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"I decided…": Agency in Black women professors

Abstract

Literature predominantly portrays Black women academics as individuals who usually lack a sense of belonging, unable to manage their workload and struggle with career progression in higher education. The oversaturation of this kind of literature can (over time) perpetuate a stereotypical idea that Black women academics are incapable of coping and succeeding in higher education institutions. Therefore, this article aims to explore how Black women professors can take responsibility for their successful academic outcomes. Bandura's agentic theory of the self was used to frame this paper. A qualitative research design, using nine semi-structured interviews was adopted for the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Collectively, the Black women portrayed themselves as non-apologetic for being in the academic space, making time for writing and having a "go-getter" mentality. The findings present a line of thought that can help in challenging the stereotype about Black women academics.

Keywords: *Agency; Black women academics; professors; higher education institutions*

1.   Introduction

The intersectionality of racism and sexism have marked the experiences of many Black[1] women academics in South African higher education institutions (Mokhele, 2013; Naicker, 2013; Divala, 2014; Schulze, 2015; Khunou *et al.,* 2019; Crenshaw, 1994). Abbamonte asserts that

> Intersectionality is a concept often used in critical theories to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, and classism) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another (2018: 108).

Put another way, both race and gender are prime indicators of some Black women's identities. Naturally, for anyone the acknowledgement of one's race and gender is a form of identity; however, what makes the Black women's intersectional is the fact that their gender and racial identities

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1   Although Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2019) refer to people of African ancestry as Black Africans, this paper will refer to people who are of sub-Saharan African ancestry or who are perceived to be "dark-skinned" in relation to other racial groups as Black. This is because the everyday term that the researcher and others within her communal context uses to refer to herself and themselves is Black.

merge to make their experience of suppression different from that of other groups (Crenshaw, 1994) such as Black males or White women because they only have one suppressive and one privileged identity that they occupied. Literature has shown that Black women are marginalised in terms of power, control and influence in university spaces (Baxley, 2012; Obers, 2014) and as a result usually lack a sense of belonging, are unable to manage their workload and struggle with career progression in higher education (Baxley, 2012; Mokhele, 2013; Obers, 2014; Maseti, 2018). For example, Mandleco (2010); Zulu (2013); Jones, Hwang and Bustamante (2015); Subbaye and Vithal (2017) as well as Mahabeer, Nzimande and Shoba (2018) assert that Black women are often given heavy teaching and administrative workloads, are forced to carry out research and teaching activities in hostile environments, and experience feelings of isolation within the academic space which lead some of them to quit in the early stages of their academic careers, before even reaching the professorial level. Mandleco (2010) adds that other Black women academics never reach the professoriate, even if they do continue their careers in institutions of higher education. A Report of the Ministerial Task Team on the Recruitment, Retention and Progression of Black South African Academics shows that the population race and gender profiles of staff still reveal apartheid-era patterns (DHET, 2019). The report indicates that Black academics are in the majority in lower-level posts such as junior lecturer and lecturer, while White academics are in the widely held senior posts such as senior lecturer and professor (DHET, 2019). Male academics are dominant in senior posts and female academics are dominant in junior posts (DHET, 2019). Academic leadership at universities is still dominated by White and male academics (DHET, 2019).

Popular literature illustrates Black women academics as defeated and hampered by the racist and patriarchal framework (Collins, 2001; Zulu, 2013; Dlamini & Adams, 2014; Divala, 2014; Maseti, 2018) and while this literature is valid and necessary, the oversaturation of it can (over time) perpetuate a stereotypical idea that Black women academics are incapable of coping and succeeding in higher education institutions. In contrast with what seems to be mostly non-progress for Black women academics in higher education institutions, Subbaye and Vithal (2017) indicate there has also been some progress made in the inclusion and number of Black women who have become academics and made progress within academia, since the introduction of democracy in 1994. As a result of the South African government instituting initiatives for the improvement of the representation of Black women in higher education (such as developing policies, research grants and mentoring projects), Black women have made some advancement in higher education institutions (Maodzwa-Taruvinga & Divala, 2014; Mzwanga, 2018). For instance, Zulu's (2020) study showcases South African Black women academics who have made it to professorship, and Jones *et al.* (2015) further assert that some Black women academics continue to prevail over workplace adversities.

