers in Engineering, which were less than one per cent, increased to 12 per cent in 2001.

As Skelton (2004) argues, the idea of an actual academic remains embedded within the image of male, middle-class and middle-aged men which is used as a measure against which academic women, particularly young women, position themselves and by which they are appointed. In the most recent published statistics, membership in the Science faculties globally has been reviewed (Ngila *et al.*, 2017). Cuba boasts the highest percentage of women in Science faculties at 27 per cent, with South Africa closely behind with 24 per cent. Finland is the most progressive country in Europe with a percentage of 17 per cent of women in the Science faculties. From a global perspective, Africa and Latin American areas have the highest numbers of women in Science faculties (Ngila *et al.*, 2017).

Participant E commented:

The old boys’ network exists. Traditionally they were made up of the prominent white male academics. The UKZN hierarchy is controlled by the old boys’ network.

According to her, “If you spoke up, you would be dealt with punitively, post-merger.” She came in from the previous University of Durban Westville as the head of a programme. Male colleagues and subordinates from the former University of Natal resisted her leadership. Although women make strides in terms of heading up committees and driving projects, they continuously have obstacles placed in their path by their male colleagues and subordinates. The patriarchal culture is challenging to work with, women are treated with disrespect

and continually get spoken to in loud and aggressive tones. The male tribe band together irrespective of their role in academia. Many of them support each other as they continue to subjugate women with their mannerisms, practices and etiquette. According to eight of the participants, the boys' network is bold and transparent in their actions.

The responses to the old boys' network confirmed that the network is still prevalent. Participant C had some frightening experiences with men in academia from different perspectives, as she had a negative experience with her male supervisor.

As a traditional Indian man his views about women were perpetuated by socially constructed norms, and due to this he gave me no respect as an equal.

She had difficulty completing her PhD, as she had no support from him.

He would not show up for meetings and would go into his mode of writing research, ignoring me for six months at a time, as he made his personal goals a priority.

Participant J confirmed that women who are seen as an academic threat are not considered for career advancement nor are they respected by the old boys' network. The old boys' network would make a concerted effort to ensure that she (Participant J) does not climb the academic ladder, since they make up most of the decision-making structures, this was easy to apply.

Participant F indicated that men would often say she "doesn't know how to perform certain tasks." Two pertinent milestones were marred by how her male colleagues and subordinates treated her. When she became head of department, academics tried to "sabotage my department" and when she made Associate Professor, her white male colleagues, who were ignorant of her knowledge and experience, mocked her instead of congratulating her. Participant E substantiated that male colleagues are prioritised when allocating research supervision to meet university prescribed hours. "They are assigned Masters and PhD students, where publication from research is increased." She is currently supervising two Honours students and confirmed that male and female academics are not treated equally. Male academics are supported and given more opportunities to progress. When they get home, they have their dinner prepared and the children taken care of, which allows them time to focus on research outputs.

Research outputs play a significant role in terms of progression in academia. The glaring gender disparities influence the number of women who could progress into senior positions. Participant C had an incident where senior male academics would take parts of her research and publish it on their own after she asked for guidance on the research.

It is evident why male academics can attain senior positions faster than women. It is due to increased research outputs, and the support structures that are in place for them. They use every opportunity to make anyone's research their own.

Participant D validates that "academia is male dominated, so it is difficult to enter the upper echelons. The Sciences especially are very male-dominated", while Participant G felt alone and alienated in the academic space. "It is daunting being surrounded by a predominantly male department. There is no support." Participant H stated that there was an innate fear of male academics.

The male academics have unexpressed expectations that the female academics need to provide maternal support by supporting and helping students. Students who are

having personal problems, for example, would be recommended to a female member of academia.

