Exploring the interplay between gender, social context and career: a study of professional women in Sri Lanka

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Exploring the interplay between gender, social context and career: a study of professional women in Sri Lanka

By

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Abstract

This PhD takes a social constructionist approach (see Burr, 2003) to explore how professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers. By explaining career through the recursive relationship between social context and individual agency, this study adds new insights into existing understandings of women’s careers which are dominated by psychological models of women’s development over their lifespans (see Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005; O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Pringle and Dixon, 2003). Most importantly this study which addresses women’s experiences in Sri Lanka fulfils a significant gap in the extant literature which has paid only little attention to careers in South Asian nations.

This study is based on qualitative interviews (see King, 2004) conducted with 24 professional Sri Lankan women: eight in early career, eight in mid-career and eight in late career (see O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). All respondents aspired to reach the highest possible level in their organisations’ hierarchies and therefore continuously engaged with work organisations, home and family and wider contextual structures in Sri Lanka in pursuit of achieving their career goals, contributing towards maintaining and/or transforming these social structures in the process. Based on these findings I developed a theoretical framework to understand women’s careers in a dynamic and contextually significant manner. This framework highlights eight different strategies women use to develop their careers which has four possible social outcomes. In illuminating specifically what women do to advance their careers within their social contexts and with what implications this framework makes a significant contribution to the careers literature which gives only little attention to individuals’ career strategies. Moreover by appreciating both social context and individual agency as explanations of women’s careers this model refrains from taking an overly
deterministic (see McRae, 2003; Crompton, 2011) or voluntaristic (see Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005; O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005) stance to conceptualising women’s career development.

Second, I outline a South Asian model of women’s career development highlighting family, moral notions, religious philosophies and wider belief systems such as astrology and horoscopes as central constituents of women’s careers. I highlight how these understandings could be used to identify blind spots in existing literature and further develop prevailing ideas of women’s careers in the West. Specifically I argue that traditional notions do not altogether disappear as societies develop (see Gerth and Mills, 1991), but rather individuals use these notions to walk towards modernity. Finally I conclude the thesis by outlining how scholars could develop my work further, calling upon authors to bring moral character, traditional notions and enchantment back to the careers field.

**Key words:** Gender, Career development, Social constructionism, Sri Lanka.
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Publications and conference presentations arising from this research

Publications

Published conference proceedings:


**Invited book chapters**


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Chapter 1: Introduction

Increasing numbers of women around the world are pursuing higher education and seeking high level employment (see Crompton, 2006). However scholars argue that highly skilled women remain disadvantaged in their careers, highlighting their under-representation in senior positions (see Burke and Nelson, 2002; Powell, 1999; Tharenou, 1999; Marlow et al., 1995). For instance, in the year 2007, women in the UK comprised only 3.6 per cent of executive directors in the FTSE 100 companies and only 60 FTSE 100 companies had at least one woman in their executive boards (see Sealy, Singh and Vinnicombe, 2007). An array of studies explain women’s limited career advancement in terms of unequal domestic divisions of labour (see Crompton et al., 2005), childbirth and childrearing (see McRae, 2003), gendered workplaces (see Bolton and Muzio, 2007) and implementation gaps in work-life policies within organisations (see Tomlinson, 2004). However, little is known about women’s careers in less economically developed non-western nations: particularly South Asian nations.

Women are now entering higher education and employment in countries such as India (see Phadke, 2007). However they are significantly under-represented in senior positions as women in the West (see Jain and Mukherji, 2010). This becomes extremely important to investigate further given that scholars describe South Asian societies as largely patriarchal (see Lynch, 1999), where women are supposed to place their roles as wife, mother, daughter and daughter-in-law above all other roles (see Rana et al., 1998). Research into work organisations in India have found gender to be an even more salient issue than it is in the West, highlighting masculine ideas of leadership (see Gupta et al., 1998; Jain and Mukherji, 2010), a general lack of family-friendly policies (see Poster and Prasad, 2005) and a view that women’s presence in organisations is still somewhat exceptional – or at least outside the
norm. Moreover, a few notable studies suggest that perceived moral dangers for women in society contribute towards women’s under-representation in management in India (see Budhwar et al., 2005). All this evidence highlights that women’s careers in South Asia are very different to women’s careers in the West that we are familiar with. However, our understandings of how women in these countries develop their careers within their organisational, familial and wider socio cultural contexts are limited. Thus I hope to contribute valuable insights into this under researched area through my study of professional women in Sri Lanka. Here I define professionals as individuals who hold transferable and internationally recognised cultural assets which could be identified in credentials as result of long periods of time in education and training (see Savage et al., 1992).

Sri Lanka is a predominantly Buddhist country with a population of about 20 million people. Women’s careers in Sri Lanka become particularly interesting to study since Sri Lanka is an extremely religious, patriarchal society which is on the brink of modernity. For instance, although Sri Lankan’s place a high value on pregnancy and childbirth, moral behaviour for women (see Wijayatilake, 2001), intergenerational caring obligations (see Perera, 1991), extended family relations (see Niles, 1998) and Buddhism, they also place significant emphasis on higher education and employment for women, English language and western style organisational practices. The emphasis on western style organisational methods is reflected in the country’s emerging modern private sector. However, the problem is that these ‘western’ organisational cultures appear to be inconsistent with the country’s prevailing values and traditions: in particular norms of good behaviour for women in Sri Lankan society.
Significantly, Sri Lanka distinguishes itself from other South Asian countries in terms of high literacy rates and privileged social statuses of women in the country. For instance 92.8% of males and 90% of females were identified as literate in the year 2009 Labour Force Survey. These figures are indeed extremely high in comparison to the literacy rates of Sri Lanka’s closest neighbour, India, which are 75.3% for men and 53.7% for women (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner India, 2001). In fact literacy rates in Sri Lanka are close to the literacy rate of UK which is 99% (ONS, 2001), and there is no significant gender disparity in the country’s literacy rates as in India. Scholars have argued that ‘Sri Lanka has a cultural heritage of relative gender equality in terms of later marriages, bilateral descent, daughter’s value in the parental home, continued kin support following marriage and widespread access to education for women’ (Malhotra and Tsui, 1999; 221). This is in contrast to women in many parts of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh who experience subordination by husbands’ family (see Metthananda, 1990). Privileged social conditions and widespread access to education seem to have led to women in Sri Lanka to comprise 63.2% of the total number of professionals in the country (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). However, they account for only 20% of all senior officials and managers (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). Given that women in Sri Lanka form the majority of professionals in the labour market, it is striking that they are so badly under-represented in senior managerial positions.

In this thesis I focus on how professional women in Sri Lanka enact their careers within their work organisations, home and family, and the wider Sri Lankan context. Specifically I concentrate on the actions women take in their careers in the light of constraints and opportunities they perceive to emanate from these social contexts (see Evetts, 2000), and consider how these actions impact back on the contexts women are situated within. Implicit
here is the assumption that people are part of their social contexts and through their actions they contribute to the constraints and opportunities they encounter (see Weick, 1995). The broad theoretical approach I adopt in my study could be described as social constructionism (see Young and Collin, 2004). This position highlights an iterative relationship between individuals and their social contexts and emphasises that individuals’ meaning making is socially and culturally situated (see Burr, 1995; 2003). By explaining women’s career development through the recursive relationship between social context and individual agency, my study adds new insights into existing understandings of women’s career development which are based on mainly psychological models of women’s development over their lifespans (see Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005; O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Pringle and Dixon, 2003). Moreover my study which addresses women’s experiences in Sri Lanka contributes significantly to the careers literature as well as other literatures such as the gender and management literature and the work-life balance literature which can be described as ethnocentric, focusing mainly on individuals in the West.

In sum the broad aims of this research study are:

1. To contribute original empirical data to a previously under researched area
2. To develop a theoretical understanding of women’s career development by looking at the complex relationship between context and action, and appreciating both choice and constraint in women’s careers.

1.1 Overview of the thesis

My study is based on qualitative in-depth interviews (see King, 2004) conducted with 24 women: eight in early career, eight in mid-career and eight in late career (see O’Neil and
Respondents belonged to a wide range of professions which included medicine, management, finance, law, academia, and engineering. Twelve of these women were working for private sector organisations in Sri Lanka while twelve were working for the public sector. All respondents were qualified to graduate level or above and experienced considerable social class privilege. Twenty women were married and had children. In three-four hour interviews the women unfolded their career stories in their own words. I note recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim.

Turning to the structure of the thesis, the literatures relevant to this study are reviewed in chapters 2-6. I first review the literature on women’s careers in the West in chapters 2, 3 & 4. I draw on the careers literature to address women’s career development, the gender and management literature to explore women’s experiences at work, and the work-life balance literature to investigate women’s home-work dynamics. I then review the literature on women’s careers in South Asia in chapter 5, which is followed by a review of the Sri Lankan context (the destination of this research study) in chapter 6. The review of literatures is followed by a bridging section where I emphasise the gaps, tensions and problems underlying the literatures reviewed in relation to understanding women’s careers; particularly South Asian women’s careers, thereby identifying the key issues and research questions I address in this thesis.

Chapter 7 focuses on the epistemological position used to understand women’s accounts of their careers in this thesis: social constructionism. Chapter 8 addresses the research design and methodology of this study. Here I first explain the importance of a qualitative approach to understand women’s career development and thereafter detail the processes of recruiting participants, data collection and analysis.
Chapters 9 - 12 present the research findings. In chapter 9 I examine women’s aspirations for life and career while considering how women go about achieving these aspirations in the following chapters. I investigate how women engage with the wider contextual structures of Sri Lanka which they perceive impact on their careers in chapter 10, while examining how women enact their careers within their organisational and home contexts in chapters 11 and 12.

I discuss the empirical findings of the study in chapter 13 and highlight the contribution these findings make to existing understandings of women’s careers. Finally I conclude the thesis by outlining directions for future research.
Chapter 2:  Review of the Literature

In chapters 2-6, I will be reviewing three literatures which are relevant to my study of professional women’s careers in Sri Lanka. I will first review the literature on women’s careers in the West in chapters 2-4 and thereafter review studies on women’s careers in South Asia in chapter 5, which I took as a proxy of Sri Lanka since there was very little empirical work on the Sri Lankan context. And finally I will give a preview into the Sri Lankan context: the setting of this research study in chapter 6. This review of literatures is followed by a bridging section at the end of chapter 6 where I emphasise the gaps, tensions and problems underlying the literatures reviewed in relation to understanding women’s careers: in particular South Asian women’s careers, and highlight the key areas I address in my empirical study.

2.1  Women’s careers in the West

In the 20th century women in the West fought for the right to work and the right to vote. However equal opportunity laws and changes in social attitudes have created a new scenario for western women today. A few scholars argue that women’s choices are unlimited in contemporary western societies (see Hakim, 2000). However the majority of scholars remain sceptical of the extent to which individual agency has altogether replaced structural constraints of all kinds (see McRae, 2003; Crompton, 2006). I take a middle-line approach to this big divide in opinion. I emphasise that it is important to recognise both choice and constraint in women’s careers, in particular how women make choices about their careers in the light of both constraints and opportunities within their social contexts. From this perspective, I will commence this review with the literature on women’s career development. This literature is dominated by psychological models of women’s development over their lifespans (see O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005). I will review these
models, and then explain why I do not go down this route to explore women’s careers in Sri Lanka. Thereafter, I will introduce my preferred approach to studying women’s careers: by looking at how individuals perceive and engage with their social contexts. A few scholars have used this approach to investigate careers (see Duberley et al., 2006; Richardson, 2009; Al-Ariss, 2010; Evetts, 2000) and I will review each of these studies in turn. After explaining my preferred approach to exploring women’s careers, I will review the literature on women’s experiences in work organisations, focusing on how women enact their careers within largely gendered organisations (see Lewis and Simpson, 2010). Thereafter I will move on to women’s home-work dynamics highlighting how professional women’s career development in the UK and other western countries are impacted by domestic labour (see Crompton et al., 2005), childcare (see McRae, 2003; Walters, 2005), and organisational constraints such as implementation gaps in work-life policies (see Gambles et al., 2006).

### 2.2 Women’s career development

Career development has been defined as a continuous series of career stages characterised by specific tasks and concerns (Greenhaus et al., 2000), and classic age/stage models of career development (e.g. Super, 1980; Levinson et al., 1978) have played a key role in shaping career development theory over the years. However scholars have argued that traditional career models are inappropriate for understanding women’s career development because they are based on patterns in men’s lives (see Gallos, 1989; Marshall, 1989; Woodd, 2000; O’Neil et al., 2008). For example Donald Super’s (1980) life stage model was challenged for being linear in consisting of a sequence of eras which follows one another (Pringle and Dixon, 2003), conceptualising career progression as only upwards (Mirvis and Hall, 1996) and implying that a career involves unbroken employment in only one kind of employment with no significant conflict between work and family roles (Arnold, 1997). Such features have
been criticised as being unsuitable to explain women’s careers which are variable and non-linear due to domestic concerns (Pringle and Dixon, 2003), and characterised by diverse occupational patterns rather than only upward mobility (Huang and Sverke, 2007).

Therefore authors have called for alternative career development models for women (Gallos, 1989; Sullivan, 1999) and contemporary scholars have responded to these requests by developing career models especially for women. Joan Gallos’ (1989) call was one of the earliest where she argued that traditional career development models which are built on male models of work and success and supported by ideas of centrality of work to individual identity, and beliefs of personal empowerment requiring separation from other people (Levinson et al., 1978), would not work for women whose identities are formed around their relationships to others. Gallos’ (1989) basic point was that women are developmentally different to men and this idea should be applied to the study of their career development. Her arguments were influenced by developmental psychology, especially the work of developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982). Contemporary women’s career development models which highlight women’s preoccupations over age based career phases (see Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Pringle and Dixon, 2003) seem to have emerged from ideas of women’s psychological development over their lifespan. These models are the dominant means of understanding women’s career development in the extant literature. In what follows I will discuss two of the most widely used women’s career models.

The Kaleidoscope career model (KCM)

This model is based on the idea that women change their career patterns by shifting different parts of their lives to organise roles and relationships in new ways in a similar manner to a
kaleidoscope which produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). The KCM comprises three parameters; authenticity, balance and challenge. Sullivan and Mainiero (2008) state that these parameters take different levels of significance depending on what is occurring in a woman’s life at a particular point of time. The authors suggest that engaging in challenging work is likely to be the primary focus of women in early career phases (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), mid-career women would predominately be concerned about balance, while late career women would desire authenticity although they would be interested in taking on challenges as well (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008).

There seems to be a significant discourse of voluntarism in the KCM where it implies that women’s careers are largely unbounded in suggesting that women can shift their career patterns as they desire. However, studies suggest that women’s choices are often constrained by domestic (see Crompton et al., 2005), organisational (see Gambles et al., 2006), and labour market (see Burke and Nelson, 2002) structures. Although the KCM somewhat recognises domestic constraints in the context of mid-career women in implying that mid-career women are likely to be concerned about balance, it disregards the challenges women face in attempting to harmonise home and work due to labour market constraints, such as the unavailability of part-time jobs at managerial level (see Crompton and Birkeland, 2000) and organisational constraints such as ideal worker norms in workplaces (Gambles et al., 2006). Furthermore this model doesn’t recognise the long term career impacts of ‘balancing’ home and work by temporary career breaks or part-time work. For example research evidence suggests that women often struggle to secure employment without occupational downgrading when returning back to work after career breaks or long years of low level part-time work (see Walters, 2005). Therefore we cannot always assume that women can make smooth transitions in and out of work as they please.
While I recognise the power of individual agency I also emphasise that individuals’ choices are not always unbounded. Nevertheless one of my most significant criticisms of the KCM is that it never appears to associate career with earning a living. Indeed work is conceptualised as almost an ‘optional extra’. And financial imperatives seem to be almost entirely absent, or at least are pushed to the margins in favour of what are seen as more pressing concerns such as identity, lifestyle and personal growth. While I agree that they can be extremely important dimensions to career development, we must also consider the financial imperatives that underpin career. Moreover this model seems to pay very limited attention to the work related developmental tasks which shape the sequence of occupations in women’s lives such as education and training pursued and work experience accumulated. I see these as significant limitations of the KCM, and in this sense I would argue that such activities and preoccupations need to be fully integrated, for this model to be inclusive and robust.

O’Neil and Bilimoria’s career development phases for women

O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) proposed a three-phase, age-linked model of women’s career development. The first phase (idealistic achievement) comprises early career women aged 24 to 35 who focus on developing their careers. The second phase (pragmatic endurance) includes mid-career women aged 36 to 45 who are highly relational and manage personal and professional responsibilities. O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) suggest that women in this phase are making choices about childrearing and career commitment given that their ‘biological clocks are ticking’. The last phase (re-inventive contribution) comprises mostly late career women aged 46 to 60 who take an active stance on issues such as justice and see their careers as opportunities to learn and chances to make a difference to others.
I find this model to be overly simplistic in implying that all women in similar age groups share similar interests. While women of similar ages could share certain interests such as lifestyle choices it is important to note that women also differ to each other in dimensions such as religious faith, cultural values and political opinions (see Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Given these differences, to what extent can we expect women in similar age based career phases to be so similar to one another? However what I find particularly strange about this model is these age-based interests changing drastically as women move from one age group to another. For instance between ages 24-36 women’s interests are predominantly about ‘career’, but these interests change to ‘family’ when they reach ages 36-45. While I recognise that changes in individuals’ values and interests are possible over time, I find it bizarre that they could change so dramatically and predictably as individuals move from one age group to another. I would argue that it is not women’s interests and values that change over their life but rather it is their preoccupations which shift due to organisational constraints which make home-work harmonisation difficult. However constraints which emanate from the workplace such as ideal worker norms (Gambles et al., 2006) are not recognised in this model. Most importantly, there is only very little about ‘career development’ in this model as in the KCM, since it pays only little attention to work related developmental tasks which shape the sequence of occupations over an individual’s life. And I wonder how this model would account for the careers of late starters or people who make career changes in mid or late career.

In reflecting on extant women’s career development models, I have three key criticisms. First, these models seem to oversimplify women’s career experiences leading to frameworks for understanding which do not capture the diverse ways in which women develop their careers. Second there is only little emphasis on work related developmental tasks such as
education, training and work experience which shape the sequence of occupations in women’s lives. In this sense these models do not seem to associate career development with work. Third these models seem to ignore the impacts of organisational, occupational, sectoral (see Kaulisch and Enders, 2005), labour market (see Burke and Nelson, 2002) and economic contexts on women’s career development. In ignoring these factors which are likely to influence the way women develop their careers, these models seem to operate in almost a contextual vacuum. Given these limitations of developmental psychological approaches to understanding women’s career development, I do not wish to go down this route to explore Sri Lankan women’s careers in my empirical study. Rather I prefer to investigate women’s careers by looking at how women perceive and engage with their social contexts, in line with the sociological tradition. A few scholars have used this approach to understand individuals’ careers (see Duberley et al., 2006; Richardson, 2009; Al-Ariss, 2010; Evetts, 2000) and in what follows I will review each of these studies in turn.

**Understanding career development through individuals relationships with society**

A few scholars have attempted to understand careers by looking at individuals’ relationships with society. Stephen Barley’s (1989) structuration model is one of the first attempts to look at career by focusing on the complex interplay between individuals and society rather than only the individual. This model is based on Anthony Giddens’ (1984; 1991) idea that structure and action can be seen as a duality, with each sphere implicated in the other. The Barley model comprises three key dimensions which are in an iterative relationship with each other: institutions, career scripts and individual action and interaction (see Barley, 1989). Here institution means ‘social phenomenon in which the form of collective behaviour is relatively established and permanent’ (Hughes, 1937: 6). Institutions can include employing companies, industries or professional bodies, family and other social contexts which
individuals may perceive to be constraining or enabling to their careers. Institutions are suggested to encode norms or career scripts, which offer individuals interpretive schemes to pave their way through their careers (Barley, 1989). In other words career scripts ‘prescribe patterns of legitimate thought which operate as modalities between individual actions and social structures’ (Duberley et al., 2006: 1135). In the context of individual action, Barley argues that people will act differently to their interpretations of career scripts in enacting their careers. These actions are deemed to have both intended and unintended consequences (Giddens, 1984) on the content of scripts, serving to maintain, challenge or transform them.