The article therefore aims to explore how Black women academics can take responsibility for their successful academic outcomes and intends to present a line of thought that can help in challenging the negative perceptions about Black women academics. This article forms part of a contribution towards closing the gap in literature on the academic triumphs and achievements of Black women in higher education institutions. Particularly, the article asks (1) How do Black women academics adapt in higher education institutions? (2) How do Black women academics manage their workloads in higher education institutions? And (3) How do Black women academics make career progress in higher education institutions?

2. Black women in higher education

Academics' professional identities develop through the interaction of an inward and an outward journey (Schulze, 2015). The inward journey necessitates reflection during which the academic makes sense of themselves as an academic (Haamer, Lepp & Reva, 2012). The outward journey occurs when the academic engages with the academic world (Sutherland & Markauskaite 2012). The professional identities develop from the individuals' engagement with relevant communities of practice during which they can develop the knowledge, skills, values and culture of academics (Schulze, 2015). The result of them suffering dual oppression – the oppression of being Black in the racially segregated political system and the oppression from the patriarchal culture (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Mans & Lauwrens, 2013) can also play a role in their professional identity formation. Mabokela (2001) and Lewin (2019), however, contest that Black women are much more likely to experience racism than sexism, or at least are more likely to experience exclusion or marginalisation primarily because of racism rather than sexism. Supporting this argument, Mokhele (2013) asserts that White women were privileged by legal prescriptions during the pre-1994 historical phase, which put them above Black women in the hierarchical ordering of the peoples of South Africa at the time.

Black women in the South African university space endure disparities across the intersectionality of race and gender lines (Maseti, 2018; Ramohai, 2019; Crenshaw, 1994) such as involvement in heavy teaching workloads, administrative work (Zulu, 2013; Jones *et al.,* 2015) and being treated with a lack of respect and given little opportunities to be part of communities that could support them to develop identities as productive academic members such as mentors (Bertrand Jones & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013; Vandeyar, 2010). The consequence of marginalisation is that Black women academics cannot benefit from higher education institutions as much as other races and genders can and have been doing (Ramohai, 2019), especially in terms of belonging, the ability to manage workloads and making career progress.

3. Belonging

Belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion and identity for a member of a certain group or place. It is the basic fundamental drive to form and maintain lasting, positive and significant relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 2017). At the workplace, these relationships can be extended to the organisation and its values (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011) and to work itself. Filstad, Traavik and Gorli (2019) further elaborate that belonging is also influenced by social interactions, materiality, emotions and aesthetics. According to Mokhele (2013) as well as Patton and Harper (2003), studies reveal co-occurring discrimination related to race and gender, including lack of support systems and networks as well as an unwelcoming, insensitive and isolative environment (Watt, 2003). Maseti (2018) indicates that the experiences of discrimination and marginalisation of Black women often lead to their alienating feelings of unbelonging within academia. As a result, Black women can become outsiders from within and do not successfully participate in their institutions (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Ramohai, 2019). Some Black academics also encounter feelings of having lowered beliefs in their own competency and a reduced sense of belonging (Ponjuan, Conley & Trower, 2011) because of not being supported in higher education institutions (Mokhele, 2013). For instance, in her study Maseti (2018) found that the burden of constantly needing to prove Black women's worth and intellectual capability became an artificial barrier to their belonging in academic spaces. Additionally, in her study, Mokhele

(2013) found that being Black and new in a higher education institution created suspicion, not only around her as a person but also around her qualifications and competence. Perumal (2003) and Portnoi (2015) have described South African universities as conservative, male-dominated environments in which women, particularly Black women, are socialised into silence. The stereotypes that communities use to construct gender roles (Mollaeva, 2017) make it difficult for women to survive in male-oriented spaces that reinforce the constructed roles. Sadly, scholars have found that institutional cultures are still predominantly masculine (Tsikata, 2007; Kele & Pietersen, 2015) and, in terms of staff component, are still White.