It is evident from the reflections of the participants' narratives that male academics are openly harsh towards them and devalue their roles as academics. Often a male mentor would tear down the female academic's idea and act in an aggressive and intimidating manner resulting in emotional trauma. Perfunctory appointments are the appointment of favoured candidates by decision makers in powerful positions. Academics who align themselves and are in support of the boys' network are awarded opportunities for sabbatical leave, research time, and considered first for promotions. The network has punished women who expect fairness and support from a research perspective. All participants confirmed that the research criterion was the most demanding. Favoured female incumbents are supported and put forward for promotion. The demeanour of these successful and supported women was that of someone who did as they were told, someone who performed tasks without question, and someone who executed duties by sacrificing family and personal time. These appointments achieved success by surreptitiously supporting the old boys' network.

The paradox of female leadership

Feminine leadership values are similar to transformational leadership, which is purely interested in the leader shifting the values, beliefs and needs of his/her followers. Women in leadership specifically attempt to address issues that they believe to be hindering their advancement. Female cultures are seen to be entirely different to male cultures and thus inconsistent with leadership roles. Men exaggerate these differences to hinder the progress of women. Gender socialisation leadership tenets associated with success are often consistent with male personae and gesticulations. Women have an innate tendency to lead with a higher degree of empathy and emotional intelligence (Ramnund, 2019).

Feminist theory substantiates that women should portray additional male-type physiognomies and moderate empathy that facilitates hesitancy and a deficiency of ferociousness. There is no compromising circumstance for women, men begrudge women who portray leadership values of aggression, assertion and self-confidence; however, they demonstrate reverence for women who exhibit reflexive and poignant physiognomies (Welch, 1990). The latter is inconsistent with the attainment of accomplishment.

There was a mixed response to feminised leadership in the study. The positive responses were that women who established and supported feminised leadership values in the institution were supported by their female counterparts. Participant G indicated that her Dean was a woman and that she was "*tough, but fair*". She was described as a good, supportive leader who encouraged and supported women. All the participants at the Edgewood campus confirmed that there was great leadership and a supportive culture due to a nurturing leadership style. Ten of the participants confirmed that female academics in leadership positions demonstrated aggressive male-type leadership characteristics. There was no empathy or support from them. However, if women tried to exemplify feminine leadership values of being empathetic and supportive, they were viewed as deficient.

Women by the very nature of socialisation adopt a more participatory and democratic decision-making approach. Women have much to contribute to in a leadership role, specifically in terms of collaboration, inclusivity practices, ethics and integrity, as well as the ability to harness multiple perspectives. However, when women in leadership positions did not portray

feminine values or a transformational leadership style, they are referred to as “queen bees”, as they adopt masculine leadership traits and sabotage other women’s growth personally and professionally. A significant stumbling block in terms of support and development for Black women in academia is that of the “queen bee” (Ramnund, 2019). “Queen bees” are women in leadership portfolios who do everything within their power to ensure that other women do not develop or get promoted into senior positions. They align themselves with the old boys’ network to safeguard their success and in doing so, eliminate any female competition.

All participants noted that there was a dire need for formalised support systems, particularly for research. Participant I confirmed that female academics in senior positions “*were unhelpful, blocked me and made me pay for my investigations when I did my PhD, although they had the power to assist me by allowing me to use university facilities*”. She confirmed that her male colleagues were well supported by these same women who “*blocked her*”. She strongly verbalised the need for support structures for women in her male-dominated field. Participant K verified that formalised support and mentoring programmes would be highly advantageous. She indicated that

promotions based on gender alone are extremely negative as its impact is far reaching. The queen bee lives at UKZN, there are women in very senior executive positions; these women were part of the team that stiffened the promotions standards. I believe this was done purely to make it arduous for women to progress into senior positions.

Participants confirmed that male academics on decision-making panels have the authority to impact on significant policies and practices. This is historic with the old boys’ network. However, with women in senior positions and taking up spaces on these decision-making panels, they stand with and support the male academics in processes that continue to subjugate women.

Participant L noted,

New people coming into the institution are vulnerable because of poor support throughout the institution. Women have all the career opportunities in the present, but we are not supporting each other.

Meanwhile participant H stated,

People need space to develop but women in leadership are making sure that this does not happen. “Queen bees” are openly territorial, and they refuse to develop people.