Duberley, Cohen and Mallon (2006) used the Barley structuration model of career to examine how scientists in the UK and New Zealand made sense of and sought to develop their careers within organisational and other contextual settings. Their findings highlight the dynamic interplay between five institutional contexts which scientists saw as both constraining and/or enabling to them in developing a career: namely science, profession, family, government and national culture. The scholars also identified four scripts which the individuals in their sample drew on in accounting for their careers: the organisational careerist script where respondents talked about career in relation to the organisation’s career path, the impassioned scientist script which described career as deeply entangled to science, the strategic opportunist script which highlights that career could be managed to bring individuals rewards such as promotion and remuneration, and finally the balance seeker script where the key motive was to reconcile home and work. According to Duberley and her colleagues, the majority of respondents had not aligned themselves to only one career script but had drawn from two or three them when explaining different parts of their careers.
In discussing how respondents’ engaged with the institutions they perceived to impact on their careers, through the career scripts noted, Duberley et al. (2006) highlight two modes of engagement scientists adopted to manage perceived contextual influences on their careers: transformation oriented and maintenance oriented modes of engagement. For instance, scientists adopting transformation oriented modes had worked towards change by means such as collaborating with campaign groups to widen women’s access to scientific careers, while those adopting maintenance oriented modes had preferred to work within existing structures by means such as developing their disciplines in relation to opportunities available in the market (Duberley et al., 2006).

A few other scholars have used Duberley et al.’s (2006) analysis to examine individuals’ career development in terms of how they perceive and engage with social contexts (see Richardson, 2009; Al Ariss, 2010). Notably, although their ideas seem to be embedded within structuration theory, these authors do not explicitly acknowledge this. Richardson (2009) investigates the modes of engagement of British academics that pursue internationally mobile careers. The author identifies three contexts: the science context, the national context and the organisational context, which impacts on the way academics develop their careers. In the light of the structural conditions identified in her study, Richardson (2009) argues that an international career is characterised by ‘seams’ which must be managed by the individual. Here seams refer to the tension between the scientific, national and organisational contexts of academia. Richardson (2009) illustrates how some international academics use ‘maintenance’ oriented modes of engagement to develop their careers while others opt for ‘transformative’ approaches to advance their careers. For instance academics adopting maintenance oriented modes had accepted the employment policies in the countries they relocated to, and worked within these by means such as securing citizenship in the country prior to applying for
academic jobs (c.f. Richardson, 2009: S166). However, those who adopted transformative modes had drawn on their professional networks to secure jobs in the countries they relocated to, thereby circumventing prevailing national policies.

Al Ariss (2010) develops Duberley et al.’s (2006) and Richardson’s (2009) work in investigating career development experiences of skilled Lebanese migrants to France. The author identifies two structural levels: organisational and national, which migrants perceived to impact on their career development, and illustrates how his respondents navigated these barriers using four modes of engagement: maintenance, transformation, entrepreneurship and opt out. Al-Ariss (2010) extends Duberley et al.’s (2006) and Richardson’s (2009) work by identifying two additional modes of engagement individuals use in their careers: entrepreneurship and opt out. The scholar defines entrepreneurship as migrants commencing new business ventures in order to avoid discrimination and legal constraints in the French context of employment, and opt out as migrants giving up on employment altogether because they could not deal with the legal and discrimination barriers (Al-Ariss, 2010). All the above studies (Duberley et al., 2006; Richardson, 2009; Al-Ariss, 2010) make a significant contribution to existing understandings of individuals’ careers due to identifying the structural conditions which impact on the way individuals develop their careers, highlighting how individuals navigate these structural barriers via various modes of engagement in order to advance their careers, and suggesting the implications of individuals’ actions.

Juila Evetts (2000) considers how specifically women engage with social structures via different modes of engagement in their careers. Drawing on Giddens’ structuration theory (1984) she proposes a dualistic relationship between individuals’ actions, structures and cultures to explore women’s career change. In my view her approach could also be very
valuable in illuminating the dynamics of women’s career development. However, where Giddens subsumes culture within his conceptualisation of structure, Evetts distinguishes between these dimensions. With respect to cultural dimensions Evetts speaks about belief systems and social attitudes which influence individual behaviour and thereby impacts on individuals’ occupational choices and career aspirations. With respect to structural processes she talks about career paths within organisations and divisions of labour within organisations and families. In Evetts’ view (2000) cultural beliefs and controlling social attitudes about women support structural arrangements within work organisations and families. The key point in her argument however is that women’s careers are not determined in a direct, causal way by structural and cultural factors, but rather women are able to choose between the opportunities available to them to some extent. From this perspective, Evetts (2000) argues that women will experience and deal with inequalities and constraints in different ways which she identifies as adaptation, manipulation, negotiation, resistance and/or confrontation.

Evetts’ (2000) ideas are invaluable due to taking a holistic approach to acknowledging the interrelatedness of cultures, structures and agency in individuals’ careers. I find her framework particularly useful because she talks about modes of engagement in terms of ‘what individuals do’ rather than in terms of implications of people’s actions (see Richardson, 2009; Al-Ariss, 2010). However, despite these merits, her framework warrants further development and especially empirical application. For instance Evetts (2000) hasn’t clearly defined what she exactly means by ‘structures’. This isn’t however surprising given that the ontology of ‘structure’ is a widely debated and unresolved issue in academic literature (see Layder, 1994). Moreover although Evetts (2000) briefly mentions that women’s actions would impact back on structures and cultures, she hasn’t developed this idea sufficiently in her paper.
In reviewing all the above studies (e.g. Evetts, 2000; Duberley et al., 2006; Al Ariss, 2010; Richardson, 2009) I would argue that understanding individuals’ relationships with society is invaluable to understanding their career development since it illuminates how individuals actively and continuously deal with opportunities and constraints that emanate from their social contexts, in order to develop their careers. In my view, this is an excellent approach to investigate Sri Lankan women’s careers. Among prevailing approaches, I am particularly partial towards Evetts’ (2000) framework, since she clearly distinguishes between modes of engagement and their social implications (contribution towards maintaining or transforming existing social structures). This can potentially yield insights into what exactly women do to develop their careers within social contexts and with what implications. My interests lie in how particular organisational contexts and home and family impact on women’s careers. Therefore in the next chapter I will move on to reviewing the literature on how women enact their careers within work organisations, and manage the interplay between home and work.
Chapter 3: Women at work

In this chapter I review the literature on how women from more economically developed western countries enact their careers within work organisations.

Highly educated women are increasing their presence in work organisations (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). However a plethora of research studies has demonstrated work organisations as profoundly gendered, defined in terms of a distinction between men and women (Britton, 2000), and posing considerable challenges to women’s careers. Scholars highlight how women in western countries engage with their organisational contexts and in doing so, how they reproduce gendered elements of organisations by shaping their personal lives to suit organisations and explaining fellow women colleagues’ unsuccessful career outcomes in terms of their domestic commitments (Lyng, 2010; Bolton and Muzio, 2007). In this chapter, I will examine these issues in detail.

3.1 Gendering in organisations

A large body of research examines the ‘gendering’ of organisations. Joan Acker’s 1990 publication ‘Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: a theory of gendered organizations’ is one of the first scholarly work to highlight that distinctions between male and female and masculine and feminine contribute to advantage and disadvantage individuals experience in organisations. Acker (1990) illustrates the gendered nature of organisations through interrogating the meanings underlying the concepts of hierarchy and job. According to Acker (1990) hierarchies are gendered because they are based on the logic that employees who are dedicated to paid employment are more suitable for authority while those who have responsibilities out of the workplace should occupy the lower levels. Acker argues that the meaning underlying hierarchy excludes women who cannot often conform to the ‘ideal
worker’ norm (Acker, 1990) due to being socially constructed as homemakers and therefore having or being perceived to have domestic commitments out of work. She similarly argues that jobs in organisations are expected to be undertaken by ‘disembodied workers’ who exist only for work (Acker, 1990). The universal worker according to Joan Acker is a man whose life is assumed to revolve around his full-time job.

An array of empirical research studies has developed Acker’s (1990) ideas and highlighted ‘gendering’ in occupations - even in professions well-represented by women. For instance, Irvine and Vermilya (2010) illustrate how veterinary medicine in the US (a profession numerically dominated by women) places much value on masculine characteristics such as freedom from familial responsibilities and thus results in women being clustered in low paid specialties such as companion animal medicine, and less likely than men to own private practices. Ryan (2010) similarly illustrates gendering in the sport of field hockey which is well-represented by women. Here all contact work of a coach is scheduled during non-standard hours, week nights and weekends with only little consultation in scheduling training dates and times. Thus women who highlight their personal difficulties in making it to training at ad hoc hours are characterised as those in need of special privileges and thereby disadvantaged in their careers. These studies highlight that gendering in occupations are independent of the percentage of men and women working in them. As Britton and Logan argue, ‘although people bring their own gender to organizations, the jobs they occupy are already themselves gendered’ (2008: 108).

A number of other studies similarly draw attention to gendered elements of organisational cultures which have differential implications for men and women. However, I will move on from simply pointing out that organisations are gendered, to exploring the ways gender
inequalities are reproduced in organisational contexts as women enact their careers within them. In what follows I will talk about how gender inequalities are maintained and/or reproduced in organisational contexts under two key themes: (a) conditions to progress in organisations (b) behaviours that signify success in organisations (see Gheradi and Poggio, 2001).

**Conditions to progress in organisations**

Studies indicate that both women and men are required to work extremely long hours, give priority to work over their personal lives and demonstrate organisational citizenship in order to survive and progress in organisations. For instance, in the context of the legal profession in the UK, Bolton and Muzio (2007) argue that key requirements for a successful legal career involve conforming to the long hours culture of the profession and making career the number one priority in life. Lyng (2010) similarly describes the career contract in Norwegian corporate law in terms of commitment, sacrifice and performing above expectations. Lyng’s (2010) respondents had emphasised hard work and the ability to develop relationships with clients as important criteria to progress upwards the career paths at work. Moreover employees were expected to devote significant time to ‘non-billable activities’ such as publishing and giving lectures. Lyng’s (2010) informants had worked 50-70 hours a week to fulfil these demands. Indeed this exceeds the statutory minimum of 48 hours in the UK and most other European countries.

Although these rules are applicable to both men and women, they can be understood as gendered since domestic labour and responsibilities for children may reduce women’s capacity to work long hours and initiate non-billable activities. Lyng (2010) however argues that domestic responsibilities constitute a symbolic as well as practical and material barrier
for women’s careers. For instance, Lyng’s (2010) respondents had talked about how they were excluded from new assignments during pregnancy due to assumptions that they will take all the parental leave available. This process of exclusion had continued even after women returned to work after parental leave. Other research findings similarly reveal that women are often stereotyped as less desirable employees by their colleagues and/or superiors due to perceptions of their motherhood and/or family responsibilities and thus disadvantaged in their careers (see Cabrera, 2007; Metz, 2005; Griffith and MacBride-King, 1998; Parasuramann and Greenhaus, 1993).

Lyng (2010) illustrates a range of strategies that pregnant women and new mothers in Norwegian corporate law firms undertake to avoid being marginalised and excluded due to perceived domestic commitments. First the women in Lyng’s study had avoided taking sick leave during pregnancy. Second they had continued to work reduced hours during parental leave and attempted to keep in touch with colleagues and clients. According to Lyng (2010), this strategy symbolises determination and ability to keep up ones’ career despite her physical absence. Third these women had avoided conversations about domestic topics. Some women had even refrained from voicing domestic concerns when they took part in committees set up to prevent women dropping out of work due to gender specific concerns, since they were afraid of appearing as having special needs (Lyng, 2010). Fourth Lyng’s (2010) female respondents had speeded up their already high speed work routines by limiting socialising at work. Lyng (2010) however argues that refraining from socialising at work may itself lead to being ‘othered’.

A final strategy the women in Lyng’s (2010) study had employed was personally emphasising their determination to continue with their careers after parental leave when in
conversations with the partners of their law firm. According to Lyng (2010) the success of these strategies is variable. However I would argue that the strategies women used to overcome being marginalised at work simply reinforced the largely masculine career contract in corporate law firms which expected employees to exclusively dedicate themselves to work regardless of their personal lives.

Interestingly, in instances where the ‘up and go’ career contract in Norwegian law had conflicted with parenthood, mothers who left the firm never communicated their experiences of being excluded to their superiors since maintaining a good relationship with former employers was advantageous for future business relations and/or when reconsidering employment when children were older (Lyng, 2010). Thus these women explained their exit from the firm in terms of their domestic responsibilities and gender rather than the prevailing career contract or experiences of being marginalised due to perceptions of domestic responsibilities. In other words the assumption that motherhood is incompatible with the prevailing career contract was reproduced by women’s own collective actions. In the context of veterinary medicine in the US Irvine and Vermilya (2010) similarly illustrate how women themselves contribute towards preserving the masculinity inherent to their occupation by their actions. Here the female veterinarians in their study had explained women’s limited mobility within the profession in terms of their domestic responsibilities and justified women’s commitments out of work as a practical barrier to their career progression, rather than highlighting the injustice inherent to the prevailing career contract in veterinary medicine.

Studies of recently commercialised professions highlight that participating in after-hours social activities at work is an important criterion for progressing in organisations (see Watts,
After-hours activities are gendered because they have differential implications on men and women. Women who take the major responsibility for their domestic spheres are likely to find it more difficult to participate in these occasions than men. Moreover women might not feel comfortable in social events such as pub gatherings if they are dominated by mainly men.

Dryburgh (1999) highlights how women engineers deal with after-hours social rituals inherent to the engineering profession in Canada. Here frequent pub gathering had formed a big part of the prevailing workplace culture, reinforcing the image of engineers as hardworking professionals who have fun to make up for the challenges of their work. The women in Dryburgh’s (1999) study had associated themselves with the play culture at work despite the largely masculine nature of heavy drinking, to project friendship and reduce the chance of others considering them as unsuitable for work in male dominated professions. However, although they took care in managing their image in these settings, they varied in their actual participation in these activities. I would argue that that Dryburgh’s (1999) respondents were reproducing the largely masculine elements inherent to the engineering culture by identifying with it and justifying it, although they did not always participate in these activities. Moreover, although these women thought that identifying with the prevailing culture was enough for them to survive in the organisation, physical absence from frequent social rituals deprives women from opportunities to network and from building informal rapport with their peers and superiors. Given that decisions about top management positions tend to be based on subjective criteria which can lead to biased decisions (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2006; Powell, 1999), I would argue that women who frequently opt out of social activities at work are likely to be disadvantaged in their careers because they lose out
on social capital important for career advancement in organisations (see also Bolton and Muzio, 2007).

In the context of construction engineering in the UK, Watts (2007) similarly highlights that women engineers were reluctant to socialise with male colleagues on a regular basis. However many respondents had felt that they had no option other than to join these gatherings since working long hours and socialising at the pub afterwards was essential to become accepted as a member of the construction team. Some participants had opted out of regular social activity. However, most women had been aware of the cost of separating themselves from these gatherings, which in their view had to be counterbalanced by being extra good at their jobs (see also Evetts, 1998; Powell et al., 2009; Walker, 2001). Thus these women had engaged in extensive impression management effort directed towards ‘keeping up to date’ with what was happening at work and ‘tying up loose ends’ to ensure that they are seen dedicated workers (Watts, 2007).

Here again, I would argue that these engineers were reproducing the norm that women have to perform above expectations, in the course of attempting to blend into the normative culture of construction engineering. Moreover, there is no guarantee that performing extra well in jobs would counterbalance the loss of career development opportunities which occur during after-hours social activities. For instance, in the context of the legal profession, Sommerlad (2002) argues that socialising with clients has significant implications for career prospects since the capacity to bring in clients to the firm is the main avenue for career progression. In the light of Sommerlad’s (2002) findings I would argue that informal workplace socialising is indeed vital for career advancement in organisations.
Behaviours that signify success in organisations

Gherardi and Poggio (2001) talk about the types of behaviours individuals must display if they are to be successful in organisations. Here elements such as determination, assertiveness, competitiveness and willingness to take risks which are typically associated with men and masculinity are highlighted. In the context of Norwegian law firms Lyng similarly argues that maintaining a position on the A team requires projecting self-confidence, energy, proactivity, and exceeding availability. These again are typically masculine characteristics that men are assumed to possess. Research evidence suggests that there could be a relationship between gender stereotypes and managerial stereotypes, where senior managerial positions are often associated with traits such as assertiveness, instrumentality, autonomy and result orientation which are considered to be masculine (Kanter, 1977) and thus identified with men rather than women (see Powell et al., 2002). Connected to this, the idea of leadership as a gendered construct has been highlighted by a number of scholars (see Sinclair, 1998; Eveline, 2004; Binns, 2010). For instance in Binns’ (2010) study, certain respondents described leadership in gender neutral terms but had at the same time used highly masculine concepts. All these findings illustrate that leadership and management in organisations is associated with masculinity. Thus women who are less likely to be associated with masculinity are likely to be invisible as leaders in organisations (Binns, 2010) and thereby be disadvantaged in hierarchical advancement (see Eagly and Karau, 2002; Schein, 2001).

An abundance of empirical research findings highlights how women perform masculinity and play down femininity in order to appear as effective leaders and managers. For instance in a study of women in education management in Britain, Priola (2007) argues that women frequently enact masculine behaviours to position themselves as good managers. In the context of veterinary medicine, Irvine and Vermilya (2010) similarly highlight how female
veterinarians equate success to their ability to ‘do masculinity’ and at times play down femininity. From a career point of view studies suggest that that emulating masculine characteristics can be useful for career progression. For example Kumra and Vinnicombe’s (2008) findings of male and female consultants in a professional services firm in the UK reveal that employees had more chance of being promoted if they were more like the existing partners i.e. more like men. Similarly in the context of the legal profession, Bolton and Muzio (2007) argue that the minority of women lawyers, who behaved like their male counterparts are successful in overcoming stratification and segmentation in the profession. Nevertheless in adopting typically male attributes, women do not necessarily change the gendered norms of the profession but rather reinforce them (Bolton and Muzio, 2007).

At an individual level, studies suggest that women who perform masculinity could be penalised for not being ‘womanly’ enough (see Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008; Ryan and Haslam, 2007). Men, however, have less difficulty in performing masculinity since they are not marked as gendered (Whitehead, 2001). In this way, women leaders seem to be in a ‘lose-lose’ situation (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). If they behave as ideal leaders, they are not perceived as proper women. However if they behave as ideal women they are not perceived as effective leaders.

Scholars argue that women who enter male dominated organisations often find themselves in difficult situations where they are required to both act like men and preserve their female characteristics (see Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Powell et al., 2009). Thus women are compelled to manage playing down and highlighting gendered identities in the organisation. In other words a lot of identity work is required (see Lewis, 2006) from women. The notion of ‘gender switching’ (see Bruni and Gherardi, 2002) may be a useful way to think about this.
Binns (2010) highlights the excerpt of a woman respondent who continually switches between feminine and masculine masks at work. This respondent had found this process of gender identity switching unproblematic and enjoyable. In contrast, a few research studies illustrate how women repeatedly switch between the worker mode and mum mode (see Tyler and Cohen, 2010; Nath, 2000). Thus it seems as if women have trained themselves to engage in gender switching smoothly, since it is part and parcel of being a woman in an organisation.