These above findings illustrate clearly how racial and sexist discrimination works in practice to conspire against the belonging of Black women academics in the South African higher education institutions. Jones *et al.* (2015) however identify external supports that especially African American women sometimes utilise that could help them in feeling more a part of their institutions and departments. Such external supports can include having supportive leadership and formal or informal mentors who could provide helpful resources communication, information and introduction to professional associations etc.

This paper is important as it highlights and expands on the necessity of Black women academics knowing how to adapt and belong in higher education institutions amid the racist and sexist oppression that may exist within these spaces.

4. Workload management

Universities are confronted with the challenge of increased workloads and a growing number of faculties and as a result have developed workload allocation models to improve the management of workloads (Botha & Swanepoel, 2015). The performance agreement of academic staff is based on the strategic objectives of the faculty and entails four categories of critical performance indicators: (1) teaching and learning; (2) administration and management; (3) research and postgraduate supervision; and (4) community engagement and services to the scholarly community (Botha & Swanepoel, 2015).

Barrett and Barrett (2008) identified three main approaches in the allocation of academic workloads at universities based on their level of complexity, namely informal, partial and comprehensive approaches. The informal approach is one where the head of a department typically divides work between staff, based on their competencies and areas of specialisation, and upon consultation with them. Partial approaches are more complex, but exclude some academic tasks, such as research while comprehensive approaches are even more complex, using weightings and covering most academic tasks and also weightings for administration work.

Misra *et al.* (2021) postulate that faculty workload inequities have important consequences for faculty diversity and inclusion. On average, women faculty spend more time engaging in service, teaching and mentoring, while men, on average, spend more time on research, with Black women facing particularly high workload burdens. Research was felt by many to be the element that differentiated loads and was the area that suffered most when loads rose (Barrett & Barrett, 2008). Lewin (2019) postulates that gender is implicated in the way institutions are structured and how they operate. For example, in their study Misra *et al.* (2021) found that White women perceive that their departments have less equitable workloads and are less committed to workload equity than white men. Women of colour perceive that their departments are less likely to credit their important work through departmental reward

systems compared to white men. In a study conducted by Botha and Swanepoel (2015) it was indicated that although there were no statistically significant differences in the total working hours per week of academics holding different positions, there were statistically significant differences in terms of time spent on the various academic activities. Male academics appeared to spend more time on research and postgraduate supervision while female staff members spent more time on administration and management. With women still expected to fulfil their domestic responsibilities, an increase in workload disadvantages them in terms of pursuing their scholarly work (Sader, 2014). Heavy teaching workloads make it difficult for South African and Black women academics to thrive in doing research and they convey being "tired" or "exhausted" (Portnoi, 2015; Lewin, 2019). Several women academics also indicate how their families question their choice of profession due to the workload and time involved (Portnoi, 2015). Additionally, women academic staff report competing demands of work and family obligations as a key push factor

However, there are a few academics who believe the workload is manageable (Portnoi, 2015). Research also shows that negotiating workloads and tasks can allow academics to develop and grow towards their career aspirations (Lewin, 2019). This requires a focus on developing new ways of managing workloads, along with attempts to foster different institutional cultures (Lewin, 2019). This article will therefore explore the strategies that South African Black women academics use to manage their workloads.

5.   Career progression

South African universities have set out promotion criteria (although not uniform) which blends four elements – research; teaching and supervision; community-orientated activity (Academy of Science of South Africa, 2018). Excellence on these elements is supposed to yield promotion and progression. Academic promotion can however be a mechanism that creates or reflects inequalities, with certain groups rising to the top more readily than others (Sadiq *et al.,* 2019).

A critique of promotion criteria often focuses on the undue weight given to research achievement (often held to advantage men) rather than teaching, perhaps because research output can be more easily measured (Sadiq *et al.,* 2019).