Participant M confirmed that there were no mentors in place and that she would have benefitted from a formalised mentoring programme. She also indicated her passion and commitment to be a mentor to younger academics. Participant J confirmed the existence of the queen bee syndrome; this is explicitly displayed by African Black women who are appointed into positions where they do not meet the minimum requirements. They are allowed to obtain their qualification, meeting the minimum criteria for the job, while in their posts. Participant J further confirmed that “*there is an entitlement culture. There is a calculated play for career growth*”. Participant B confirmed that women with their sights on climbing the ladder or developing themselves will “*dismantle anyone else whom they perceive to be a threat*”. They attach themselves to senior male academics and attempt to incapacitate women advancing professionally. By proving allegiance to the male academics and treachery to female academics, these women are sustained in their career advancement by the male academics who hold position and influence. Women adopt male characters to endure and

flourish into higher-ranking positions. Taking on male characteristics is seen as the recipe for success.

According to participant B:

Race plays a sizeable part in departmental dynamics, the gender divide is sensed, human resources did a presentation that there are too many Indian lecturers. This created racial tension that wasn't there before. When a position is advertised, the manager already has someone in mind for the post.

Four of the participants confirmed that human resources played a role in the racial divide, which contributed to the gender divide. This was because African women were recognised as preferred candidates for permanent appointments and promotions.

In contrast, many of these women did not meet the requirements; there was a multi-directed challenge in place. These appointments were deliberate and set the women who were appointed up for failure, as they would not accept assistance and guidance from senior members of faculty for fear that they would sabotage her due to professional jealousy. These women exhibited all of the characteristics of the "queen bee" by not allowing any women in the department to progress and display competition for her role.

Particularly encouraging stances of self-motivation and self-initiated mentoring initiatives as well as valuable experiences of female leadership are also conferred. Participant N confirmed that *"they are thrown into the deep end"* and there are no support structures. She adopts a different manner of dealing with new women in the department. She always creates inclusivity so that women do not feel threatened. Participant N believes that formalised support structures are unnecessary; she proposed that instead experienced academics should be encouraged to provide support and mentorship. Participant D asserts that her direct line manager is very supportive. According to Participant G, there are no formalised support structures; however, all members of the department have a good relationship.

Stress

According to McCallum (2007), black female executives are increasingly facing burnout. This can be linked to the fact that they are promoted prematurely without a structured mentorship plan in place or the lack of a suitable mentor. The stress is attributed to the international trends for women to grow, develop and perform. This, in turn, affects the sometimes, new female executive, who is in an influential portfolio with extraordinary expectations to accomplish amplified tasks. McCallum (2007:1) alleges "many black female executives are prone to burnout as they tend to neglect other equally important aspects of their personal lives to fit the role of the super-achiever where performance is often seen as the only criterion of their self-worth. Furthermore, the high performing female executive often thinks the solution to her problem is simply to work a little harder" and prove her capability to her male counterparts. Research by Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) and Oosthuizen and Berndt (2008) on stress experienced by academics, is consistent with reports of stress between male and female academics not being dissimilar.

However, women define stress indicators differently than their male colleagues. Job dissatisfaction, job insecurity and psychosocial factors are often generic causes of stress in the workplace (Long, 1995). Higher education institutions have to manage and protect their staff from increasing levels of stress to preserve staff well-being, organisational performance

and the intellectual health of a nation (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008:322). In South Africa, the changing institutional cultures may lead to job dissatisfaction due to excessive workloads and the merged institutions placing higher performance output demands as well as the perception of job insecurity (Oosthuizen & Berndt, 2008; Cloete *et al.* [eds], 2004). According to male academics; workload, inadequate salaries and lack of recognition are perceived to provide the most significant stressors whereas women profess job insecurity, isolation, lack of recognition and work politics as stressors.

The changes that higher education has undergone has contributed to the stress experienced by female academics. According to Robbins and Coulter (1999), several sources of workplace stress are identified, these are directly related to the changes that transpired in 2004 (Cloete *et al.*, 2004). The following sources of stress that could be related to the merging of institutions and the changes in institutional culture are fear, excessive rules and regulations, change in the organisation, restructuring, role ambiguity and role overload. This is an adaptation and expansion of the original Cooper and Marshall (1976) model of the sources of stress.

Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) brought to the fore the prevalence of stress in higher education in the South African context. Participant A indicated that stress levels are high due to family-life balance. She has an orthodox and unsupportive husband and has had to deal with the emotional trauma of her parents' divorce as well as the high academic workload. Participant M confirmed that high levels of stress contributed to physical manifestations of illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure and ulcers. According to participant J, levels of stress increased when the university became UKZN. Qualified academics "*left in droves to set up a private practice or to move internationally*". The stress was as a result of several reasons.

There was a huge drive to push Black academics who were appointed into roles without meeting the minimum requirement with no structured mentorship in place. Departments did not function well, and as a result, many lost Health Professional Council of South Africa (HPCSA) registration.

Participant G confirmed that "*trying to juggle everything*" was stressful. Her priority was attending to her child that was born with medical problems. She is also frequently summoned into meetings related to her deficient *research production units* and the timeframes on completion of her PhD. According to Participant B, the role overload leaves one depleted and tired. However, she has had severe physical manifestations of stress; she suffered from ulcers, a lack of circulation and a time where she became nonresponsive at work and was hospitalised in the Intensive Care Unit. The doctors could not find medical justification for her condition and said it could be stress related.

Participant D confirmed that many women were suffering from severe depression as they were not coping with the excessive abuse they have to endure from male academics and their male line managers. Participant I confirmed that the environment was highly stressful and could lead to physical ailments. She confides in her husband. She tries to socialise with close family and friends who help her manage and distract her from her stressful environment. Levels of stress were high for Participant E because there was no support structure; there was no orientation or expectations as an academic, no formal mentor, excessive workload and completion of her PhD. She said she only survived because of her supportive line manager. These female academics have had to find their coping mechanisms to manage stress in order for it not to impact or minimally affect their physical health.

In managing stress in academia, studies indicate that specific programmes assist in educating people on dealing and coping with stressful situations, including bullying by male or female colleagues, which cause severe stress. These interventions include mentoring programmes. They create awareness by the perpetrator as well as the victim. With the management and the tools to deal with challenges, women can move upward into leadership positions. Mentoring programmes should by their fundamental nature, be successful in developing historically marginalised Black women academics in South Africa.

6. CONCLUSION

This article acknowledged an all-inclusive leadership experience disguised as the “old boy’s network”. Other essential leadership practices include the queen bee phenomenon, which acts as one of the most detrimental obstructions to the success and advancement of Black women in academia. The historical and political background seeped in the subjugating of women by race, gender and class offer further complexities for the of Black women working toward professional advancement in the academy. This comprehensive study provides credibility to capricious experiences of Black women in the academy and specifies a South African higher education framework post-2004 in an amalgamated university milieu. The social construction of reality and the intersections of race and gender determine a plausible theoretical framework of the impediments that Black women currently experience.

The researchers believe that women are equally committed to their profession as men, but have restrictions on their time due to a myriad of factors: obstacles inherent in academia and disinterest in a tenure track position because of the strain of balancing home life and academia expectancies; women have greater teaching loads than men and less access to resources essential for research and women’s commitment to teaching and service minimises their time for research (Bingham & Nix, 2010:5).

The implications of this study are far-reaching in the broader transformed South African academy. Black female academics are subject to unique intersecting challenges that are not effortlessly recognised. Policies, practices and processes are gender-biased and the empirical evidence has supported this disturbing verdict. Leadership committed to advancing institutional equity and providing mentorship to Black female academics is lacking and necessitates serious deliberation in the academy. If the South African academy is to maintain its current position internationally, a detailed audit of the critical challenges needs to be prioritised. Black women in academia face a solitary journey on their career trajectory; they are required to establish their networks of support and seek out experienced academics that are willing to provide a mentorship role over a protracted period. Their lived experiences are testimony to their professional, personal and physical challenges. All of which manifest in stress with physical and emotional disorders. In an endeavour to postulate a sociological interpretation of the career trajectories of Black women academics, this study has underscored the significant hindrances to the advancement and progression of Black women in the academy.

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