3.2 The future of women in gendered organisations

The literature above highlights the advantages inherent to masculinity and maleness in organisations and shows how women have to continuously negotiate a place in the organisational world where they have only little room. However the largely gendered nature of the organisation is invisible since it is taken as the norm (see Lewis and Simpson, 2010). Individuals who occupy the norm (i.e. men) are unnoticed and the privileges they enjoy are often concealed (see Lewis and Simpson, 2010). The normative position, according to Lewis and Simpson (2010), is the centre of power in the organisation. Nevertheless the authors argue that ‘the norm’ can be seen as doubtful, anxious and subject to challenges as individuals from the borders (i.e. women) seek to enter it. For example challenges can be presented by women who possess technical expertise (see Watts, 2010; Dryburgh, 1999; Walker, 2001), women managers who can do masculinity (see Binns, 2010), women who stand up to those who resist their authority and challenge the existing status quo in organisations (see Watts, 2010), women who demonstrate that motherhood and work can be achieved together (see Lewis, 2010) and most importantly women who enter leadership and management positions and bring new ways of doing things (see Helgensen, 1990; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Jogulu and Wood, 2006).
For instance Bass and Avolio (1990) argue that the trend in U.S. organisations towards team working, consensual decision making, and empowerment may actually benefit the ‘feminine’ leadership styles that women are assumed to possess. According to Helgensen (1990), women who manage workplaces in ways that encourage creativity, cooperation, and intuitive decision-making fulfils the expectations of contemporary organisations. Helgesen’s (1990) findings reveal that organisations managed by women form an interrelated matrix built around a common purpose rather than a conventional hierarchical pyramid. It has been argued that many companies including the ICICI bank and Pepsi recognises that women managers bring with them a ‘unique style’ to the workplace (Sharma, 1990; Budhwar et al., 2005) and thus employs almost 60 per cent women in their labour force (Budhwar et al., 2005). All these findings suggest that the privileges men enjoy due to their normative position in organisations are likely to be threatened by women who seek entry to the norm (Lewis and Simpson, 2010).

However Lewis and Simpson (2010) argue that those individuals occupying the norm will not give up without a fight. First the authors propose that men will attempt to camouflage the norm and thereby maintain the existing status quo (Lewis and Simpson, 2010). For instance an abundance of studies provides insight into how women are marginalised by men by means such as put down humour (see Watts, 2007; Watts, 2010), excluded from core work processes (see Corroto, 2005; Greed, 2000) and kept out of key social networks at work (Cabrera, 2007; Ibarra, 1993). Women often develop their technological skills in order portray themselves as competent to colleagues (see Dryburgh, 1999; Evetts, 1998; Powell et al., 2009; Walker, 2001), perform masculinity in order to fit in with their male counterparts (see Dryburg, 1999; Watts, 2007; Watts, 2010; Powell et al., 2009; Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004), adopt an ‘anti woman approach’ by rejecting femininity and being critical of
other women (see Powell et al., 2009) and deny gender discrimination in occupations in pursuit of avoiding exclusion (see Powell et al., 2009; Lyng, 2010). However scholars argue that women lack the ‘criteria per se’ to be accepted by the majority, which is maleness (Hopfl, 2010; Miller, 2002).

At a deeper level, in an academic context, Hopfl (2010) illustrates how women heads of departments were implicitly removed in a restructuring effort in a university in the north east of England. This termination had been concealed by logic of rationality and change and thus the women who were dismissed had resorted to expressing their grief in private rather than confronting the forces which were responsible for their removal. Other studies have similarly indicated how gendering processes in organisations are often camouflaged under a discourse of equal opportunity at the workplace (see Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). Drawing from an array of empirical research studies Ryan and Haslam (2007) suggest that women may be more likely than men to be assigned leadership roles that are represented as attractive and challenging but are actually problematic. According to Ryan and Haslam (2007), this strategy can be seen as a ‘win-win scenario’ for those who seek to preserve the gender based status quo. If women fail in these difficult positions, they can be blamed and the appointment of men can be justified. If women succeed, they may ‘acquire reputations as effective trouble-shooters who confirm the utility of the think crisis–think female association and simply progress from one glass cliff to another’ (Ryan and Haslam, 2007: 563). Thus succeed or fail, women are likely to be in a disadvantageous position. However, in either event, the organisation will be seen as progressive since equal opportunities policies were enacted. Hopfl’s (2010) and Ryan and Haslam’s (2007) work highlights how organisations strive very hard to maintain the existing status quo although always implicitly.
A number of studies highlights how women capitalise on feminine strengths that they are perceived to possess and establish themselves in certain segments of occupations rather than attempting to enter the main areas. In the context of the legal profession Bolton and Muzio’s (2007) findings reveal how women lawyers use typically feminine attributes of care and understanding to attract female clients requiring legal services in family law and welfare. Bolton and Muzio (2007) describes this as ‘occupational sedimentation’. The scholars argue that by ‘organising themselves into stable and strong sub-groups’ women ‘may be able to exercise some power and ameliorate the effect of vertical stratification present in other segments of the profession’ (Bolton and Muzio, 2007: 59). The problem however is that women may find it extremely difficult to leave the particular segment they colonise and achieve success in other areas. As Cockburn (1988:38) argues ‘people have a gender which rubs off on the jobs they do. The jobs in turn have a gender character that rubs off on the people that do them’.

All this data shows the complexity, contradiction and uncertainty characterising gender in organisations. Women are required to continuously negotiate a space in the organisational world that doesn’t have much room for them. This negotiation however is by no means easy since forces at both surface and deep level strive to maintain the prevailing status quo. Thus most women may give in to prevailing forces or organise themselves in to specific female segments by drawing on femininity which is symbolically associated with them. Either ways women are much likely to contribute towards maintaining prevailing gender inequalities. However as Gherardi (1994) argues strands of ‘delegitimation’ may also be introduced by women who refuse to accept existing status quos.
Overall, I find this literature invaluable since it highlights how women continuously engage with deeply gendered organisations in order to develop their careers, and in the process contribute towards maintaining and/or reproducing the gendered elements of organisations which disadvantage them. However the extant literature is based on women from more economically developed, western countries. I would argue that we need to extend our focus to understand how women from less economically developed non-western countries operate within their organisational contexts and with what implications. There may be a lot of things we could learn from studies from elsewhere.
Chapter 4: Home and work

In this chapter I review the literature on how women from economically developed western countries manage the relationship between home and work.

The interplay between home and work become significant to understanding women’s careers given that women bear children, and take on the major brunt of domestic labour and childcare within their households (Crompton, 2006). Studies highlight that women’s careers in the UK and other economically developed western countries are impacted by unequal divisions of domestic labour at home (Crompton et al., 2005) rearing of young children (McRae, 2003), lack of part-time work at managerial level (Crompton and Birkeland, 2000) and implementation gaps in work-life policies in organisations (Gambles et al., 2006). In this chapter, I will explore these issues in detail.

4.1 Domestic labour and childcare

An array of studies highlights that women undertake the major part of housework even when they are at full-time work (see Crompton, 2006; Pilcher, 2000; Crompton et al., 2005). Given that women bear ‘double burdens’ of paid work and domestic labour at home, one could expect women’s career advancement to be significantly impacted. Indeed scholars have suggested that retaining the major responsibility for caring and domestic work while pursuing full-time employment is a major reason behind women’s lack of success in career (see Crompton and Lyonette, 2011; Harkness, 2003; Walters, 2005). It is important to note that men have been increasing their participation in normatively associated female tasks such as cooking and cleaning since the 1970’s (Duncan et al., 2003). However, even when men help in domestic work, it is women who plan it and take responsibility for it (Duncan et al., 2003).
Scholars used to think that there was an association between gender ideologies and domestic divisions of labour within households (see Kamo, 1988). Yet recent cross national findings of men and women in Europe indicate that gender ideologies are changing, although men’s participation in the domestic sphere remains slow (Crompton et al., 2005). Scholars suggest that intensification of work in organisations may contribute towards men’s lack of involvement in housework (Crompton et al., 2005). Professional women are often able to afford domestic help due to their attractive remuneration packages. However studies suggest that this doesn’t necessarily ease these women’s burdens since they have to recruit and train household staff and supervise their work (see Bianchi et al., 2000). Thus the extant literature depicts domestic responsibilities to remain a significant issue for women’s careers in most economically developed, western countries.

Moving on to childcare, studies highlight that caring is gendered in most western countries where women undertake the bulk of this work in their households (see Crompton, 2006). Although men are increasingly participating in caring for young children (see Duncan et al., 2003) women still hold the fort in this area. A significant problem women in the UK encounter after maternity leave is the lack of affordable (see McRae, 2003) and reliable (see Duncan et al., 2004) childcare providers. In countries such as the UK, state provided childcare is underdeveloped, frequently unavailable and/or the cost of childcare is often very high (McRae, 2003). Thus constraints in finding affordable childcare may compel women to take breaks from their careers to rear young children themselves. However, it is important to note that issues concerning the cost of childcare do not affect all women equally since women in professional occupations are likely to have attractive maternity packages and high rates of pay (Walters, 2005) which will enable them afford good quality childcare. As Vincent and
Ball argue ‘childcare opportunities and choices are strongly stratified and very closely tied to family assets’ (2006: 63).

Crompton and Lyonette’s (2008) findings of men and women in the UK highlight that professionals and managers are more likely to use expensive forms of childcare such as nurseries and nannies than intermediate and manual workers. Nurseries were used by only 14 per cent of intermediate and manual respondents in Crompton and Lyonette’s (2008) sample and nannies by none. Over half of these respondents had used grandparents, and a quarter had used child-minders. However respondents whose parents were too old or still working had struggled to combine work and childcare (Crompton and Lyonette, 2008). A substantial minority of Crompton and Lyonette’s (2008) professional and managerial interviewees had also drawn upon grandparents for childcare. However grandparental care was seen as benefit to the child rather than a regular childcare option for the parents.

Significantly, although these findings seem to suggest that professionals have no problems with childcare, I would argue that this is certainly not the case. For instance in the context of nursery care, women may confront logistic problems (see Crompton and Lyonette, 2008) when childcare providers are located considerable distances away from home. Moreover, children have to be picked up from nurseries by stipulated times which often do not leave allowances for ad-hoc after-hours work obligations. Most importantly, Duncan and Irwin (2004) argue that many mothers in the UK do not like communal nursery care and seek caretakers who could show the child affection. In this sense mothers may perceive themselves to be the ideal caretakers of their children. This could possibly explain why many mothers take breaks from careers to rear their young children themselves.
However, there is a consensus among scholars that breaks in career are detrimental to individuals’ long term career prospects (see Reitman and Schneer, 2005; Terjesen, 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1998 and 2002; Metz, 2005). For example, in the context of their findings of MBA graduates, Reitman and Schneer (2005) argues that MBAs with career interruptions earned 45 per cent less than those with no interruptions and that this difference existed even 25 years after career breaks. Terjesen (2005) similarly argues that women who take time off work may be faced with fewer career development opportunities upon their return to work. Other scholars (e.g. Kirchmeyer, 1998 and 2002; Metz, 2005) have also suggested that breaks in career due to children weaken women’s career advancement. Many women opt to work on a part-time or on a flexible basis in pursuit of harmonising home and work, and an abundance of studies give insight into women’s experiences in attempting to do this. I will discuss these studies in the following section.

4.2 Part-time work

Part-time work is an attractive option for women who seek to harmonise home and work. Studies gives insight into how women doctors opt for careers in general practice (see Crompton and Lyonette, 2011; Crompton and Harris, 1998) since it allows them work part-time hours. For instance, Crompton and Lyonette’s (2011) findings highlight that women doctors indicate general practice as their first career choice and a third of women doctors switched to general practice in their late twenties to early thirties, a time when women are likely to consider childbearing. However, although GP work is family friendly, it is perceived to be inferior to hospital medicine (see Petchey et al., 1997). Nevertheless general practitioners who work part-time do not suffer any loss of status to their careers (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011). However it is important to note that women colonising family friendly segments will reproduce occupational sex segregation as well as the unequal gender division
of labour in households since working part-time will enable women retain the major portion of caring and domestic labour at home (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011).

Significantly, while women in occupations like medicine have the option of working part-time hours without losing occupational status, women from other occupations do not enjoy similar privileges, particularly those who work for organisations that operate within competitive business environments. For instance, in the context of their findings of accountancy careers in the UK, Crompton and Lyonette (2011) argue that that the option to work part-time at higher levels is possible only in relatively unusual circumstances where the majority of accountants in their sample had negotiated this after being with the company for some time. In the context of her findings of women from the hospitality industry in the UK, Tomlinson (2004) similarly argues that employees find it extremely difficult to negotiate part-time work arrangements with their employers. Tomlinson’s (2004) respondents had commented that achieving managerial status prior to maternity was important if women were to gain access to part-time work while avoiding occupational down-grading. This is despite employers in Great Britain having a duty to consider allowing women to return to work part-time following maternity leave (DTI 2003; cited in Tomlinson 2004). However as Horgarth et al. (2001) argues all British employers are not completely aware of the state policies and even when they are aware they do not always accommodate to state provisions. According to Lyonette and Crompton (2008) over-qualified women are often ‘trapped’ in lower-level jobs, due to a lack of part-time jobs at more senior levels (see also Walters, 2005; Crompton and Birkeland, 2000).

Apart from the limited availability of high level part-time work, scholars argue that part-time employment is associated with a lack of career development opportunities, even for well
qualified personnel (Crompton et al., 2003). For instance Tomlinson (2004) argues that managers often perceive part-time workers to lack commitment and therefore believe that they should not expect the same career development opportunities as the committed full time workers. This is despite the Part-time Workers Regulations 2000 encouraging employers in Great Britain to think about promoting part-timers (DTI 2002; cited in Tomlinson 2004). In Lyonette and Crompton’s (2008) study of women accountants in the UK, 68 per cent of women who worked part-time reported that this had reduced their career opportunities and 65 per cent agreed that they could not further their careers without working full-time. Edwards and Wajcman (2005) similarly note that employees who opt for part-time work face slow career growth. Significantly, even though part-time workers’ career progress is stalled, scholars argue that the demands made of them by their employers remain high. For instance, the women accountants in Crompton and Lyonette’s (2011) study had worked considerably longer hours than contracted. I would argue that it is especially unfair that employees opting for non-standard work options such as part-time work are disadvantaged in their careers since they accomplish as much as those working full time, often through an intensification of work (see Lewis, 2001; Wise, 2003).

Some women opt to work part-time for only a temporary basis until their children grow older. However research findings (e.g. Crompton and Birkeland, 2000; Walters, 2005) suggest that time in low level part-time employment could be detrimental to women’s long term career prospects. For example, Walter’s (2005) findings reveal that women part-timers continue to be trapped in low level jobs since employers perceive them to have lost the human capital they once possessed after spending many years in low calibre part-time work. According to Crompton and Lyonette (2011) qualified women who opt to work part-time, expect negative career repercussions.
4.3 Flexible work options

Scholars acknowledge that flexible work options such as flexitime and home-working are increasingly available in the UK (see Crompton and Lyonette, 2011) and other more economically developed countries in the West (see Gambles et al., 2006; Kossek et al., 2010). However, it is widely recognised that even when work–life balance measures are extensively available in organisations, such measures are not necessarily utilised (Pocock, 2005). The lack of utilisation of work-life policies has been linked to an array of factors. I will explain these in turn. First, studies highlight that that women find it difficult to access flexible work options since employers implement these practices for only the core employees that they especially wish to retain and motivate (see Tomlinson, 2004; Dex and Smith, 2002; and Lewis, 2001).

For instance, in the context of the Hospitality industry in the UK, Tomlinson (2004) argues that employers provide flexible working arrangements for only highly skilled managerial employees. Her findings reveal that the option to work flexible hours is often informally negotiated in organisations and such arrangements are not universally accessible to everyone. However she suggests that being a trusted employee and possessing a good working relationship with decision makers helps in negotiating flexible work arrangements (Tomlinson, 2004). Dex and Smith (2002) similarly state that employees with a greater amount of discretion are more likely to be offered the option to work flexible hours than others. These findings suggest that professional and managerial employees have a bigger chance of accessing work-life balance options in comparison to their non-professional or non-managerial counterparts. However Lewis (2001) has argued that even among professionals and managers, flexible work options are made available for only the core workforce that the organisation especially wishes to retain.
Second, scholars argue that flexible working practices are incompatible with long work hour cultures in workplaces, since many organisations associate commitment with time spent within the organisation (Tomlinson, 2004). The need to spend extended periods of visible time in the workplace is backed by the idea of making customers the number one priority, a discourse exacerbated by the competitive nature of business environments. In the context of the accountancy profession, Anderson-Gough et al. (2001) argues that trainee accountants are told to put clients’ demands ahead of their own lives. According to Lewis (2007) accountants who leave office earlier than other colleagues, give the impression that they are being unprofessional due to prioritising their own demands over clients. This scenario is popularly coined by the term ‘ideal worker’, defined as employees who ‘demonstrate commitment in terms of long hours and exclusive dedication to the job’ (Gambles et al., 2006: 45). In the light of this definition, those employees who are not willing or unable to give their maximum time to their employing organisation are likely to be classified as less desirable. According to Gambles et al. (2006), assumptions about the ‘ideal worker’ prevail in workplaces of many national contexts, especially among professionals and managers.

Given that long-hours cultures and associated ideal worker norms are tied to promotion possibilities in organisations (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011), we can expect employees who exercise work-life initiatives to be disadvantaged in their careers. Research findings highlight that employees are increasingly reluctant to utilise flexible work options available within their organisations, since they perceive negative career repercussions to follow (see Gambles et al., 2006, Crompton, 2001, Rapoport et al., 2002; Crompton et al., 2003; Cross and Linehan, 2006). For example, in the context of UK, France and Norway, Crompton (2001) argues that male and female retail bank managers often hesitate to take up flexible options made available by their employers, due to the fear of appearing uncommitted and therefore
jeopardising their career prospects within their organisations. Based on a study of managers’
and professionals’ use of work-family policies in the USA, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002)
argues that employees are likely to use these policies if they work with powerful supervisors
and colleagues who could protect them from perceived negative effects on their careers.

Third, studies highlight that work intensification in organisations is increasingly incompatible
with available flexible work options (Brannen et al., 2001; Perrons et al., 2007; Blair-Loy and
Wharton, 2004). For instance Crompton’s (2001) findings of retail bank managers in Britain,
Norway and France reveals that managers are often not able to exercise work-life initiatives
available within their workplaces due to their excessive workloads. Scholars suggest that
heavy workloads are the result of globalisation and the intense demands of corporate work
conditions (see Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004). In the case of UK, several pieces of
legislation have been introduced which includes the initiation of a maximum working week
of 48 hours for employees (Gambles et al., 2006). The Employment Relations Act 1999 sets
out the legal minimum required of employers in the UK with respect to certain employment
rights. However, Hogarth et al.’s (2001) survey data suggests that only a modest proportion
of employers in the UK (precisely 20%) reports detailed knowledge of these regulations.

All the above findings highlight that organisational structures and cultures undermine flexible
work policies in workplaces (Gambles et al., 2006) classifying those individuals who utilise
these measures as uncommitted and therefore unsuitable for the demands of high-level
organisational work. Lewis (2001) argues that non-standard work arrangements are often
interpreted as favours rather than entitlements by employees, and a low sense of entitlement
to work-life initiatives is likely to lead to employees accepting prevailing work structures.
Moreover when employees interpret non-standard work options as special benefits,
employers will continue to award these options to only their core workers and work-life policies will remain underutilised.