Building a research profile is arguably the most essential element for achieving success as an academic in a higher education environment, not only for the purpose of intellectual prestige, but also for reasons of economic survival (Mokhele, 2013). However, Black women still face numerous challenges pertaining to upward mobility, research success and overcoming gender-based epistemological stereotypes (Ramohai, 2019; Joubert & Guenther, 2017). Research also shows that it seems childbearing and rearing may lead to interrupted career paths that can affect women's self-confidence (Obers, 2014). Additionally, research indicates that Black women in academia do not succeed as expected (Herman, 2011) – with success in this regard being measured by the ability to conduct research, engage in quality teaching and learning, and involvement in engaged scholarship (DHET, 2013; HESA, 2014; Ramohai, 2019). A large-scale survey conducted by Blake and La Valle (2000) confirmed the observation that women's research careers are less developed than those of men. They also found that a woman's professional profile is less likely to include a high publication record or involve a set of high-profile academic activities, and sometimes they are also less likely to be holding a PhD (Mokhele, 2013). Women are also said to tend to gravitate towards teaching, thereby inhibiting their career advancement and the concomitant growth of professional

self-esteem (Obers, 2014). Women, and Black women in particular, are significantly under-represented in the professoriate (Lewin, 2019). A lack of women role models in the higher education institutions, especially Black women, might be a constraining factor for many women as it can limit aspirations (Lewin, 2019).

Some women, however, have managed to succeed despite the gendered and racist higher education space, and a few Black women have succeeded in establishing a research career in South Africa (Mokhele, 2013). Raw courage seems to have played a pivotal role for these women academics. Instead of feeling pity for themselves because of the situation they found themselves in, these Black women academics were very clear about what they wanted to achieve (Mokhele, 2013) and were therefore agents of their own academic careers.

6. The agentic theory of the self

As noted in the previous section, life for a Black person in South Africa can be hard, and disappointments and challenges are to be expected. The agentic theory of the self (Bandura, 2008) framework may assist in explaining how Black women academics navigate the trials of the workplace more effectively and become empowered despite the challenges.

Human agency is the ability "to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (Bandura, 2008:16). "Agency embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place" (Bandura, 2001:2).

Human agency is exercised through three different modes: personal, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2001:13). *Personal* agency is exercised individually, and it is the process by which an individual affects what they can control directly. In some cases, however, direct influence is not possible. The exercise of agency through proxy is the indirect influence that a person can exert on circumstances beyond their immediate control, by acting through others. In many spheres of functioning, people may not have direct control over conditions that affect their lives. They then can exercise *proxy* agency by influencing others who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire. *Collective* agency is an interdependence of human functioning that is enacted when people who share common beliefs act as a group to produce effects by collective action.

This paper intends on exploring the adaption, management of workloads and career progression of Black women academics in higher education institutions. The core features of agency enable people to take responsibility for their self-development, adaptation and self-renewal in changing times (Bandura, 2001). Agency embraces the practice of personal influence in self-regulation capabilities, belief systems and endowments (Bandura, 2001). This study is useful as Black women professors' voices will come through and therefore provide other aspiring Black women professors with assistance in navigating the process towards the promotion to professorship.

There are four core components of human agency that are described by Bandura (2001), which are: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflection.

Intentionality deals with the forming of intentions that "include action plans and strategies for realizing them" (Bandura, 2001:6). Individuals can choose to behave accommodatively or, through the exercise of self-influence, to behave otherwise. An intention is a representation of a future course of action to be performed. It is not simply an expectation or prediction of

future actions but a proactive commitment to bringing them about. Intentions centre on plans of action, and future-directed plans are rarely specified in full detail at the outset.

Forethought involves "the temporal extension of agency" (Bandura, 2001:7) by setting goals and anticipating future events. Forethought includes more than future-directed plans. People set goals for themselves and foresee likely outcomes of prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts anticipatorily. When projected over a long-term course on matters of value, a forethoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence and meaning to one's life. (Bandura, 2001:7).