Employees would utilise work-life measures if they feel that they are entitled to modify prevailing work structures for family reasons. For instance, Lewis and Smithson’s (2001) cross national findings reveal that individuals from countries with greater state support in general felt more entitled to employer support. Here participants from Ireland, Portugal and the UK had not expected employer provision for childcare despite the greater need for it while Swedish and Norwegian participants had felt entitled to employer support due to it being constructed as morally right. Lewis and Smithson’s (2001) findings illustrate the significant role state policies play in constructing what individuals perceive as fundamental rights and therefore what they demand from their employers. Crompton (2001) however remains sceptical of the extent to which the state support could mitigate the effects of competitive market forces which intensify workloads. Thus she argues that corporate changes such as control of work hours are essential if employment and family are to be reconciled. Gambles et al. (2006) similarly argue that existing workplace practices and cultures that weaken the effectiveness of work-life balance policies should be changed to facilitate work-life harmonisation for employees.

In sum, the extant literature seems to depict rather bleak prospects for professional women’s careers in more economically developed western countries like the UK. For instance, women’s careers are seen to be constrained by domestic labour (see Crompton et al., 2005), childcare (see Duncan et al., 2004), lack of part-time work at higher levels (see Crompton and Birkeland, 2000) and implementation gaps in work-life policies in organisations (see Gambles et al., 2006). Indeed this literature seems to suggest that separation from home and
family is essential for women to progress in their careers. For instance, Lyonette and Crompton (2008) argues that women with children may choose not to pursue top level jobs in organisations since they cannot manage job related demands with their roles at home. However, I would argue women are increasingly making it to the top in professions such as accountancy (see Alvesson and Billing, 2009) and it is not only women without families who do so.

We are well aware of the constraints women in economically developed western countries encounter in developing their careers. However, what we lack is understandings of how women enact their careers in the light of prevailing structural constraints. I am interested in how women manage the interplay between home and work in order to develop their careers. However this appears to have received only little attention in the extant literature. Significantly, I would argue that our knowledge of women’s home-work dynamics is limited to the more economically developed countries in the West. Indeed we are unaware of how women from less economically developed non-western nations perceive and manage home and work. Given that socio-cultural contexts differ to one another considerably, I would argue that it is extremely important to learn how women in nations that have received less research attention perceive and manage home and work.
Chapter 5: South Asian women’s careers

In this chapter I review the literature on women’s careers in South Asia.

South Asian nations have undergone significant transformation over the past decades as they have moved to modern industrial states from primarily agrarian societies. This transformation has been associated with significant societal changes. For example, increasing numbers of women in South Asian countries are now entering higher education and thereby employment (Phadke, 2007). However women in countries such as India still remain under-represented in management positions (Jain and Mukherji, 2010). Studies suggest that traditional gender ideologies (see Jain and Mukherji, 2010), added obligations to extended family members (see Rana et al., 1998), gender based prejudices within organisations (see Gupta et al. 1998) and perceived moral dangers for women in society (see Phadke, 2007) contribute towards women’s underrepresentation in management. In this chapter I will discuss South Asian women’s careers in detail with reference to these factors.

5.1 Women at work

The limited available literature suggests that organisations in South Asian contexts are gendered (see Acker, 1990) as organisations in the West, where workplaces are defined in terms of a distinction between men and women and thus have differential implications on male and female employees (Britton, 2000). For instance in a comparative study of employees working for a US owned high-tech company in India and the US, Poster and Prasad (2005) highlights that rules about work times are strict within the Indian workplace and thus employees in India have less flexibility about their work hours in comparison to their colleagues in the US. Such rules may present challenges especially to women workers who are often expected to place the roles of wife and mother above all other roles (Rana et
al., 1998; Jain and Mukherji, 2010) and are therefore likely to have significant obligations out of the workplace. According to Nath (2000) organisations in India often use women’s marital status as a measure of their commitment to the organisation, and depict women as less committed employees than men due to perceptions of their domestic roles (see also Budhwar et al., 2005). These findings indicate that the definition of the ‘ideal worker’ (Gambles et al., 2006) in Indian organisations does not encompass married women who are assumed to have obligations out of work. Thus while married women in the West face barriers in progressing upwards in organisations’ hierarchies due to organisations being defined in predominantly masculine terms (see Acker, 1990), married women in South Asia seem to be left out of largely masculine organisations altogether.

A few notable studies highlight that social capital is absolutely vital for career advancement in South Asian organisations where recruitment, selection and even promotion are significantly influenced by individuals’ relationships with key organisational personnel (see Saher, 2011; Khilji, 2003; Sparrow and Budhwar, 1997). For instance Saher (2011) draws attention to how some departments in a medical corporation in Pakistan hire mainly people who are closely known to the organisation (see also Sparrow and Budhwar, 1997) even if they lack the necessary skill requirements. According to the author, the prevailing ideology was that a well-known person would be more likely to comply with the organisation, demonstrate loyalty and return the favour done to him/her by the management. Empirical findings also highlight that, employees who have strong social connections to relevant organisational personnel (Granovetter, 1973), get an edge over those who have weak connections, in appraisal and compensation practices (see Khilji, 2003; Saini and Budhwar, 2004; Saher, 2011). While social capital is important for career development in western organisations (see Sommerlad, 2002; King et al., 2005), social relationships with key
resource personnel surpassing equal opportunity policies in workplaces and influencing performance appraisal systems and compensation practices is relatively unheard of.

Significantly, none of the above studies give insights into the specific impacts of informal recruitment and promotion practices on particularly women’s careers. However, I would argue that the central role social capital plays in selection and appraisal processes is gendered, because women are reported to be left out of social networks in Indian organisations (see Gupta et al., 1998; Jain and Mukherji, 2010; Nath, 2000). Indeed one interviewee in Budhwar et al.’s (2005) study pointed out women’s exclusion from informal organisational networks as one of the main causes of many women not entering higher management in India (see also Nath, 2000). Moreover cross national research findings of academics in Mauritius and Australia indicate that women from South Asian contexts find in more difficult to enter male dominated networks in comparison to their western counterparts (see Thanacoody et al., 2006). Scholars argue that South Asian women attempt to develop their technical skills to compensate for the loss of networking opportunities (see Adya, 2008; Nath, 2000). In my view, however this may not be sufficient since organisations in India and Pakistan are comfortable with training less qualified known personnel than hiring qualified strangers (see Saher, 2011).

As in the West, studies suggest an association between gender stereotypes and managerial stereotypes in Indian organisations (see Gupta et al., 1998; Jain and Mukherji, 2010). For example Gupta et al.’s (1998) findings revealed that a significant percentage of male managers and a third of female managers believed that women managers were less competitive and less aggressive than male managers in meeting the demands of modern organisations. In this sense, ‘ideal managers’ would be men who are associated with
aggressiveness and competitiveness. Gupta et al.’s (1998) respondents also stated that women managers are likely to let their emotions influence their managerial behaviour. This finding highlights that women in India are associated with typically feminine traits which is deemed to be incompatible with effective managerial behaviour. Turning to the sphere of individual action, studies illustrate how women in India adopt masculine characteristics in pursuit of appearing as effective managers (see Nath, 2000; Gupta et al., 1998). However as I argued in chapter 3 attempting to ‘fit’ into the prevailing masculine model of work and success within the firm could be problematic for women (see Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008; Ryan and Haslam, 2007) since it requires them to behave in ways that contradict the female stereotype.

Women acting in contradiction to the prevailing female stereotype may not be palatable to particularly South Asian people given that submissiveness and unobtrusiveness are regarded as important values amongst women in these contexts (see Thanacoody et al., 2006). Thus South Asian women attempting act like men in pursuit of enhancing their career prospects may actually be a career hindrance. A few studies suggest that women in India exhibit typically feminine leadership styles in order to overcome gender based prejudices. For instance, some women managers in Nath’s (2000) study reported that their male subordinates saw them as more humane than male managers since they were more sensitive towards employees’ family lives and talked to them about domestic issues. Budhwar et al.’s (2005) survey responses similarly highlighted that employees saw typically feminine traits such as concern towards personal situations, willingness to share information and ability to gain ideas from others as some of the key strengths of women managers. These findings suggest that feminine attributes which are associated with women are being increasingly acknowledged in the Indian organisational context (Budhwar et al., 2005).
Nevertheless I would argue that women who penetrate managerial positions and do things in different ways are likely to present challenges to the norm in organisations, and thus those individuals who occupy the norm (i.e. men) may do all they can to preserve the prevailing status quo as Lewis and Simpson (2010) suggest. For instance, a number of studies highlight how women in India are offered less challenging jobs than men, kept out of critical work assignments (Khandelwal, 2002; Katamreddy, 2008), excluded from handing crucial organisational issues (see Budhwar et al., 2005; Khandelwal, 2002) and left out of social networks at work (see Gupta et al., 1998; Jain and Mukherji, 2010). However, while these studies illustrate how women are marginalised by the majority group men and thereby disadvantaged in their careers, they do not offer sufficient insights into the actions women taken in response to this exclusion. In my view, South Asian men would be more likely to react to challenges to their normative position than men in the West given the prevailing ideology of male superiority and female inferiority in countries like India (see Gupta et al., 1998) and subordination and disempowerment of women being the norm in patriarchal South Asian societies (see Kakar and Kakar, 2007).

5.2 Home and Work

In chapter 3 I focused on the barriers women from economically developed western contexts encounter in harmonising home and work. In the case of home, I highlighted domestic labour and childcare as constraints on these women’s career progression. However, in the case of South Asian women’s home spheres, we see a totally different picture to women in the West where extended family members and domestic aides are members of households in addition to spouse and children we see in the western model. Scholars argue that women from South Asian contexts are often able to work intensively due to their extended families helping them with childcare (see Gambles et al., 2006; Nath, 2000; Rout et al., 1999; Wesley and
Muthuswamy, 2005). However the complexity inherent to this picture becomes apparent when we take a second glance. For instance research findings suggest that South Asian women face the demands of multiple roles, which often go beyond the wife, mother, and worker roles working women in the West take on to include additional responsibilities to their extended families (Rout et al., 1999; Rana et al., 1998; Poster and Prasad, 2005).

Here the demands of elder care have been noted to be particularly problematic for women from developing countries. For instance Budhapriya’s (2009) study of professional women in India revealed that certain women in her sample stated that they would like employers to provide support for emergency-care for elderly parents and parents-in-laws as well as for children. This finding suggests that Indian women’s care giving burdens are much broader than western women’s. Given that there is almost no social security in most developing countries (Gambles et al., 2006) elder care can be expected to be a significant burden to women in these nations. Indeed women from developing countries are often able to employ their less affluent fellow citizens as domestic maids to help them with caring and household chores. However research findings suggest that women continue to be the supervisors of housework and child-related activities in the home even after employment of domestic aides and therefore this process of management is often problematic (Muttarak, 2004; Constable, 1996).

Given the burden of multiple family roles, we can expect spousal support within the household to be extremely important for South Asian women. However, in the context of India, studies suggest men’s participation in domestic labour is minimal (Ramu 1989; cited in Budhapriya, 2009; Nath, 2000). Rout et al’s (1999) findings indicate that extended family members and the South Asian community contribute towards sustaining conventional gender
roles and thereby prevent couples from sharing household chores with each other. For example, many women in their research sample had spoken of the pressures from the Asian community for men not to be seen doing women’s work or showing signs of an equal relationship. Thus while legal and economic changes have helped women join the workforce in India, prevailing normative attitudes prescribes different roles for men and women (Budhapriya, 2009). According to Budhapriya (2009) men are expected to prioritise work over family while women are expected to prioritise family over work.

In the light of these findings we could expect married women in South Asia to find it extremely challenging to develop their careers. Desai (1996) notes that Indian women tend to limit their career aspirations for family reasons. She argues that keeping a low profile in one’s career enables these women to enjoy both work and family spheres. A few other scholars similarly note that professional women in India make career compromises when it becomes difficult to harmonise home and work (see Radhakrishnan, 2008; Budhapriya, 2009). However Budhwar et al.’s (2005) findings of senior managerial Indian women indicate that the women in their study were extremely career-oriented and ambitious that they had been ready to make compromises on their home fronts to make their careers a success. Nath’s (2000) findings similarly highlight that career advancement is very important to both professional women and their families in South Asia.

Moving on to the work sphere, the limited available literature suggests that organisational constraints are more severe in countries such as India than in the West (see Poster and Prasad, 2005; Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004; Uma Devi, 2002). For example, Rajadhyaksha and Smita, (2004) argue that the new call centres and software firms in India often expect employees to work 24 hours a day. Many of these firms have introduced gymnasiums, day-
care facilities, laundries, canteens and even sofa beds to rest (see Uma Devi, 2002; Phadke, 2007) to prevent intensive work schedules affecting employees’ work-life balance (Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004). However scholars argue that these work-life initiatives do not work (Budhwar et al., 2005) since they are implemented as an imitation of western organisational practices rather than from a genuine concern to enable employees harmonise home and work (Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004). Moreover measures such as gymnasiums and day care facilities inside the workplace are geared at keeping workers within the organisation itself. A few studies suggest that organisational time expectations and ideal worker norms in Indian workplaces work in opposition to the new work-life initiatives. For example, Poster and Prasad’s (2005) findings highlight that employers in India prefer work being done within the workplace itself since it can be closely monitored. Furthermore Indian employees often had to sign an attendance register at work where in and out times had been strictly noted by the organisation.

The Indian state gives substantial attention to legislation which enable women workers harmonise home and work. ‘The Maternity Benefits Act (1961) for instance entitles a woman to six weeks of leave with full pay, both before and after delivery. If the woman wants, she can take the entire 12 weeks of leave after the delivery. Under this Act, it is unlawful for an employer to discharge or dismiss a woman during or on account of maternity leave, except for gross misconduct. Further, a woman worker must be permitted to take two nursing breaks in addition to normal breaks until the child is 15 months old’ (Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004: 1675). The Factories Act of 1948 establishes maximum working hours for employees and states that factories must provide day-care facilities for children below six years where more than thirty women workers are employed (Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004). However, Rajadhyaksha and Smita (2004) note that employers frequently get around the legislation by
employing less than 30 women as permanent workers and the rest on a part-time or contract basis. All these findings highlight that although employers and national states take measures to help women harmonise home and work, these efforts do not always work in practice due to gaps in implementation (see Gambles et al., 2006).

Given these significant challenges South Asian women encounter from their extensive domestic obligations, conventional gender ideologies and bureaucratic workplace cultures it becomes extremely interesting and significantly important to find out how women in these contexts perceive home and work and manage these spheres as they pursue their careers.

5.3 Moral character and women’s careers

A number of studies and newspaper articles offer insights into the perceived moral dangers for women in India when working night shifts and travelling home from work late in the night. For instance Phadke (2007) talks about how women’s families worry about how neighbours will perceive their daughters when they come home at the nightscape. According to scholars lone women’s presence in the night are contradictory to traditional norms (Patel, 2006), where women are supposed to be in ‘gated communities’ to which entry of outsiders is controlled and monitored (Phadke, 2007; Patel and Parmentier, 2005). Thus women being seen alone in the nightscape are often linked to prostitution (Patel, 2006). Phadke (2007) highlights how women workers travelling home at night are often stopped by distrustful policeman and watched by inquisitive neighbours. She mentions that women in India are frequently compelled to negotiate with all these concerned parties although she doesn’t illustrate how exactly they negotiate.
Phadke (2007) argues that cities in India are often constructed as rather dangerous places for women. However the discourse of safety for women is actually a discourse of sexual safety where concerns are on whether women will be sexually assaulted or engage in consensual sexual relations rather than being murdered or robbed. According to Phadke (2007) promiscuity and women engaging in consensual sexual relations before marriage threatens the normative culture of Indian society, and thus women in India are in danger of all men who are not potential marriage partners. This becomes an especially significant concern to women’s careers given that they are compelled to interact with various men from all walks of life at the workplace.

In the context of the new call centre industry in India, people have voiced concerns over the ‘informal, American-style college campus atmosphere’ in these workplaces encouraging promiscuity and casual sexual liaisons amongst young employees (Dhillon, 2003). The rising number of abortions in the city of Bangalore has been blamed on the westernised organisational cultures of these centres and many parents are deemed to be reluctant to allow their daughters take up employment in this industry (Dhillon, 2003). However it is important to note that middle class women in India are increasingly joining the professional workforce in multinational organisations, despite prevailing norms of moral conduct for women classifying working in the night and liaising with men at work as unrespectable. This raises the question of how women in these contexts manage prevailing behavioural norms.

In a study of professional women in the new software industry in Mumbai and Bangalore, Radhakrishnan (2009: 211) provides insights into how women articulate themselves as the ‘culturally appropriate’ yet ‘modern’ women of the New India in terms of exercising just the ‘right’ amount of freedom for women, confirming to ‘appropriate’ sexual behaviours and
striking a balance between work and family. Radhakrishnan, who captures this phenomenon through the term ‘respectable femininity,’ highlights how these women distinguish themselves from promiscuous western women and from Indian women of previous generations ‘through a discourse of balance, restraint, and ‘knowing the limit’ (2009; 211). For instance, the women in Radakrishnan’s study had explained the value they placed on career development for women as well as their attachment to modern consumables, while emphasising the need to balance work with family life and adhere to norms of good behaviour for women in Indian society which included not travelling alone in the night. Radhakrishnan (2009) argues that these modes of femininity are complementary with being a top professional woman in India. However in another study she suggests that women trying to live up to the respectable identities they craft in terms of balancing home and work may lead to them making compromises in career (see Radhakrishnan, 2008). She does not specify exactly what these career compromises are.

In an ethnographic study of female workers in the new garment industry in Sri Lanka, Lynch (2007) highlights how working class women from rural villages in Sri Lanka attempt to distinguish themselves from female workers from urban Sri Lanka, as the respectable women who work in garment factories. In her very interesting book ‘Juki Girls, Good Girls: Gender and Cultural Politics in Sri Lanka’s Global Garment Industry’, Lynch demonstrates how female workers use their residence in rural villages to craft respectable identities as good, disciplined and sexually inactive workers who are not too modern like ‘Juki’ girls (i.e. girls from urban villages) but neither too rural like their fellow sisters in agriculture, thereby positioning themselves as the ‘good girls’ of the new Sri Lanka. Lynch discusses the dilemmas faced by female factory workers in terms of agency and resistance, where ‘good girls’ often flirt with boyfriends, dress in fashionable styles and engage in love affairs (i.e.
acts that are frowned upon in rural villages) thereby diverting from the ‘good girl ideal’, although they shape their behaviour through self-discipline due to concern over their own and their families’ reputations. While Lynch (2007) provides rich insights into the struggles Sri Lankan female workers encounter in attempting to position themselves as the respectable women of the garment factories, her work doesn’t capture the consequences of these moments of rupture from the ‘respectable woman’ ideal. That is, do these moments of rupture redefine norms of moral behaviour for female factory workers from Sri Lankan villages, or do they simply reinforce the existing social order? These issues are still to be addressed.

In another ethnographic study of Sri Lankan women in garment factories, Hewammanne (2008) similarly explores how single working class female workers negotiate alternative identities in numerous social spaces such as the shop floor, boarding houses, social outings and village homes, in their struggle to make sense of societal ideals of respectable femininity. But as Lynch (2007), Hewammanne doesn’t illustrate how exactly ‘respectable femininity’ plays out in terms of the iterative relationship between individual agency and representations of moral behaviour for women in Sri Lanka.

Studies elucidate the measures families, national states and organisations in South Asian countries take to protect women from perceived moral dangers and preserve their respectability. Phadke (2007) talks about how fathers, brothers and husbands in India accompany women at most times to demonstrate to the public that they are unavailable for sexual liaisons and thus maintain their moral honour. In the context of national state policies, Samita Sen’s (2010) study of women plantation workers in colonial India demonstrates how the law required prospective women workers to obtain permission by a male family member to work in plantations due to plantation work being associated with risks of sexual assault and
thus presenting moral dangers. Sen (2010) argues that the Indian state attempting to protect women from perceived moral dangers disadvantaged them from earning a livelihood and further reinforced patriarchy. Until recently article 66(b) of the Indian 1948 Factories Act stated that no women would be allowed to work in any factory except between the hours of 6 A.M. and 7 P.M (Office of the Labour Commissioner, 2006; cited in Patel, 2006), possibly in pursuit of protecting women from perceived dangers to their moral reputations. This act was amended on only March 2005 to allow women work a night shift (Patel, 2006).

A few studies provide insights into the measures organisations in India take to safeguard women employees’ moral honour. For instance, scholars talk about how workplaces in India arrange private transportation and male escorts for women employees travelling at night (see Phadke, 2007; Patel, 2006; Radhakrishnan, 2009). Patel (2006) highlights how call centre managers in India personally visit female employees’ families and explain to them that the working conditions and transportation are safe for women in order to convince the family to allow the daughter or wife work the night shift. All these studies suggest that organisations work hard to protect their female employees’ respectable femininity. However a few studies note that some companies are reluctant to hire women employees due to being obliged to see to their safety concerns (see Nath, 2000; Budhwar et al., 2005). Thus norms of moral conduct for women in South Asian societies obviously have career consequences although only little attention has been given to this in the extant literature.

Significantly, although studies highlight the measures organisations, national states and families take to protect women from perceived moral dangers, they do not consider the consequences of these actions. For instance would these actions encourage patriarchy and reinforce existing norms of moral behaviour for women, or would they have an effect on
changing the extant social order? Most importantly although scholars argue that women in South Asia frequently negotiate around norms of respectable behaviour (see Phadke, 2007; Radhakrishnan, 2009), only few of them illustrate how exactly women negotiate or address the possible consequences of women’s actions on their careers. Thus the literature reviewed so far raises important questions about how exactly norms of moral conduct for women in South Asia, plays out in the context of women’s careers.
Chapter 6: The Sri Lankan context

In this chapter I give a preview into the destination of this research study.

The democratic socialist republic of Sri Lanka is an island located in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country which has a population of about 20 million. The population density is highest in Colombo, the capital. Indo-Aryan emigration from India in the 5th century B.C. came to form the ‘Sinhalese’ which is the largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka today (Wilhelm, 1912). The second-largest ethnic group, the Tamils, hail from South India and emigrated between the 3rd century B.C. and A.D. 1200 (Wilhelm, 1912). In 1505 the Portuguese took hold of Sri Lanka (known as Ceylon at that time) until the Dutch secured control in 1658 (Mines and Lamb, 2002). The British took over in 1796, and Ceylon became an English Crown colony in 1802 (Mines and Lamb, 2002). However the country eventually won its independence as the Commonwealth of Ceylon on the 4th of February 1948.

Demographics of Sri Lanka

Statistics as per Central bank report 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>20mn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population growth rate</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Gender distribution     | Males 9.6mn (48% of the total population) |
|                        | Females 10.4mn (52% of the total population) |

<p>| Ethnic distribution    | Sinhalese 74.5% |
|                        | Sri Lankan Tamils 11.9% |
|                        | Moors/Muslims 8.3% |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious distribution</th>
<th>Indian Tamils 4.6%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other groups 0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most Sinhalese are Buddhists and they form the majority of the population. Most of the Tamils are Hindus while Christians comprise both Sinhalese and Tamils who embraced Christianity during colonisation. Due to the multi-ethnic nature of Sri Lankan society, there are many languages spoken within the country. The Sinhalese speak Sinhalese while the Tamils speak Tamil. The Muslims speak either Tamil or Sinhalese whereas other groups such as the Burghers (descendants of Dutch colonisers) speak English. However English is widely spoken within Sri Lanka and it is a compulsory subject in the national secondary school curriculum. The upper classes in Sri Lanka speak more English than their mother tongues.

As noted before in the introduction, Sri Lanka boasts a high literacy rate of 91.4% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). Significantly there is no substantial gender disparity in literacy rates where 92.8% of males and 90% of females have been identified as literate in the year 2009 Labour force survey. These figures are indeed very high in comparison to the literacy rates of Sri Lanka’s closest neighbour India, which are 75.3% for men and 53.7% for women (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner India, 2001). In fact literacy rates in Sri Lanka are close to the literacy rate in the UK which is 99% (ONS, 2001). Annual health indicators in Sri Lanka reveal that Sri Lankans enjoy a rather
high quality of life. For example, life expectancy in Sri Lanka is 68 years for males and 76
years for females, while infant mortality is 12 per 1,000 live births and maternal mortality 58
per 100,000 live births (Central bank of Sri Lanka, 2008).

6.1 The Sri Lankan welfare state
The Sri Lankan welfare state provides free education and health care for their citizens and
these elements contribute towards the high literacy rates in the country and the comparatively
high quality of life that Sri Lankans enjoy.

Education
Sri Lanka has a policy of free primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education. Currently
there are over 9000 government schools in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Education Sri Lanka,
2011). There are also private schools which emerged during the colonial era and international
schools which emerged within the last 30 years. However these schools are popular only
amongst the more affluent social classes. Although higher education in Sri Lanka is free, it is
also extremely limited. For example, there are 14 state universities in Sri Lanka and only
16.5% of students qualified for entrance gain admission to the state Universities (Central
bank of Sri Lanka, 2008). Thus many students who are unable to enter the state universities
are forced to find other means of higher education. Some students enroll themselves at the
Open University or the few state-owned autonomous degree awarding institutes such as
NIBM or SLIIT, or study as external students at the traditional universities. The more affluent
Sri Lankans send their children abroad to pursue their studies in foreign universities or
educate their children at private foreign affiliated educational institutes in Sri Lanka itself.
Most middle class students study for professional examinations in Accountancy and/or
Computing from the UK such as CIMA, BCS, and ACCA. As a result Sri Lanka has one of the largest pools of professionally qualified accountants in South Asia.

Health
The state funded healthcare system in Sri Lanka has a large network of state hospitals and employs a large number of health care workers. The low maternal and infant mortality rates can be partly attributed to the state provided health care. However it has been argued that the migration of health professionals has posed a serious problem to health care in Sri Lanka (Samarage, 2006). Medical officers and skilled nurses are moving to private hospitals or the overseas in search of better salaries and work environments (Samarage, 2006) and therefore there is a lack of medical staff in rural areas of the country, especially in the North East. The more affluent citizens of Sri Lanka use private health care in the few private hospitals.

6.2 The political and legal context
Following independence from Britain in February 1948, the political scene in Sri Lanka has been dominated by two parties: the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which is now the major part of the current ruling party - the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA). The SLFP was founded by S. W. R. D. Banadaranaike who became prime minister in 1956 and campaigned for state support for Buddhism and Sinhalese nationalism thereby making Sinhalese the country's one and only official language. He was assassinated in 1959. His widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the world's first female prime minister in Asia in the year 1960. In 1972, the country became a republic within the Commonwealth, and changed its name to Sri Lanka.
The government is a mixture of a presidential system and a parliamentary system. The President of Sri Lanka is the head of the country and is elected for a six-year term. The President appoints a prime minister and a cabinet of ministers comprising elected members of parliament. A significant issue addressed by Sri Lanka’s current government was the separatist war which commenced in 1983. This arose with a terrorist group known as the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) launching a war on the government demanding a separate homeland for Tamils in the north and east of the country. Since the 1980’s successive governments attempted to initiate peace talks with the rebel leaders which subsequently failed. In 2005 Mahinda Rajapaksa (the 5th executive president of Sri Lanka) declared an official war against terrorism and in May 2009 the LTTE was defeated militarily.

Sri Lanka participates in multilateral diplomacy, particularly at the United Nations, where it seeks to promote independence and development of the less economically developed world. Sri Lanka was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and a member of the Commonwealth, the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Corporation), the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank.

Sri Lankan law is derived from various sources which include Roman Dutch law, English law, Personal law and Sri Lanka's statute law. Roman Dutch law is regarded as the common law of Sri Lanka (Tambimuttu, 2009). However statute laws which comprise specific statutes of the country that have replaced Roman Dutch Law on particular matters may provide different rules. Personal law consists of Kandyan law governing the up-country Sinhalese population, Thesawalamai law applicable to Malabar descendants of the Province of Jaffna and Muslim law which applies to Muslims (Tambimuttu, 2009). The current constitution which was introduced in 1978 establishes a democratic, socialist republic in Sri Lanka, which is also a unitary state. The constitution of Sri Lanka entitles all citizens to freedom of thought
and religion, freedom of speech, assembly, association and occupation, freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention and torture and rights to equality which ensures that no citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion or place of birth (see LawNet, 2010). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a comprehensive review of the entire Sri Lankan legal system; however in what follows I will highlight key laws applicable to professional women workers in the country.

The Shop and Office Employees (Regulation of Employment and Remuneration) Act regulates the conditions of employment, hours of work and remuneration of all persons employed in shops and offices in Sri Lanka (Department of Labour, 2006). Therefore this act is most applicable to professional women’s employment in the country. According to this act maximum working hours are 45 hours a week and all workers employed in any shop or office should be allowed one and a half days of holiday every week with full remuneration (Department of Labour, 2006). However there are special provisions relating to the employment of women. For instance law 9, 32 1984 states that women shall not be employed in a shop or office before 6 a.m. or after 8 p.m. on any day unless she is employed in a residential hotel or in an office in an airport. Moreover organisations employing women to serve customers from behind counters are required to provide seating facilities for female employees (Department of Labour, 2006). This law appears to distinguish between male and female workers, constructing women as requiring special needs.

The Shop and Office Employees Act specifies all provisions relating to maternity for women in the country. For instance law 7, 60 1957 specifies that 12 weeks of fully paid maternity leave is available for permanent, seasonal and part-time female workers. All public, bank and mercantile holidays are excluded in computing maternity leave and women’s employment
contracts cannot be cancelled due to pregnancy confinement or any illness related to pregnancy (Department of Labour, 2006). Apart from maternity leave, however, there are no other state policies to help women harmonise home and work.

### 6.3 The economic context

Sri Lanka is a developing nation with a gross domestic product of about US$32 billion (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2008). This translates into a per capita income of US$1,600. Despite a civil war since 1983, economic growth in Sri Lanka has averaged around 4.5%. Sri Lankans expect the economic situation in the country to improve in the future due to the end of the civil war. Sri Lanka’s economy traditionally revolved around the agricultural sector. During post-independence tea, rubber and coconut were the main export earners and cultivation of rice was a main contributor to the economy. Nevertheless agriculture has lost its relative importance in recent decades. The service sector is now the largest component of GDP at 60% (Central bank of Sri Lanka, 2008). In 1978 Sri Lanka opened its economy to foreign investment. Import restrictions were removed, and the government encouraged foreign direct investment through providing various incentives such as tax holidays.

Currently, business process outsourcing is an area of interest. Call centres and accountancy services have been set up in various locations in and around Colombo. For instance HSBC USA recently set up a global call centre in Sri Lanka. High literacy rates and a relatively good command of English Language are strong points Sri Lanka offers to foreign investors. Furthermore approximately 50% of Sri Lankan students who have completed their higher education are trained in technical and business disciplines (Board of Investment Sri Lanka, 2011).
The Information Technology (IT) sector is given heavy importance by the government, where an IT park has been set up in Sri Lanka in pursuit of attracting leading foreign IT providers. The manufacturing sector is also important accounting for 28% of the GDP (Central bank of Sri Lanka, 2008). The textile and apparel industry is one of the most significant contributors to Sri Lanka’s overall economy. In the year 2007 this sector’s exports amounted to US$ 3,341mn, accounting for 43% of national exports and 56% of industrial exports (Central bank of Sri Lanka, 2008). Sri Lanka has one of the world’s lowest costs of production (Board of Investment Sri Lanka, 2011) and this has attracted foreign investors to set up manufacturing plants in the country. For example well-known brands such as Nike and Gap are produced in Sri Lanka.

6.4 The labour market

Over 7.0 million people were employed in Sri Lanka during the year 2009 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). 4.9 million (65%) were males and 2.6 million (36%) were females. These statistics suggest that the Sri Lankan labour market is male dominated, which is significant given that females outnumber males in terms of the total population. Of those employed, 42.3% work in the services sector, 25.1% in the industries sector and 32.6% in the agricultural sector (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). Looking at the same figures for the year 1992, the agricultural sector was the dominant sector employing 42%, while services employed 37.7% and the industrial sector employed 20% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). This indicates a downward trend in the agricultural sector, while the industrial and services sectors seems to have seen growth. Therefore there has been a shift in focus from an agricultural based economy in Sri Lanka to an industrial and service based one.
Looking at employment by gender and occupation, we see a very interesting picture. Women account for 50% of total clerical jobs, 34.7% of sales jobs and 33.3% of elementary occupations (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). However, only 2.0% of women as opposed to 9.6% of men are employed as plant and machine operators (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). This statistic suggests gender segregation within occupations in Sri Lanka. Interestingly women comprise of 63.2% of the total professionals in Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). This figure is indeed significant given that women constitute only 35% of the employed workforce. In the UK, only 12% and 15% of women were employed in professional and associate professional occupations in the year 2003 (Begum, 2004). Significantly women in Sri Lanka account for 20% of all senior officials and managers (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). This indicates that there are barriers to women’s advancement in Sri Lankan organisations since there do not appear to be a shortage in women’s skill sets. Given that women in Sri Lanka form the majority of professionals in the labour market, it is notable that they are so badly under-represented in senior managerial positions. However it is important to note that women account for only 11% of senior officials and managers in the UK (Begum, 2004) which is a much developed and progressive country than Sri Lanka. Thus in comparison to women from other countries Sri Lankan women enjoy privileged labour market status.

In the context of wages in Sri Lanka we see a somewhat contested picture. For instance it has been argued that women workers in Sri Lanka earn around 15 per cent less than men (Ajwad and Kurukulasuriya, 2002). However Sri Lankan women working as housemaids in Middle Eastern countries earn considerably high wages in comparison to males working overseas, and in the context of these figures Hakim (2006) suggests that Sri-Lanka closely follows Swaziland in terms of the lowest average gender pay gap in the world.
The Sri Lankan labour force has employment opportunities in state owned public organisations and private organisations. The traditional public sector was developed during colonial rule to provide administrative and professional services for the country. This once elite sector was eventually superseded by the emerging modern private sector in the early 1990’s. However a large number of people are still employed in public organisations. This sector in general is known to be poor paymasters who possess traditional and bureaucratic organisational cultures. In contrast, private organisations are considered to be high payers with western-influenced work cultures.

6.5 The socio cultural context

Key themes pertinent to the Sri Lankan socio cultural context are caste, social class, gender and culture, family and religion. In the paragraphs that follow I will explore each of these themes in turn.

6.5.1 Caste in Sri Lanka

The Sinhalese caste system is not rooted in religion or purity-pollution ideologies as in India, but is identified with ancient socioeconomic differences. The dominant caste ‘Govigama’ was a ‘farmer caste’ which constitutes about 50 per cent of the Sinhalese population (Ross and Savada, 1988). ‘Govigama’ was considered to be the most prestigious community due to being rich farmer landowners and pursuing an important and non-risky occupation as farming. The other three major castes are Karawa (warrior migrants from India who later turned into fisherman due to being settled around the coastal area), Dhurave (toddy tappers) and Salagama (cinnamon peelers) (Ross and Savada, 1988). These three castes together form around 30 per cent of the Sri Lankan population. There are also other less significant castes in the Sinhalese caste system such as Navandhaenna (silversmiths), Wahumpura (Jaggery-
makers), Bathgama (bearers), Berava (drum beaters), Panna (grass cutters), Kumbal (potters) and Radha (washers) who altogether comprise of a very small percentage of the total Sri Lankan population (Ross and Savada, 1988). Very few of these groups engage in their original occupations in current Sri Lankan society and some of these traditional occupations are now extinct. The caste system amongst Tamils in Sri Lanka also reflects occupational differences. For example the dominant Tamil caste, constituting over 50 per cent of the Tamil population, is the Vellalas. The Tamil Vellalas were cultivators. In the past, they formed the elite amongst Tamils and were largely landlords (Ross and Savada, 1988). Below the Vellala are the Karaiyas, whose original occupation was fishing and the Chettis who are a merchant caste (Ross and Savada, 1988). In the middle of the Tamil caste hierarchy is a group of small artisan castes and at the bottom of the system are a number of labouring castes (Ross and Savada, 1988).

With colonial rule, wealth was no longer coincident with caste lines in Sri Lanka. As noted before, the British created an educated class to provide administrative and professional services for the country. They created the legal profession, state health services and thereby the medical profession and the teaching profession (Ross and Savada, 1988). In addition to this, the expansion of commercial plantations created new occupations such as landowners, planters, transport agents, contractors, and businessmen (Ross and Savada, 1988). The Karawa, Salagama and Dhurave caste groups especially benefited from this emerging new order. These groups left their traditional occupations to accumulate wealth during the colonial period (Ross and Savada, 1988). In her book ‘From Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka’, Jayawardena (2002) talks about the rise of the new Sri Lankan bourgeoisie during colonisation who were westernised and accepted cultural norms of the British. Some of them converted into Christianity. These new professionals formed a
new class system in 19th century Sri Lanka, which replaced the original class based social divisions (Ross and Savada, 1988). Existing Sri Lankan society seems to place much emphasis on ‘social class’ which is based on broad socio economic differences.

6.5.2 Social class

Sri Lanka is a class based society characterised by significant socioeconomic divides between people. This is apparent in the unequal distribution of income within the country. For example the Gini index which measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption of expenditure) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution, was 47 for Sri Lanka in the year 2005 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2005). A Gini index score of zero implies perfect equality while a score of one hundred implies perfect inequality. A Gini score of 47 suggests that the distribution of income within Sri Lanka is largely unequal.

The prevalence of social class within Sri Lankan society is highlighted in the marriage proposals section of the Sunday Observer Newspaper in Sri Lanka. Newspaper advertisements have been and still remain a major source of spouse selection in Sri Lanka (Perera, 1991). Stated below are excerpts from the marriage proposal section of the Sunday Observer;

Well established Govi Buddhist parents seek partner for doctor daughter, 5’3 26 slim, fair and accomplished. Educated in a leading school in Colombo and inheriting over Rs 40M. Looking for educated partner (preferably a Doctor or Engineer) of similar status. Caste immaterial

(12th June 2009)
Leading business parents (Karawe Buddhist) looking for fair beautiful and educated
daughter from a respectable family for their handsome son, 30, 6’1, MSc Monash
University and sole proprietor of well-established family business. Preferably a
doctor, PhD or of similar education. Those residents abroad considered
(18th February 2009)

Both advertisements clearly illustrate the profound emphasis placed on social class within Sri
Lankan society. This is apparent in the phrase ‘looking for an educated partner of similar
status. The contents of the above adverts suggest that education, wealth and perhaps foreign
residency are proxies of social class status in Sri Lanka.