Self-reactiveness is the processes of self-management and self-motivation. It is the conversion of plans into fruitful courses of action that entail the self-management of thought processes; motivation to continue with chosen courses in the face of difficulties, delays and uncertainties; and emotional states that can challenge self-regulatory efforts (Bandura, 2001). In addition to being a planner and fore thinker, an agent must be a motivator and self-regulator as well (Bandura, 1986; 1991). Agency thus encompasses the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution.

Self-reflection refers to the self-examining nature of human agents. Through self-awareness, they reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, the meaning of their pursuits, and… (if needed) change existing life course patterns (Bandura, 2001). Besides being agents of action, people can also be self-examiners of their own functioning. The cognitive capability to reflect upon oneself is another distinctly core human feature of agency. Through reflective self-consciousness, individuals assess their motivation, principles, and the meaning of their life pursuits. Efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency because people need to believe that they can produce desired outcomes otherwise they have little incentive to act or persevere as they encounter difficulties.

7.   Research methods and design

The aim of this article was to explore how Black women academics can take responsibility for their adaptation, managing their workload and making career progression in their academic endeavours. A qualitative research design was selected to collect and analyse the data. A qualitative approach was fitting as it allowed for a rich understanding of Black women professors, with a specific focus on their agency.

7.1 Setting and study participants

Nine Black women professors from two public South African universities participated in the study. One university was historically a White institution while the other was a recently merged university. These institutions were selected because they are among the top research-producing universities in South Africa, while also making notable efforts to be equitable in terms of race, compared to their counterparts. The participants were from several faculties including health sciences, humanities and science. A limitation was that there were faculties that were not represented in the sample and as a result the scope of Black women academics' agentic identity was limited. The interviews were conducted in English and IsiZulu. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with Black women professors. Semi-structured interviews facilitated the participants' thinking about their own constructions, meanings and understandings (Burr, 2003) of being a Black woman in the higher education space. This type of interviewing was appropriate for this study because it allowed reflection and in-depth discussions to be achieved through probing the participants to expand on their responses

while keeping some structure in the interview (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The interviews revealed the manner in which Black women professors talked about how they were able to adapt and triumph as academics in South African universities. The interviews yielded thick data (based on depth and contextual particularity), which was made possible by the participants doing most of the talking during the interviews (Silverman, 2013).

7.2 Data collection

Permission from gatekeepers at both the universities was granted to recruit prospective participants. After ethical clearance was granted by the large public university, suitable participants were identified. Specifically, the researcher searched (e.g., by executive structure/college/faculty/discipline) through the two institutions' websites systematically and identified Black women professors. The researcher thereafter invited ten suitable potential participants from each university using an initial email invitation. Attached to this email was an information sheet that provided further details on the purpose and nature of the study. Nine participants responded to the email invitation and participated in the study. The semi-structured interviews took between 45 and 90 minutes. The researcher engrossed herself in the audio-recorded data, transcribed the interviews and analysed the data.

7.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Protocol reference number: HSS/2053/017M). Prior to commencement of the interviews, the researcher ensured informed consent of the participants. Informed consent implies that the participants are supplied with adequate and clear knowledge about the study so that they can make an educated choice about involving themselves in it or not (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001; Gray, 2014). The participants were also given an information sheet that provided ethical information about their rights as participants, such as their right to confidentiality, volunteering and that they could discontinue at any stage if they felt uncomfortable during the research process. Other ethics that guided this research were ensuring that no harm was caused to the participants in the study and that the sampling, data collection and analysis processes were fair and equitable.

7.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews. Braun and Clarke's (2012) six steps of thematic analysis were appropriate to use as these steps sought to describe the data in rich detail by identifying, analysing, and reporting the patterns emergent in the data. The researcher familiarised herself with the interviews by reading the transcripts and listening to the audio-recorded data. The codes (features that appeared interesting and meaningful) were generated thereafter. The common key codes were extracted from all five interviews. The overarching themes were identified from the common codes. The three themes identified were then refined and defined. Finally, the researcher interpreted the extracts that related to each of the themes from the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings and discussion will be presented from the emergent themes.