6.5.3 Gender

Women in Sri Lanka are often evaluated by society according to a moral-immoral dichotomy
where immoral behaviour includes pre-marital sexual relations, flirting, cursing,
disobedience, drinking and smoking, (Perera, 1991). As noted earlier in chapter 5, Sri
Lankan society does not expect women to go out alone in the night. ‘If a woman ventures out,
it is expected that she is chaperoned either by an elder or a male (even if he is
younger/smaller than the woman)’ (Wijayatilake, 2001:105). Immoral women are suggested
to be marginalised in the Sri Lankan community (Hewammane and Brown, 1999; Lynch,
1999). For Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims in Sri Lanka, the ideal woman is one who is
obedient, modest, and hard-working (Perera, 1991). The ideal man however is expected to
provide for and protect the females in his family at all times. Nevertheless despite the
patriarchy characterising Sri Lankan society, scholars argue that the socio-cultural position of
Sri Lankan women is favourable when compared to women of other South Asian countries
(Malhotra and DeGraff, 1997; Malhotra and Mather, 1997; Malhotra and Tsui, 1999).
Since the 1900’s and possibly earlier than this, Sri Lankan women have engaged in late marriages in general (Perera, 1991). In the context of survey findings of women from the Kalutara district in Sri Lanka, Malhotra and Tsui (1999) argues that there is widespread acceptance of relatively late marriages among daughters as well as mothers. In the context of survey findings of women in several urban and rural areas in Sri Lanka, Perera (1991) argues that the selection of a marriage partner depended more on the consent of the woman rather than on the choice of parents, although parents had wanted a partner of similar nationality and religion. Some of the parents in Perera’s (1991) study had been willing to leave the selection of a husband to their daughters, if their daughters were mature and could be trusted to make a choice which satisfied basic socio economic aspirations.

Certain scholars have linked the emphasis placed on education for women within Sri Lanka to their late marriages (Malhotra and DeGraff, 1997). Sri Lankan parents have equal educational aspirations for their sons and daughters (Jayaweera, 1991), more boys than girls drop out from school and the majority of university students are women. Among the elite in Sri Lanka, education of women has been seen as a means to obtain a husband from a good family (Malhotra and Tsui, 1999; Hakim 2000). Malhotra and Mather (1997) argues that Sri Lankan couples in general differ from North Indian couples in terms of educational gaps among spouses where the husbands in their research sample had been only as well as or perhaps even less educated than their wives.

Apart from education, social acceptance of employment for women is widespread within the country (Malhotra and DeGraff, 1997). This may also contribute towards the late marriages of women. Research findings suggest that most young Sri Lankan women intend to pursue employment after marriage (see Malhotra and Tsui, 1999; Malhotra and Mather, 1997). For
example, 83% of all daughters in Malhotra and Tsui’s (1999) sample had stated that a woman should continue to work after marriage and 52% had thought that they should continue to work even after having children. Perera’s (1991) survey findings similarly indicate that there is recognition of the role of women as co-providers in Sri Lanka. However Malhotra and DeGraff (1997) argue that women from the poorer families are more likely to be in the labour force than middle-class women due to financial need. Nevertheless they also highlight that wealthy women are more likely to be employed than less affluent women due to their upper class status. Here social networks of other employed family members was found to influence the distribution of job offers available to affluent young women, by providing them information about employment opportunities and contacts with potential employers. These findings highlight that Sri Lankan women’s employment patterns are integrally entwined with social class. However I would argue that education and employment of women in Sri Lanka are tied to ethnicity as well. For example Malhotra and DeGraff’s (1997) research findings indicate that young women of Muslim origin are less likely to be in the labour force than Sinhalese women. In sum, the above research findings suggest that Sri Lankan women have considerable advantages in education and employment although there is some variation between women of various ethnic groups and social classes.

Studies highlight that Sri Lankan women take active roles in decision making within their families. For instance, the majority of the married women in Malhotra and Mather’s (1997) sample had considerable input in family decisions on financial and social issues and played a big role in domestic issues. According to the authors married women in Sri Lanka gain domestic authority as they become older since motherhood give them status in their households over time (Malhotra and Mather, 1997). Significantly, the Sri Lankan couples in Malhotra and Mather’s (1997) sample had made household decisions themselves where
parents and in-laws had rarely controlled couples’ decisions. The authors argue that this contrasts with evidence from India where in-laws can be an extremely dominating (Malhotra and Mather, 1997).

Sri Lankan women may occupy favourable social positions as scholars imply, however it is important to acknowledge that the domestic division of labour within most Sri Lankan households remains conventional, even when women are at work. As Wijayatilake has argued ‘the gender ideology prevailing in Sri Lanka, could be broadly classified as one which perceives men as providers of income and security, while women are perceived as nurturers and care givers’. (2001:73) ‘Childcare and attending to the needs of the disabled and the elderly have been traditionally considered women’s work’ (2001:55), ‘failing the wife/mother, the reproductive tasks fall upon other females – such as daughter, female relatives or even a domestic aide’ (Wijayatilake 2001: 98). Perera (1991) similarly argues that women in Sri Lanka could depend on men for childcare and housework only in times of crisis. Indeed this could be expected to pose a significant challenge for women pursuing full-time careers. Affluent women in Sri Lanka are often able to employ their less affluent fellow citizens as domestic staff to help them in household affairs and childcare. However domestic employees are often uneducated and need to be closely supervised at all times. Perera’s (1991) findings highlight that upper class Sri Lankan women devote substantial time to managing and supervising household tasks. Given that the turnover of domestic staff is quite high it becomes necessary to repeat the recruitment, induction and adjustment process frequently.
6.5.4 Family

Sri Lanka can be classified as a society possessing strong extended family relations. Research on Sri Lanka is limited, but the few studies available (e.g. Freeman, 1996; Niles, 1998) suggest that Sri Lanka is a collective society. For example Niles (1998) argues that Sri Lankans are more ‘collectivist’ and less ‘individualist’ than Australians in the context of a cross national comparative research study of 131 Australians and 134 Sri Lankans. Here concern for the family, respect for elders and service to country and others had emerged as important goals for the Sri Lankans whereas Australians had placed much value on personal happiness, health, wealth, and a good job, although they had also shown concern for their families.

As mentioned before, Sri Lankan family systems are characterised by inter-generational caring obligations. Adult children often care for elderly parents, and grandparents regularly take care of grandchildren. In a country with poor state support and social security this two way caring system becomes mandatory for survival. Retirement or nursing homes for the elderly and day care for young children are not popular within Sri Lankan society. Only few options are available and these are affordable to only the affluent social classes. Moreover assigning the elderly or young children to communal care is often portrayed as shirking of one’s duties. Affluent Sri Lankans employ domestic staff to help in caring for the elderly and the young, while their less affluent counterparts manage through their own family networks. However the main responsibility for caring lies with the woman of the household in both affluent and non-affluent households.

Sri Lankans in general have high sense of duty towards family and therefore take their caring responsibilities very seriously. Perera (1991) argues that the respondents in her study had
clearly accepted their responsibilities for the aged although they also commented on the practical difficulties involved in doing this. Perera’s (1991) findings also highlight how elderly extended family members look after young children while their mothers go to work. Most of the older women in Perera’s (1991) study had welcomed the opportunity to help their young daughters achieve status through employment by taking over some of their family responsibilities. However some of these older women had also complained about the difficulties involved in having to manage young children in their old age. However, despite these occasional dilemmas, ‘sense of duty’ among Sri Lankan women (both old and young) remains very strong. Sri Lankan society perceives women who choose not to care to be immoral and/or unwomanly. Thus women in Sri Lanka are somewhat obliged to make the best of their dilemmas and go on with life. The value placed on caring could be partially influenced by the religiosity within Sri Lankan society. Sri Lanka is an extremely religious society, where values such as caring for dependents and respecting elders are highly regarded. A more in-depth discussion of religion in the context of Sri Lanka is provided in the following section.

6.5.5 Religion

Sri Lanka is a predominantly Buddhist society where over 75% of the population is Buddhist. Since Buddhism was an important element of my empirical data, I will give a brief preview into Buddhist philosophy and the practice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in this section. Buddhism is a key social institution in Sri Lanka where all television and radio channels commence and cease the day with Buddhist prayers. Furthermore all days significant to the life of Buddha (more than 15 days annually) are declared as national holidays in Sri Lanka (Deegalle, 2006). The sale of meat and alcohol that the Buddha condemned are prohibited on these days. Political events commence with the blessings of Buddhist priests and this is
broadcasted live on all media. The Sri Lankan government takes numerous measures to commemorate and promote Buddhism within the country by renovating ancient temples, constructing large Buddha statues, publishing books on Buddhism and celebrating days significant to the Buddha (see Perera, 1988).

According to Schalk there is no concept as ‘religion only’ in Sri Lanka since Buddhism is the ‘religion of the state’ and the ‘royal state ideology’ (2006: 143). Indeed a large number of Buddhist laypeople dominate the political scene in Sri Lanka and Buddhist monks participate in the political sphere as well (see Deegalle, 2006). Significantly the sangha (Buddhist monks) are considered to be above the state in Sri Lanka. For example, presidents do not commence office or embark in political missions without the consent and blessings from leading Buddhist monks. From a historical perspective, rulers of Sri Lanka have always been subordinate to Buddhist priests where some kings had even offered their kingdoms as alms to the Sangha (see Gombrich, 2006:169).

Scholars argue that Buddhism forms a core part of the national identity of the Sinhalese: the major ethnic group in Sri Lanka (see Gunawardana, 1990; Bartholomeusz and de Silva, 1998). According to Neumaier (2004) an ancient Pali Buddhist scripture (the Mahavamsa) claims that the mission of the Sinhalese people is to be the ‘torchbearers’ of Buddha’s teachings: the dhamma. The contemporary Sinhalese Buddhist community in Sri Lanka are indeed faithful disciples of the Buddha. For example devoted pilgrims regularly crowd Buddhist temples and give alms to monks, a large lay community observe the eight precepts of Buddhism (see Nyanatiloka, 2000) on Poya days, and children are given a sound Buddhist education from tender age (see Perera, 1988). Buddhism is also a key part of Sri Lankan people’s daily lives where occasions such as marriage and house warming are accompanied
by protective chants prescribed by the Buddha, Buddhists monks are summoned to homes and offered alms for death anniversaries (see Deegalle, 2006), and new-born children are taken to temples to be blessed by Buddhists priests. Early sociological thinkers such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim believed that secularisation would occur as societies modernised and relied on science and technology to explain the world rather than religion. According to Giddens (2009) the degree of secularisation in a society can be evaluated according to the level of membership in religious organisations, the extent to which religious organisations maintain their social influence in society and people’s sense of religiosity. In Sri Lanka Buddhist temples are celebrated social institutions which enjoy high financial donations from the general public. Moreover these institutions are regularly crowded by faithful pilgrims. It is in this sense that I would argue that Sri Lanka is indeed an unsecularised society.

Buddhism is the oldest religion in the world. It was founded in the 6th century and originated in Nepal (Giddens, 2009). There are two major schools of Buddhism: the Theravada and Mahayana. I focus on Theravada Buddhism which is the teachings of the oldest school practiced in Sri Lanka. Buddhism advocates that nothing is permanent (see Nyanatiloka, 2000) there are no immortal souls but an inter-temporal revival of human existence (Schumann, 2007). In other words all beings in the universe including humans, gods and animals are deemed to be in an iterative cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Buddhism promotes a belief in ‘Karma’ which asserts that nothing happens by chance but is based on the law of cause and effect (Niles, 1999). In other words, what you are in this life (human, god or animal) is due to the good and bad deeds you have committed in your past lives and thus you enjoy the merits of good deeds and pay for your sins. One cannot escape the consequences of actions in former existences, but in present life, everybody has a free will to decide her actions (see Schumann, 2007; Gombrich and Obeysekere, 1988).
Life, according to the Buddha is marked by pain decay and suffering (see Nyanatiloka, 2000). For example, people suffer as they get ill, as they grow old and feeble and as their loved ones depart from them. The Buddha argues that suffering can only be eliminated when one stops craving and escapes the iterative cycle of birth decay death and rebirth (see Schumann, 2007). The path towards cessation of suffering and therefore ultimate salvation is deemed to be moral conduct throughout the course of one’s existing life, intense mental concentration (meditation) and developing of one’s wisdom which the Buddha defines as realising the impermanence of everything in life and freeing oneself from all desires and attachments which gives rise to rebirth in the universe (see Payutto and Olsson, 1995; Daniels, 1998). This little preview highlights that ‘Buddhism’ is rather different to other religions. In contrast to Christianity, Islam and Hinduism which promotes praying to god(s) for blessings and forgiveness, Buddhism prescribes individual responsibility for salvation (Niles, 1999).

Max Weber is one the first and few scholars to look at Buddhism in the context of work. In a co-authored book ‘the religions of India’ Weber and his colleagues argue that Buddhism is inconsistent with capitalist development in society (see Weber et al., 2000). First, notions of Karma and fatalism in Hinduism and Buddhism lead to people accepting their lot and make them less susceptible to believing that they could change their existing social status (see Weber et al., 2000). Second, individuals in a society influenced by Buddhism concentrate solely on themselves in pursuit of reaching nirvana, and this may prevent the social interactions necessary for economic development (see Weber et al., 2000; Schumaan, 2007). Third, there is no 'messianic prophesy' in Buddhism that gives people hope that better things could happen to them (Weber et al., 2000) and Weber contrasts Buddhism and Hinduism to Calvinism which he saw as compatible with capitalist development. According to Weber (2008) the doctrine of predestination in Calvinism (i.e. the doctrine that God determines good
prospects for some and bad for others) made Calvinists curious about their fate and thus led them to seek reassurance in attempting to succeed in their economic affairs, in the belief that material prosperity and success in vocation were signs of election (see Giddens, 2009).

While Weber's (2008) arguments are certainly insightful, a number of scholars have disagreed with Weber's arguments regarding Buddhism and capitalist development (see Rhys Davids, 1984; Daniels, 1998; Schumaan, 2007). For instance, with regard to Weber's first argument, Gombrich and Obeysekere (1988) counter argue that Buddhism is not as fatalistic as Weber et al. (2000) implies since there are no fixed states like heaven, hell, gods and demons in the Buddhist universe. The authors imply that the notion of all beings (man, gods and animals) going through an iterative cycle of life and birth, where one’s circumstances depend on her own actions rather predestination, would influence individuals to believe that they can change their prevailing social statuses.

In relation to Weber’s second argument, scholars argue that ordinary people in Buddhist societies do not detach themselves from material desires (see Obeyesekere, 1963; Rhys Davids, 1984). In other words these authors make the point that there are gaps between the theory and practice of Buddhism in Buddhist societies, and therefore one cannot speculate about economic development in societies based on abstract religious philosophies (see also Daniels, 1998). A few scholars highlight aspects of Buddhist theory which they expect to foster capitalist development. For instance, drawing from old Theravada texts Schumaan (2007) argues that Buddhism emphasises that all individuals should actively perform good actions and thus it would be in compliance with the Buddha’s teaching to acquire property and wealth honestly which could be used to perform good deeds such as giving alms to the poor. Daniels (1998) argues that values of Buddhism such as discipline, concentration,
tolerance and exertion could encourage economic development. Other scholars have similarly proposed that frugality and resourcefulness in livelihood specified by the Buddha may lead to saving and investment decisions similar to that expected from Calvinism (see Levy, 1992; Mendis, 1994). Although these arguments are intriguing, they are not based on empirical research evidence.

Finally, with regard to Weber’s third argument, Schumaan (2007) emphasises that religion is not a reliable indicator of a nation’s economic development, since recent economic growth rates in predominantly Christian European and North American countries tend to be low while countries with Buddhist or Hindu philosophies are experiencing high economic development (see also Rhys Davids, 1894). The rapid economic development of China and India which are predominantly Buddhist and Hindu countries illustrate that certain Asian economies have moved faster than Europe, and therefore Buddhism and Hinduism is not completely inconsistent with societal level capitalist development as Weber and his colleagues advocate. While provocative, Weber’s work was based on abstract theorising about religion rather than empirical evidence on how Buddhism is practiced in societies.

Niles (1999) is a scholar who has empirically examined Buddhism in the context of work. Her approach is in contrast to Weber et al. (2000) and other scholars (see Levy, 1992; Mendis, 1994, Daneils, 1998; Schumaan, 2007) whose arguments are largely based on Buddhism in theory. Niles (1999) conducted a study of the meaning of work between two countries; Australia (a country influenced by Christian values) and Sri Lanka (a country influenced by Buddhist values). On the basis of her findings Niles (1999) argued that Buddhist religious beliefs influenced the Sri Lankans in her study to work hard and be self-reliant: both constructs which are positively related to capitalist development. However the
author also notes that the Sri Lankans in her study did not always expect hard work to lead to success and suggests that this pessimistic outlook in life may be influenced by their Buddhist faith as Weber et al. (2000) has suggested. However she doesn’t examine this ambivalence explicitly in her paper.

In sum, this review of the literature leads me to suggest that existing understandings of the influence of Buddhism on work and career is extremely limited. While there is considerable theoretical debate about Buddhism and capitalist development, scholars are divided in their opinions about the influence of Buddhism on economic advancement. Significantly what we are lacking is empirical data on how Buddhism plays out in societies to take this debate further.

6.5.6. Life world of the Sri Lankan elites

The upper class Sri Lankan lifestyle revolves around prestigious leisure clubs in Colombo which have operated since the colonial area, providing recreation and entertainment to colonial administrators and their families. Currently most upper class families visit these clubs 2-3 times a week on average. Women chat to their friends while their spouses and children enjoy a sport, go swimming or watch a cricket match at the club. Some women use the gymnasium facilities in the club regularly or go walking in the grounds. Apart from these leisure clubs, the elite classes are also regularly frequent at restaurants, coffee shops and the seaside. Since there are a large number of public holidays in the country, Sri Lankans enjoy long weekends on a regular basis. During these weekends most families head towards the coastal resorts with their friends.
Another activity significant to the lives of elite Sri Lankan women is shopping. Indeed women meet friends at malls regularly to update their wardrobes. Clothing is very important to Sri Lankan people. Since Colombo is a very small city where most people know each other, most elite Lankans would not want to be seen wearing the same outfit twice. In this sense women’s clothes symbolises their families’ social status and it is not unusual for parents and spouses to spend a great deal of money on their daughters and wives’ clothing. The upper classes almost never wear traditional Sri Lankan clothes (sari for women) except at weddings. The latest fashions in western clothing are frequently seen around Colombo.

Sri Lankans love music and dance, especially ‘baila music’ which originated from Portuguese colonial administrators. Thus elite families frequently go to hotels to listen to live music groups play and attend balls organised by various external bodies to dance. A number of upper class women also attend night clubs regularly but in these cases they are almost always chaperoned by a male. Apart from going out Sri Lankan people entertain guests at their homes regularly, often on short notice. It is not unusual for women to be prepared for guests at any time, particularly at meal times (see also Rana et al., 1998; Rout et al., 1999). The upper classes also celebrate occasions on a grand scale let it be birthdays, graduations, anniversaries or weddings. Many families would host at least 100 guests on average for a birthday party and over 500 guests for a wedding. Weddings are celebrated at five star hotels but some families host their personal parties at such star hotels as well.

As noted earlier, Buddhist temples are another significant social institution that Sri Lankan’s lives revolve around. Apart from attending temple on Poya days (days dedicated to the Buddha), upper class families provide cooked food to monks (dhane) at least once a month. These meals are prepared at home and the female members in the house go to the temple to
serve the food before noon. As mentioned before, monks are often invited to homes to partake in the food and friends and family are invited to witness the event and obtain blessings from the monks (see Deegalle, 2006). These events which are known as almsgivings are regular social occasions in upper class homes. Most elite families are also patrons of famous temples in Sri Lanka and therefore take significant roles in organising occasions at temples. Women (especially older women) are usually the main personalities behind these events. Apart from demonstrating religious faith, being the main organisers of these events also symbolises social status.

Overall the contents of this section highlights that the upper classes in Sri Lanka enjoy a very privileged lifestyle which is centred on events, occasions and social obligations. However women are required to take responsibility for these activities and maintain the social image of the elite classes.
Synthesis of key research issues

In this section I will emphasise the tensions, problems and gaps underlying the literature reviewed and highlight the key issues I intend to explore further in my empirical study.

Women at work

An array of research studies has demonstrated work organisations as profoundly gendered, defined in terms of a distinction between men and women (Britton, 2000), and posing considerable challenges to women’s careers. Scholars highlight how women in western countries engage with their organisational contexts and in doing so, how they reproduce gendered elements of workplaces such as ideal worker norms (see Gambles et al., 2006) by shaping their personal lives to suit organisations and explaining fellow women colleagues’ unsuccessful career outcomes in terms of their domestic commitments (Lyng, 2010; Bolton and Muzio, 2007). However, little is known about how women from less economically developed, non-western nations enact their careers within their work contexts. Indeed the careers literature has been described as largely ethnocentric (Cohen, Arnold and O’Neil, 2011), focusing mainly on individuals situated in more economically developed countries in the West (Cohen and El-Sawad, 2009).

Given that research into South Asian work organisations has found gender to be an even more salient issue than it is in the West, highlighting in particular masculine ideas of leadership (Gupta et al., 1998; Jain and Mukherji, 2010), a general lack of family-friendly policies (see Poster and Prasad, 2005), centrality of social capital to career advancement (Saheb, 2011) despite women being left out of social networks at work (see Budhwar et al., 2005) and a view that women’s presence in organisations is still somewhat exceptional – or at least outside the norm (Nath, 2000; Budhwar et al., 2005), I emphasise that there is an urgent
need to better understand how women in these contexts manage themselves within organisations and develop their careers.

Thus I intend to fulfill this significant gap in the extant literature by focusing on how professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers within their work contexts. To my knowledge no studies to date have addressed women’s experiences at work in Sri Lanka. Given that scholars describe the Sri Lankan context as largely patriarchal (Lynch, 1999) where women are significantly under-represented in senior posts despite comprising the majority of professionals in the labour market (see Department of Census and Statistics, 2009), I except Sri Lankan women to find it extremely challenging to develop their careers within their organisations. However, given that there is widespread acceptance of education and employment for women in Sri Lanka, and scholars argue that Sri Lankan women enjoy much privileged socio cultural statuses than women in other South Asian contexts (see Malhotra and Tsui, 1999; Malhotra and DeGraff, 1997), I expect Sri Lankan women’s experiences at work to be somewhat different to women from other South Asian countries.

Managing home and work

I argued that home life is significant to understanding women’s careers, given that women around the world bear the major brunt of domestic affairs and childcare in their households. In the context of women in the West, I highlighted domestic labour and childcare as significant constraints on these women’s career development. However, what I see as particularly interesting about the South Asian context is women’s domestic obligations encompassing not only spouse and children but extending to extended family members as well (see Rout et al., 1999; Rana et al., 1998; Poster and Prasad, 2005). Moreover, studies
suggest that organisational constraints such as ideal worker norms may be more severe in South Asian work contexts than in western work contexts (see Poster and Prasad, 2005) with little support for work-life harmonisation at organisational and state levels (see Budhwar et al., 2005; Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004).

In the light of these findings I argue that it is significantly important to see how South Asian women perceive the relationship between home and work and manage themselves between the two spheres in their careers. While studies highlight the challenges South Asian women face in their careers due to conventional gender roles (see Budhapriya, 2009), obligations to extended families (Rout et al., 1999; Rana et al., 1998) and implementation gaps in work-life policies in organisations (see Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004), scholars do not address how women deal with these constraints or manage the interplay between home and work in their careers. Thus in my empirical study, I seek to address how professional women in Sri Lanka manage themselves between their home and work spheres in the light of both constraints and opportunities which emanate from them.

Character and women’s careers

A number of studies provide insights into the perceived moral dangers for women in South Asian contexts when working night shifts and travelling home from work (see Phadke, 2007). Scholars have argued that women’s presence alone in the night represents a diversion from traditional norms (Patel, 2006) since women are supposed to reside mainly in private spaces (Phadke, 2007; Patel and Parmentier, 2005). This is of special concern to women at work because increasing numbers of women are required to work non-standard hours with the emergence of the new global economies in many South Asian countries: especially the BPO sector. Scholars highlight how working women in South Asian contexts maneuver around
prevailing norms of moral conduct for women by attempting to articulate themselves as ‘culturally appropriate’ yet ‘modern’ women by conforming to normative sexual behaviors, exercising the right amount of freedom for women (see Lynch, 2007; Radhakrishnan, 2009; Hewamanne, 2008) and striking a balance between work and family (Radhakrishnan, 2009). One noteworthy study of working class women in Sri Lanka notes that these women regularly divert from the ‘good girl’ ideal which they shape through self-control due to concern over their own and their families’ reputations (see Lynch, 2007).

Scholars talk about how employers attempt to protect female employees from perceived moral dangers and preserve their moral honor by means such as arranging private transportation and male escorts for them (see Radhakrishnan, 2009; Phadke, 2007). However, a few studies note that employers are unwilling to hire women since they are obliged to see to their moral safety (see Nath, 2000; Budhwar et al., 2005). Given that increasing numbers of women are joining the professional workforce in the new global South Asian economies which continue to prescribe traditional roles for women, it becomes significant to address how women in these contexts account for good character in their careers and enact their careers in the light of norms of moral conduct for women.

To summarise, our understandings of the social contexts which South Asian women perceive to impact on their careers and how these women engage with these contexts in order to progress in their careers is limited. Thus I intend to fulfill this significant gap in existing literature by answering the following research questions in my study:
1. How do
   - Organisational contexts
   - Home and family
   - The wider context of Sri Lanka

impact on the way professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers?

2. How does moral character play out in the context of professional women’s careers in Sri Lanka?
Chapter 7: Theoretical perspectives

In this chapter I will explain the broad theoretical approach underlying this thesis: social constructionism.

7.1 Social constructionism

Social constructionism is a relativist epistemological position based on the notion of the social world being constructed by individuals themselves through their social practices (Cassell and Symon, 2004), rather than being a fixed entity which is external to individuals and impacts on them in deterministic ways (Cohen et al., 2004). As Weick has argued, people are part of their environments and through their actions they contribute to the creation of ‘the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face’ (1995:31). Socially constructed reality is therefore seen as a continuous and dynamic process where reality is constantly reproduced by people acting upon their representations of it. In this section I will explain the social constructionist paradigm in relation to six distinguishing features. Here I will be drawing on the work of particularly Vivian Burr (1995; 2003) who in my opinion has explained social constructionism without bias towards sociological or psychological traditions.

The primacy of social processes

According to social constructionism, the people we are and the world around us are the product of social processes (Cromby and Nightingale, 1999). In other words the values, practices and structures of meaning that constitute us are deemed to be socially produced. For example, gender from a social constructionist point of view would be seen as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Gender construction starts with individuals being assigned to a socially agreed gender category on the basis of what their genitalia looks
like at birth (Lorber, 1994). Following this assignment, people treat those in one gender
category differently from those in the other, and children behave different in response to this
differential treatment (Lorber, 1994). Language plays a central role in social construction
(Cromby and Nightingale, 1999). For example, in an English speaking country, traits such as
honest, proud, humble and angry becomes available to us because of language. We learned
these concepts upon our entry to this world and we were compelled to understand ourselves
and our relationships in terms of these concepts.

Scholars disagree over the extent to which the social realm can be privileged over other
determinants of human life. For instance some scholars (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992,
Edwards, Ashmore and Potter, 1995) seem to believe that reality refers to a world which is
solely discursively constructed. Others however (e.g. Harre, 1990; Burr, 2003) do not deny
the existence of a reality beyond text but argue that the only way we can understand reality is
by discovering people’s perceptions of it. I am partial towards this view.

**Historical and cultural specificity of knowledge**

Social constructionism implies that individuals’ understandings of the world must be seen as
historically and culturally situated and changing across time and space (Young and Collin,
2004; Burr, 1995). The idea of people’s meaning making being culturally situated portrays
them as relational beings (see Gergen, 1999; 2001). As Crotty (1998) argues individuals’
group affiliations influence the way they perceive themselves, their relationships and others.
Studies have drawn attention to cross cultural variations in individuals’ meaning making. For
example Adya’s (2008) findings highlight how western and South Asian women differ to
each other in their interpretations of gender discrimination within the IT workplace in the US.
Most South Asian women in Adya’s (2008) sample had not identified ‘genderization’ in their
US workplace while most American women had perceived gender stereotyping and discrimination. Adya (2008) argues that a national culture of high power distance may partially explain lower perceptions of unfavourable workplace attitudes among South Asian women. She also suggests that many years of societal inequality faced by women in India may explain their relatively favourable perceptions of the American workplace. Adya’s (2008) findings illustrate that individuals’ meaning making is historically and culturally situated as stated by the social constructionist paradigm (see Burr, 1995).

**Construction of knowledge is a negotiated process**

In social constructionism the construction of knowledge is seen as a negotiated process where certain interpretations are privileged over others. While all constructions claim to be factual some constructions are likely to be seen as more truthful than others. However this can vary in relation to specific cultures (Burr, 2003). For example natural events such as tsunamis are likely to be interpreted in terms of science rather than in terms of religion in most societies in this world, although there may be a few societies who may interpret a tsunami in terms of gods’ doings.

Practical conditions of life are seen to provide a suitable climate for particular common sense views prevailing at any one time (Burr, 2003). Once these views become available culturally, they may be used by powerful groups to advance their interests (Burr, 2003). For example, women are represented as relational beings and the main nurturers in their households, due to them bearing children (Gilligan, 1982), and this has successfully been used by men to maintain their privileged positions in organisations (see Gatrell, 2010; Lyng, 2010).
Knowledge and social action goes together

Social constructionism states that knowledge and social action go together where prevailing versions of events give rise to certain actions and marginalises alternative ones (Burr, 2003). For instance leadership being defined in terms of traits such as aggressiveness and risk taking implies potential leaders to perform masculinity and marginalises non-masculine leadership styles commonly associated with women. Similarly women being constructed as feminine require women rather than men to perform femininity at the workplace often entertaining corporate clients and smoothing corporate deals (see Bolton and Muzio, 2007), which at times leaves them out of core work processes in the organisation. Thus dominant knowledge clearly has implications for what we can do and what we should do, although there may be variations between different cultures and historical time periods. However we often do not see that our actions are influenced by dominant meanings or acknowledge the existence of alternative meanings. According to Burr (2003) dominant meanings are firmly entangled to social practices that over time they become objective realities to individuals who experience them as such in the course of their socialisation (see Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Nevertheless the dominant position of a particular perspective cannot be ensured for eternity. According to Burr (2003) marginalised voices will eventually emerge and contest dominant views. The rise of feminism which led to alternative discourses of femininity and masculinity emerging during the 20th century can be taken as an example to illustrate this point. Moreover men’s invisible power in organisations is brought to attention in academic literature (see Lewis and Simpson, 2010) and stories about women who have fought their way to the top of organisations by demonstrating their superior technical knowledge (see Alvesson and Billing, 2009) are becoming increasingly common in current society, although there may be some variation between different nations.
Iterative relationship between individuals and society

The essence of social constructionism is in highlighting the iterative relationship between individuals and society. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue individuals continuously construct the social world through their actions, which then becomes the reality to which they must react to. In other words individuals and society are in a continuous dialectical process of influencing each another, where social action impacts on society and thereby maintains or transforms existing social arrangements that people confront.

However it is important to note that human beings may not be able to transform the social world overnight in any way they choose since the world has already been constructed by those who preceded them and therefore may assume a status of objective reality for others (see Berger and Luckmann, 1966). As noted before, dominant understandings are often deeply entwined to social arrangements that challenging these understandings would involve resisting their associated social practices as well. People can therefore expect to find some degree of resistance to their attempts to change society since groups in society whose privileged positions are threatened by transformation may fight back (Burr, 2003). For example, Lewis and Simpson (2010) talk about how men in organisations would be likely to react to women who display technical know-how, good leadership skills and demonstrate that work and family could be achieved together, since their privileged positions in organisations would be threatened by these new entrants who bring with them alternative ways of doing things.

I am not stating that social change is altogether impossible but rather that it is likely to be time consuming and incredibly challenging. Although individuals continuously construct the world they live in, they must also to some extent live their lives within the frameworks of
meaning which precedes them (Burr, 2003). Berger and Luckmaan’s (1966) early work captures the dialectic relationship between individuals and society extremely well in highlighting how individuals simultaneously construct society and how society continuously shape individuals.

Self and agency as dynamic and dialectic entities

Social constructionists talk about individual ‘self’ in terms of identity, which according to Burr (2003) is a social concept. In other words elements which make up human identities such as sane/insane can be seen as socially produced concepts rather than essences of a person. Burr (2003) argues that a person’s identity is constructed by interweaving of many different threads such as age, class, gender etc. These components are deemed to be constructed through the discourses that are present in society which people draw upon in their communication to others. Here ‘discourses refer to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events’ (Burr, 2003: 64).

However it is important to note that a social constructionist view doesn’t imply that identities are simply imposed on people; rather people have an element of choice in constructing their identities. In other words, for each thread of our identity there is deemed to be a limited number of discourses on offer out of which we might construct ourselves, since our class, gender, ethnic origin and so on may impose limitations upon the kind of person we can claim to be (Burr, 2003). However within these limited discourses, we have a certain element of choice regarding the ones which we draw on to construct our self in interaction with others. According to Burr (2003) people can resist identities unacceptable to them and claim positions in alternative ones. To illustrate this point through an example, if a woman becomes
aware that her identity as a full-time worker represents her as a less dedicated mother to society, she could frame her paid work in terms of providing for children with the financial imperatives of work. This is likely to represent her as a ‘good mother’ in society.

Having described the social constructionist paradigm in relation to six key features, I will explain how career would look from a social constructionist point of view and justify my choice of a social constructionist approach for careers research.

**Career from a social constructionist view**

From a social constructionist point of view ‘career’ has been defined as constituted by an actor in interaction with others as she moves through time and space (Cohen et al., 2004). I see two key implications of taking a social constructionist view to career research. First, social constructionism contextualises career (Young and Collin, 2004) by highlighting how individuals and their societies are deeply implicated with each another and continuously and iteratively impact on each other. This perspective would therefore look at career in relation to the various social contexts within which it is embedded such as organisational, familial and wider socio cultural contexts. Thus it would highlight how individuals’ careers are both enabled and constrained by the contexts they are situated within and enable scholars understand people’s career meaning making in relation to their social contexts. Second social constructionism which highlights the iterative relationship between individuals and society has the potential to illuminate how individuals contribute towards maintaining and/or redefining the contexts within which they operate through their career enactment.

Third, by taking a critical stance towards taken for granted understandings and attempting to understand how certain understandings come to be seen as natural, this perspective would
encourage researchers to question overarching notions of acceptable career behaviour (Cohen et al., 2004). In other words social constructionism would entail understanding of career at a deeper level rather than a surface level (Lewis and Simpson, 2010) and help scholars move away from reductionist understandings.
Chapter 8: Methodology

In this chapter I address the methodology adopted in this study.

The objective of this study is to examine how professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers. Implicit here is the assumption that individuals are inseparable from their social contexts (see Burr, 2003) and the social worlds individuals are situated within are therefore central to understanding their lives (Giorgi, 1970). I am interested in how women perceive the social contexts that impact on their career development, and explain how they engage with these social contexts in the course of pursuing their careers. Therefore I intend to collect rich and detailed data from a selected number of Sri Lankan women to construct theoretical frameworks for understanding women’s careers in a deep and meaningful manner. In this sense, theory development will be grounded in the data collected. The methodological approach I adopt in this study can be broadly described as qualitative. Here I use semi structured interviews as the main research tool. In the paragraphs that follow I will first introduce the qualitative approach to research and then explain the use of semi structured interviews in my study. Finally I will talk about the research process of this study focusing on the specific processes of sampling, data collection and data analysis.

8.1 The qualitative approach

A qualitative approach involves studying things in their natural settings (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997) and attempting to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The goal of qualitative research is not to discover objective facts or generalise, but rather to explore the depth, and complexity of phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Myers, 2000). Central to the qualitative perspective is the focus on holistic understanding (Silverman, 2009). In contrast to traditional positivistic methods
which tend to collect and analyse data from parts of a phenomena, qualitative or interpretive approaches takes a totalised approach to research ensuring comprehensive understanding of the whole.

Many qualitative researchers would agree that reality is socially constructed (see Cassell and Symon, 2004). Therefore qualitative approaches seek to describe and interpret the meanings people attribute to phenomena and situations. In this sense qualitative research is often referred to as ‘interpretive’. Qualitative researchers typically see social worlds as inextricably linked to individuals (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and therefore attempt to understand people’s accounts in relation to the social, political and economic contexts they are situated within (see Golafshani, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997). In other words, qualitative approaches focus on contextualising findings. Unlike positivistic methods which aim for objectivity, qualitative research places subjectivity at the heart of the research process. Since qualitative studies are used to understand and describe the world of human experience, it is rather impossible for the researcher to escape the subjective experience (Myers, 2000). In the course of trying to understand participants’ world of experience, the researcher enters into interaction with respondents and gets involved in the process of negotiating meaning. Thus the research is inevitably influenced by the values of the researcher (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The qualitative research process is active and dynamic unlike much quantitative research. For instance, research questions are often redefined in the light of respondents’ conceptualisations and emerging insights in the data collection process. Moreover the inquiry begins with an open mind since the goal of qualitative research is to discover and explore rather than test
predetermined relationships. Hammersley and Atkinson explain the flexibility and dynamism characterising the qualitative research process through their notion of progressive focusing:

Ethnographic research should have a characteristic funnel structure, being progressively focused over its course. Over time the research problem needs to be developed and transformed, and eventually its scope is clarified and delimited, and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about: and not uncommonly it turns out to be about something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems (1997:206).

I will discuss the notion of progressive focusing in relation to this particular study in the forthcoming paragraphs.

8.2 Semi structured interviews

The principle method of investigation in this study is the semi structured interview. Semi structured interviews are loosely structured and comprise many open ended questions (King, 2004). The key issues the inquirer intends to address during the interview are usually identified in advance. However the majority of questions are created during the interview itself, allowing both the interviewer and the respondent to introduce their own topics, probe for details and discuss issues in depth (King, 2004). In other words, semi structured interviews are a two way dialogue which maintains both flexibility and control. Such interviews give the researcher insight into respondents’ interpretations of phenomenon, and enables her understand the reasons behind interviewees’ understandings (King, 2004). The focus here is on gaining insight into specific situations and actions (see Kvale, 1997) rather than discovering general opinions. Semi structured interviews vary in length, number of
participants and style of setting which can range from telephone interviews to interviews via the internet and face to face interviews.

In the spirit of a holistic, contextualised approach, I spent significant time interacting with respondents before and after the interviews. For instance I spent weekends at interviewees’ homes, accompanied them shopping and hosted them at my own home. I will talk about this in more in detail under data collection. While these were circumstantial meetings rather than deliberate attempts to interact with respondents and collect data, extensive interactions with participants helped me understand their worlds and thereby get a thorough grip on what my respondents were trying to say to me.

8.3 Issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research

Issues of reliability and validity are central to quantitative research. Although these issues are equally important in the qualitative tradition, the ways they are addressed in this context differs to the quantitative context.