8. Findings and discussion

Bandura's human agency is the human "capability to exercise control over one's own thought processes, motivation, and action is a distinctively human characteristic" (1989: 1175). This

section will illustrate how the participants (using pseudonyms) constructed themselves as taking responsibility for their adaptation, managing their workload, and making career progression in their academic endeavours. Particularly, this article asked (1) how did Black women academics adapt in higher education institutions? (2) How did Black women academics manage their workloads in higher education institutions? And (3) How did Black women academics make career progress in higher education institutions? The emerging themes were "no apologies", "making time to read and write" and "go-getter mentality".

8.1 Theme 1: No apologies

Mokhele (2013) indicates that studies reveal co-occurring discrimination related to intersection of race and gender, including lack of support systems and networks (Patton & Harper, 2003; Crenshaw, 1994) as well as an unwelcoming, insensitive and isolative academic environment (Watt, 2003). The discrimination, according to Lloyd-Jones (2009) and Ramohai (2019), can often lead Black women academics to become outsiders from within and not participate successfully in their institutions. The interactions with the participants, however, suggested that despite being excluded by Whites, Indians and males within their workplace, they were mentally tough and outspoken. Most of the participants of this study portrayed themselves as individuals who felt that they belonged and they did not apologise for being in the academic space as Black women.

For example, Gabi indicates that she believed that she also belonged in the university space and was therefore able to adjust well, "I never struggled to adjust to the [university] space because I believe that the space belongs to all of us, and I must make it with what I have".

Sbahle shows that she was vocal in the different academic spaces and as a result her voice was eventually heard and accepted within the academia, "I'm very outspoken so they know exactly how I think, and they have accepted that – like you know what – she does have something to contribute".

Thobile highlights that having a thick skin to take various forms of criticism well was what helped her in the academic space. She also indicates that being direct and not hiding anything while still being respectful as a leader also played a role. "I have a thick skin. And I think in terms of my leadership, what you see is what you get. Whilst I do that, respect is always at the forefront in everything that I do".

Bandura (2008) argues that agency involves intentionally influencing one's functioning and life circumstances. The findings showed that the participants exercised personal agency where they directly controlled their academic life outcomes by being vocal, feeling confident and self-regulating within the academic space. The participants showed themselves to be proactive in committing to their actions in order to adjust well in higher education. Literature indicates that some Black academics also encounter feelings of having lowered beliefs in their own competency and a reduced sense of belonging (Ponjuan, Conley & Trower, 2011), because of not being supported in higher education institutions (Mokhele, 2013). The findings suggested that while the participants did experience discrimination and being overlooked and unsupported, as suggested in literature, they were however able to take responsibility for their cognitive well-being and maintained their own sense of direction, coherence, and meaning in their academic life. This finding concurred with Bandura (2001) when he suggested that through self-guidance, people can envision futures and then act on the present to evaluate

and adjust alternate courses of action to obtain valued results and supersede environmental impacts. The findings implied that it is possible for Black women to adapt successfully in the academic space despite the challenges that they might encounter. Another implication of the findings was that higher education institutions need to be more intentional in ensuring that Black women are and feel supported and included in order to adapt well within the different academic spaces. It is also recommended that more research focus is given to Black women and their adaptability in higher education institutions.

8.2 Theme 2: Making time to read and write

Research shows that plenty of Black women academics' involvement in heavy teaching and supervision workloads, administrative work, and household responsibilities revolves around the issue of the time that is consumed by these activities, which results in a lack of time for research (Zulu, 2013; Jones *et al.,* 2015) which is paramount for an academic's career success. Most of the participants in this study indicated that they navigated the academic space by sacrificing attending to their household duties and family time in order to read and write for publications and therefore be able to compete with their academic peers. For instance, Gabi stated:

> I wake up at 4 and I sit and I read, and I read and I read. When the students are gone or you are done with the teaching, you now need to read and write. You can do that until 12 midnight because you need the uninterrupted time. It's difficult to read and write in the course of teaching.

Portnoi (2015) and Lewin (2019) argue that having high teaching workloads can make it difficult for South African and Black women academics to thrive in doing research and they relayed being "tired" or "exhausted". Gabi (and some of the other participants) indicated that they navigated through their workloads by sacrificing a lot of their (personal) time towards their research endeavours. This finding corresponded with Bandura's intentionality component of the agentic theory of the self which argues that intentional individuals (through self-influence) centre themselves around plans of action and strategies for bringing them about (Bandura, 2001). In the above quote, Gabi mentioned how she had to work outside of normal working hours in order to accommodate reading and writing without interruptions by teaching and student consultation. Jones *et al.* (2015) also talk about how Black American women professors stressed the importance of excellent time management and prioritising their work commitments in the midst of juggling multiple obligations such as teaching, publishing and supervising (Jones *et al.,* 2015).

While discussing how she managed her research work, Sbahle indicated:

> When I came back to take the post, my family did not come with me, which was hard… but… I really did not have family responsibility, so I was able to do the work during the day in the home. Nobody is waiting for me for supper or anything then I could flat-out work all the time and I believe that's why I was able to submit my thesis within three years…. So, it was important for me to accept that… that this is what I've decided to do.

Thobile also mentioned:

> I personally have three people who are helping me in different spaces. Someone helping me at home; it helps so that you as a woman who is in the academia can have enough time to do your work and be able to compete with your peers.

The above extracts suggested how gender was implicated in the way that institutions were structured and how they operated. For example, their job structures, expectations and workloads were gendered (Lewin, 2019). As previously mentioned, male academics appeared to spend more time on research and postgraduate supervision while female staff members spent more time on administration and management (Botha & Swanepoel, 2015). Research is felt by many to be the element that differentiates loads and was the area that suffered most when loads rose (Barrett & Barrett, 2008). With women still expected to fulfil their domestic responsibilities, an increase in workload disadvantaged them in terms of pursuing their scholarly work (Sader, 2014). Some of the women in this study (for example as illustrated in the quotes above), however, indicated how they decided to step away from household and family responsibilities for a while in order to focus on their research work, and that eventually led to attainment of their PhD and/or professorship. These findings are congruent with Bandura (2001) who asserted that as agentic individuals advanced in their life course they continued to plan ahead, rearranged their priorities, and structured their lives accordingly. Furthermore, other participants indicated that they decided to get assistance with managing their household and family duties so that they could have time to write for publications, and they were therefore able to compete with their academic peers. By taking these decisions in order to make time for their research endeavours, the participants were showing themselves to have Bandura's (2001) forethought component as they motivated themselves and guided their actions in anticipation of future events (for example attaining their doctorate or professorship). People set goals for themselves and foresee likely outcomes of prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts anticipatorily (Bandura, 2001).

By sacrificing their personal, household and family time, the participants were also showing themselves to be self-managing and self-regulating in order to manage their workloads and be able to compete with their academic peers successfully. Bandura (2001) also emphasises the processes of self-management and self-motivation under the component of self-reactiveness. Agency encompasses the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution (Bandura, 2001). Actions (such as deciding to get assistance in running the home) gave rise to self-reactive influence through performance comparison with personal goals and standards. Goals, such as competing with peers, motivated these individuals as they started employing self-evaluative engagement in activities. Similar to the participants, Bandura (2001) claims that agentic individuals participate in actions that give them self-satisfaction and a sense of pride and self-worth, and they refrain from behaving in ways that inflict self-dissatisfaction, self-devaluation, and self-criticism.

These findings imply that the ability to negotiate workloads and tasks can allow academics to develop and grow towards their career aspirations (Lewin, 2019). The findings also have implications for higher education to help create more space and time for women academics to be more productive in their research, especially since the participants indicated that they were affected by space and time constraints. Furthermore, these outcomes imply the importance of further developing the agentic components (such as forethought and self-reactiveness) in young, Black and women academics through mentorship, coaching, seminars and workshops.

This study suggests that workload transparency and clarity as well as consistent approaches to assigning classes, advising and service, can reduce women's perceptions of inequitable and unfair workloads. This research suggests that departments can identify and put in place a number of key practices around workload that will improve gendered and racialised perceptions of workload.

8.3 Theme 3: Go-getter mentality

As mentioned before, excellence on the elements of research, teaching and supervision as well as community service yields promotion and progression for South African academics (Academy of Science of South Africa, 2018). Therefore, building a research profile is arguably the most essential element for achieving success as an academic in a higher education environment, not only for the purpose of intellectual prestige, but also for reasons of economic survival (Mokhele, 2013).

Throughout the interviews, the participants portrayed themselves as individuals who, despite many challenges, went to great lengths to obtain the resources that eventually led them to succeed to professorship. Bandura's (2001) intentionality component came out strongly when the participants were talking about their career progression. The participants seemed to show a proactive commitment to bringing out their visions to action.

For example, in the quote below, Mercy shows how she applied for funding for several years before she succeeded in securing it, and once she obtained it, she used her research to publish and build her research portfolio, which then led to her becoming a full professor.

> I got NRF funding for three years, this was post doc. I was able to travel, I was able to research. I built my research portfolio and also obviously my teaching portfolio. That is how I climbed. You really have to work hard.

The following quote shows how Thobile displayed courage by applying and succeeding k a management post when she was the youngest in the department. This gave her skills, expertise and experience that played a role in her progression in the academic space.

> There was an advert sent around for the head and nobody wanted to apply because people were fighting. You know what, I applied. At that time as I am applying, I am the youngest in the entire team in the three campuses. So, I became the first head of department in the merged institution.

In the quote below, Mbalenhle talks about how she took the initiative of sourcing her own PhD supervisors and mentors abroad and was not discouraged to leave academia because of not being supported in her own institution. She eventually became a professor.

> For my PhD I had to look for mentors outside of South Africa, in America and in Europe, because people here were not supportive. These supervisors guided me, critiqued my work and supported me…. I've got like 60 publications… and I became a professor.

Literature indicates that as a result of the oppression that a lot of Black women encounter in academia, they still face numerous challenges pertaining to upward mobility and research success (Joubert & Guenther, 2017; Ramohai, 2019). Specifically, Mokhele (2013) found that a woman's professional profile was less likely to include a high publication record or involve a set of high-profile academic activities, and sometimes they were also less likely to hold a PhD. From the quotes above, however, it was evident that some Black women academics were able to successfully progress in higher education institutions through their decisiveness to work hard, have courage and be innovative. Bandura's (2001) forethought seems to be in line with the findings from the participants who set goals for themselves and anticipated future events. These findings were also in line with Mokhele's (2013) study that suggested that raw courage seemed to play a pivotal role for some women academics. Instead of feeling pity for themselves in the situation that they found themselves in, some

Black women academics were clear about what they wanted to achieve (Mokhele, 2013). The findings suggested that most of the participants rejected succumbing to the victim mentally amid the challenges and chose to empower themselves. These findings were congruent with Bandura's (2001) *intentionality* component of the agency theory which deals with the proactive commitment to bring future expectations about. For example, in the extracts above, the participants illustrated themselves to be "go-getters" and intentional about making strides in their academic endeavours. Additionally, the participants also set goals, self-managed and self-motivated while anticipating future events amid challenges.

The findings implied that while there were various trials experienced by Black women in higher education, intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflection were among the resources that could enable successful academic practices and productivity. Perhaps, the provision of humanistic self-development-oriented psychotherapy amongst Black and women academics would be useful for their career progression. It was also implied that their supervisors had to make substantial efforts (such as approving of and providing their employees with opportunities) to contribute to their promotions.

9. Conclusion

Collectively, the findings from the paper could be linked to Bandura's theory as the participants showed themselves to be examples of human agency as they were able to adapt (where they talked about being non-apologetic about being in the academic space), self-renew (where they discussed being proactive in making time for their academic endeavours) and self-develop (where they portrayed their go-getter mentality) in institutions of higher education. It is important to highlight that the social environment of the individual can also play a role in how they interpret reality, and in their attitudes, beliefs and ideas. Specifically, what people and what support systems are present (or absent) in an academic's life can influence how they adapt, manage their workloads and progress in their careers.

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