8.3.1 Reliability

In quantitative research, Joppe defines reliability as: ‘the extents to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study’ (2000:1). Kvale (1989:79) similarly states that ‘reliability is a question of whether repeated investigations of the same phenomenon give a similar result’. In qualitative research however, particularly under a constructionist paradigm, individuals’ perceptions are taken to be dynamic rather than static (Golafshani, 2003). Moreover it is recognised that there are likely to be multiple interpretations of phenomena (Golafshani, 2003). In this sense, repeated investigations cannot be expected to yield similar findings.
In the context of qualitative research, Hammersley defines reliability as ‘the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions’ (1992: 67). In the light of this definition Silverman (2009) argues that qualitative researchers should document their procedures to show their audience that their methods were reliable. Here, ‘detailed data presentations which make minimal inferences are always preferable to researchers’ presentation of their own (high-inference) summaries of their data’ (Silverman, 2009: 287). Silverman defines low inference data as long data extracts which include the ‘question preceding a respondent’s comments as well as the interviewer’s continuers’ (2009: 287). I adhered to Silverman’s (2009) notion of reliability in this thesis by attaching two detailed interview transcripts to the appendix. These transcripts should give readers insight into the raw material from which I derived my interpretations. Moreover in the data chapters of this thesis I have capitalised data as much as possible by using large chunks of original data rather than little isolated snippets, and provided relevant contextual details. This should help readers gauge how I interpreted my data. As Bryman (1988) notes extended transcripts help the reader make her own interpretations about the topic in concern.

In qualitative interviews, researchers can also ensure reliability by employing co-researchers (see Golafshani, 2003). Co-research involves using several peer researchers to interpret the data to improve the understanding of constructions of others (Johnson, 1997; Golafshani, 2003). Although this process is certainly virtuous it is not possible to use co-researchers in a PhD study. However in my study I discussed my data at length with my PhD supervisor. These discussions were extremely helpful to gain insight into multiple interpretations of my data.
8.3.2 Validity

In quantitative research validity determines whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In qualitative research validity is ‘the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers’ (see Hammersley, 1990: 57). Thus as Silverman (2009) argues qualitative researchers have to convince their readers that their findings are based on investigating all their data rather than parts of it. This is called the problem of ‘anecdotalism’ (see Silverman, 2001; 222-3). Silverman talks about five interrelated ways qualitative researchers can avoid ‘anecdotalism’ and aim for valid findings. First he argues that researchers must leave aside initial assumptions about data and ‘overcome the temptation to jump to easy conclusions just because there is some evidence that seems to lead to an interesting direction’ (2009: 279). This implies that the researcher must examine all her data before making interpretations which lead to Silverman’s (2009) second and third points.

Under the notion of ‘constant comparison’ Silverman (2009) argues that researchers should test emerging hypotheses by examining them across all the data, and under the notion of ‘comprehensive data treatment’ he argues that all data should be incorporated into the analysis and generalisations should be applied to all the cases in the relevant category. While the objective of my research study was not to generalise findings across the women in my sample, I adhered to Silverman’s notions of ‘comprehensive data treatment’ and ‘constant comparison’ by moving to and fro between the empirical data and examining emerging ideas across each individual data transcript. My motive was to acknowledge exactly how many women in early, mid and late career talked about particular ideas and how many did not. Since there were only 24 respondents and thus 24 interview transcripts in this study I found it relatively easy to do this.
To give an example, in contrast to other respondents in the study, Diluni blatantly stated that she did not believe in norms of respect to elders and unconditional compliance to them. I noted this unusual occurrence in my thesis rather than ignoring it because it was just one atypical instance. This covers Silverman’s (2009) fourth point which states that researchers should give the reader an indication of the frequencies of particular occurrences. Indeed I took great effort to demonstrate frequencies of occurrences throughout my thesis, where I have for instance noted exactly how many respondents talked about norms of good behaviour for women in their careers, and how many women stated that extended family members helped them develop their careers. The Nvivo software package which automatically notes frequencies in coding data was very helpful in doing this.

I also investigated the unusual cases further, which covers Silverman’s (2009) fifth point that researchers should critically investigate deviant cases thoroughly. For instance, in examining Diluni’s transcript in detail it became clear to me that Diluni had experienced serious troubles from her mother-in-law which appeared to have influenced her to reject notions of respect to elders in Sri Lankan society. I documented this finding in my empirical data. As Diluni’s case I examined all other deviant cases thoroughly and noted possible explanations for deviance where they were available in the data.

8.4 The research process

The research process of this study can be described as circular and iterative. Following a comprehensive review of the literature on women’s careers in the West and South Asia, I wanted to find out about the social contexts that impacted on professional women’s careers in Sri Lanka and to understand how these women enacted their careers in the light of these social contexts. Although I was particularly interested in how work organisations and home
and family influenced the way Sri Lankan women developed their careers, I wanted to give my respondents the opportunity to introduce their own topics and talk about their career stories freely rather than provide answers to my questions. Thus although I prepared an interview guide (see King, 2004), this guide was used as a template to remind me of the key points to address at the interview, but not as a rigid schedule. In the interviews, respondents unfolded their career stories over time, in their own words. During the process I frequently asked follow up questions and probed for greater depth and clarifications. By the end of each interview I made sure that I covered all of the issues in the interview guide, while allowing for emergent ideas and concerns.

After the first four interviews it became clear to me that respondents wanted to talk about very different issues to what I had anticipated. For instance, although I expected most women to talk about issues of gender discrimination at work and work-life balance, respondents kept talking about norms of good character for women in Sri Lankan society and explained how they enacted their careers in the light of these norms. Despite being a native Sri Lankan woman I never expected this. Nevertheless after the first four interviews, I subsequently discussed these issues with my supervisor, read the limited literature on moral character and women’s careers and amended the interview guide to include these issues of interest afterwards. As King explains the development of an interview guide does not end at the first interview but is continuously ‘modified through use’ (2004:15). Throughout the course of the data collection, issues of interest raised by respondents were addressed in subsequent interviews with other respondents. The final set of research questions emerged only after all the interviews were fully transcribed and coded. These questions were the basis of subsequent analysis. I will explain these stages more fully in the forthcoming sections.
8.5 Recruitment of participants

This research study is based on data collected from qualitative interviews with 24 Sri Lankan women who were qualified to degree level or above. From a social constructionist perspective, a large number of sample subjects are not required to ensure population representativeness, since it is assumed that practices are shared within a social context (see King, 2004; Dick, 2004). Moreover as King argues ‘the relativist epistemology also means that gathering a large volume of cases cannot guarantee the credibility of a study, since we can never define all possible readings of a text, and no one reading should be privileged over another’ (2004: 16). My aim was to construct a small but diverse sample. I will explain the composition of the sample in greater detail in the forthcoming sections.

My sampling approach can be described as non-probability, purposive sampling. Non probability sampling means sampling without random selection methods (see Henry, 1990). Purposive sampling is when the researcher targets a particular subset of people who meet her precise criteria (see Crawshaw and Chambers, 2001). In the case of this study my focus was on professional women from Sri Lanka and therefore I restricted my sample to only highly skilled Sri Lankan women; those who held transferable and internationally recognised cultural assets which could be identified in credentials as result of long periods of time in education and training (see Savage et al., 1992). Within this category however I sought to include women from both public and private organisations, a variety of occupations and diverse age-groups since I intended to explore career over the life-course.

The entire data collection of this study took place in the UK where my sample comprised Sri Lankans visiting friends and family in the UK. I decided to undertake the data collection in the UK due to three reasons. First I could discuss the interview data with my supervisor at
Loughborough on a regular basis and access more literature in the UK than in Sri Lanka. Second I had extensive links to the Sri Lankan expatriate community in the UK who were often visited by friends and family from Sri Lanka. Third being away from the Sri Lankan context may encourage respondents to reflect on their circumstances critically, since they are looking at their lives in Sri Lanka while they are out of the country.

The first step I took was notifying the Sri Lankan community in the UK that I was looking for women resident in Sri Lanka for my PhD research. The Sri Lankan community in the UK is very tightly knit and I was fortunate to have three aunts and two uncles who had been living in the UK for the past 15 years and knew almost all fellow Sri Lankan living in the areas they resided: namely North Yorkshire, Essex, London, and Cambridge. Sixteen respondents were friends and family of friends of my relatives in the UK. Six respondents were friends and family of Sri Lankans residing in Leicester (the town I lived at the time of the fieldwork) and family of Sri Lankan students at Loughborough University. Two respondents were friends of my friends in Sri Lanka who visited the UK on a conference and on business. In sum all respondents were identified through personal contacts. On one hand, knowing these women helped me develop rapport easily during the interviews. Moreover even though most interviews exceeded three hours these women were extremely patient and cooperative, probably because they were obligated to be. However there were downsides as well which included respondents assuming that I knew everything about them. Furthermore my relationship with many respondents exceeded the duration of the interview where I was indeed obligated to maintain contacts with the new friends I had made. I will discuss these issues in detail in the forthcoming sections.
8.6 Description of the sample

As mentioned before, my sample consisted of 24 professional Sri Lankan women. According to O’Neil and Bilimoria’s (2005) classification eight women were in early career (age 24-35), eight in mid-careers (age 36-45) and eight in late careers (age 46-60). Although I see classifying women into age based career stages as rather reductionist, I used this approach for my study because almost all existing women’s career models are based on equal numbers of women from three age based career stages, and these scholars argue that women’s preoccupations differ according to their career stage (see Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005; O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Twelve women in my sample worked for public sector organisations at the time of the interviews. Twelve worked for private organisations. I wanted to have equal numbers of respondents from private and public organisations because of the contrasting pay structures and organisational cultures between public and private organisations in Sri Lanka. As noted in chapter 6 private organisations are considered to be high payers and possess western-influenced cultures where superiors are addressed by first names and work-life policies are widely available. Public organisations in contrast are known to be poor paymasters who possess traditional and bureaucratic organisational cultures. A few respondents had switched between public and private organisations during the course of their career and therefore this classification is simply their status at the time of the interview.

All respondents were qualified to graduate level or equivalent. Around half were Masters qualified or were reading for a postgraduate course at the time of the interview. Three women planned to enrol in postgraduate study. One woman had a PhD. With the exception of three respondents, all women identified themselves as Sinhalese Buddhists, the majority ethnic and religious group in Sri Lankan society. One respondent was a Tamil Hindu (the second largest minority ethnic and religious group in Sri Lanka), one respondent was a Catholic Burgher
(descendants of early European colonial administrators) and one respondent was a Catholic Colombo Chetti (descendants of early Indian travelling salesmen). Although I took great efforts to diversify the ethnic composition of my sample, my contacts were restricted to mainly the Sinhalese Buddhist community that I belong to.

Nineteen respondents were married and had children. Those who were not married (all in early career) were actively seeking marriage partners. One respondent was separated after a brief marriage. All except one respondent were from Colombo. As I stated before, all of the women experienced significant social and economic privilege: where they lived in their own houses in residential neighbourhoods or rented high profile condominiums in the centre of the city. Almost all ran at least two cars and employed chauffeurs and domestic maids. The spouses of the respondents were employed in high profile professional occupations or ran their own established business ventures. Respondents’ children were studying in prestigious private schools in the country and/or in renowned universities in the UK, USA and Australia. The table below highlights a brief career profile of each respondent of the study. The women were given pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes and the names of their organisations were disguised.

**Career profiles of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Career stage</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Occupation/Designation</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>BA (Sheffield) UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niranjala</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Personal Banker</td>
<td>IBSL Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Career Stage</td>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayathri</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Doctor (House officer)</td>
<td>MBBS (Moscow) Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sashi</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
<td>BA (Colombo) Sri Lanka, MSc (PIM) Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherangi</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Assistant Brand Manager</td>
<td>HND (Edexel) UK, CIM UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shamila</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>BSc MSc (Waikato) New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshini</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>BEng (McGill) Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kishani</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Legal Officer</td>
<td>BA (Kelaniya) Sri Lanka, LLB (Colombo) Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charka</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Doctor (Registrar)</td>
<td>MBBS (Colombo) Sri Lanka, MRCP 1 (Colombo) Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irangi</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>University Lecturer (Senior)</td>
<td>BA (Colombo) Sri Lanka, PhD (Monash) Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Career Stage</td>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandana</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Bank Manager</td>
<td>IBSL Sri Lanka, SLIM Sri Lanka in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radika</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Senior Engineer</td>
<td>BEng (Kingston) UK, MEng (Imperial College) UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanili</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>BSc (Portsmouth) UK, MBA (Wales) UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diluni</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Training &amp; Development Consultant</td>
<td>BSc (Colombo) Sri Lanka, MBA (Manchester) UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalpana</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Food &amp; Beverage Manager</td>
<td>BA (Colombo) Sri Lanka, HCIMA (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nishanya</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Finance Manager</td>
<td>ACMA UK, MBA (Wales) UK in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaneetha</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Senior Professor</td>
<td>BSc (Peradeniya) Sri Lanka, PhD (Lancaster) UK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Career Phase</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rupika</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Director Bank Operations</td>
<td>Sri Lanka, MSc (LSE) UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanthi</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Permanent Secretary: Cabinet ministry</td>
<td>BA (Colombo) Sri Lanka, SLAS Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilhari</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>Assistant Director Statistics</td>
<td>BSc (Colombo) Sri Lanka, MSc (Warwick) UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Director HRM</td>
<td>PgDip in Mngt (Colombo) Sri Lanka, MA HRM (Leicester) UK in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhavi</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Head of Strategic Planning</td>
<td>LLB (UCL) UK, FCMA UK, MBA (PIM) Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devika</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Director Special Projects</td>
<td>FCMA UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anouka</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Late career</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>General practitioner/ Head of counselling</td>
<td>MBBS (Colombo) Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Socio-demographic profiles of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Career</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Spouse’s occupation</th>
<th>Domestic arrangements</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natasha/EC</td>
<td>Single (Engaged)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Spouse to be: Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Lives with parents</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niranjala/EC</td>
<td>Single (Actively looking for partner)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Lives with parents among large extended family</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayathri/EC</td>
<td>Single (Actively looking for partner)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Lives with mother and sister</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sashi/EC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 daughters: 4 and 3 years</td>
<td>Marketing Manager (Private sector)</td>
<td>Maiden aunt lives with them. Extended family members visits regularly.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherangi/EC</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Lives with parents and elder brother</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Son(s)</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Relationship with Son(s)</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shamila/EC</td>
<td>Married (divorced)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Ex-husband: Engineer</td>
<td>Lives with parents</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshini/EC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 son: 2 years</td>
<td>Captain: Sri Lankan Airlines</td>
<td>Lives with in-laws. Father visits her regularly.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kishani/EC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 son: 18 months</td>
<td>Marketing Manager (Private sector)</td>
<td>Mother-in-law &amp; maiden aunt visits her daily.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charka/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 daughters: 4 years and 18 months</td>
<td>Consultant Doctor</td>
<td>Parents and mid-aged brother lives with them. In-laws visit them regularly. They spend weekends with in-laws.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irangi/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 daughter: 5 years</td>
<td>Company Director (Public sector)</td>
<td>Parents lived with them. They visited in-laws regularly.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandana/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>Father-in-law</td>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radika/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Tamil Hindu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanili/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Operations Manager (Private sector)</td>
<td>Colombo Chetti, Roman Catholic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diluni/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Daughters</td>
<td>Consultant Doctor (Private sector)</td>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalpana/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Company Director (Private sector)</td>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nishanya/MC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Bank Manager (International bank)</td>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Family Composition</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaneetha/LC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 Son: 20 years</td>
<td>Retired University Professor (Public sector)</td>
<td>Relatives lived with them when son was young.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rupika/LC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 children: 27, 24, 23</td>
<td>Retired Government Agent</td>
<td>Relatives lived with them when children were young. Her elderly father spends every weekend at their home.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanthi/LC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 children: 26, 22, 22, 22 years</td>
<td>Commissioner General (Sri Lanka civil service)</td>
<td>Her father lives with them.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilhari/LC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 sons: 15 and 12 years</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer (Public University)</td>
<td>Parents and mid-aged sister lives with them.</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle/LC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 children: 26 and 21 years</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Father lived with them.</td>
<td>Burgher, Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Visits Parents</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhavi/LC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 son: 20 years</td>
<td>Director (Multinational organisation)</td>
<td>Visits elderly parents daily</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devika/LC</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 children: 21, 19 and 17 years</td>
<td>CEO (Private sector)</td>
<td>Mother-in-law lives with them</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anouka/LC</td>
<td>Married (widowed)</td>
<td>2 children: 24 and 22 years</td>
<td>Air Force Pilot (Killed in action)</td>
<td>Mother-in-law lives with her</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.7 Collection of data

The data collection of this study was undertaken in parallel with data analysis. However in this chapter I will explain the two processes separately to fully examine key aspects of each. As mentioned before, the principal method of data collection for this study was semi-structured interviews. Each respondent was interviewed for 3-4 hours. All interviews took place at the homes of respondents’ friends and family in the UK. Each interview commenced with a brief discussion about the nature and purpose of the research process, explaining issues of confidentiality and respondents signing the consent form. Participants were also invited to ask questions at any point during the interview process. Thereafter basic demographic information such as the respondent’s date of birth, occupation, place of work, designation, parents and spouse’s occupation, numbers and ages of children and town of residence was collected. In most cases I already knew participants’ basic background information since I
had (as I explained before) spent time with them and their families prior to the actual interview. However for formality sake I recorded this information anyway. A typical interview commenced with the following open ended question:

Please tell me about how your career to date unfolded. You can start from the time you left school and tell me about who/what influenced your choice of career, education and training you pursued, organisations you worked for, promotions and turning points in your career. I’ll interrupt you in between if I have any questions.

This opening question was intended to encourage respondents to talk freely about their career experiences over time. However they were frequently interrupted in-between with follow up questions and clarifications. Typical questions used were ‘can you give me an example?’ or ‘could you please explain what you just said?’ On many occasions these questions led to respondents making sense of their career experiences at the interview itself. For example a number of women made statements such as ‘actually thinking about it now I guess I wasn’t ready for it’. While these statements enabled me fully understand respondents life-worlds, a number of respondents went off the point on numerous occasions and I had to politely bring them back to the track. A few respondents however were rather uncommunicative (see King, 2004) and therefore responded to the opening question with a precise description of their CV. In these cases I took each milestone in their CV in turn and asked numerous questions about each. My questions prompted most of these respondents to talk about their experiences more freely. However one respondent continued to simply answer the questions I asked very briefly and therefore I continued to ask her many questions.
One of the most important aspects to undertaking qualitative research is the establishment of rapport. Therefore I took great effort to make my respondents feel relaxed and comfortable enough to share their own experiences (see Liamputtong, 2007). Phrases such as ‘that’s very interesting’ supplemented with appropriate eye contact and nodding of the head to acknowledge respondents’ statements, prompted women to tell their stories with vigour. As I mentioned before, I knowing respondents on an informal basis enabled me develop rapport quite easily at the interviews.

All the interviews in this study were note-recorded. This was due to 22 out of 24 participants requesting their statements not to be digitally recorded. Although the consent form respondents signed before the interviews clearly indicated that confidentiality would be guaranteed and I personally assured them of this, most women were very hesitant to be digitally recorded. This may be because I belonged to the same social circles that they did and knew their families and friends as well. Also in the context of my personal experience, I have observed Sri Lankan women to be incredibly concerned about how they present themselves to society and so I was not too surprised about my respondents’ reluctance to be digitally recorded. Thus I decided to note-record the interviews using short hand since I wanted participants to be relaxed and comfortable at the interviews and share their experiences openly. It was indeed difficult to note record qualitative interviews when respondents shared detailed stories rather than answering a predetermined set of questions. I achieved this by pausing after each question to record the verbatim. Notably, this did extend the length of an interview to over three hours in most cases. However, the interviewees were extremely cooperative as I mentioned before. I transcribed each interview immediately after the actual interview so that I would not forget anything which was said and done. And in each case the full transcript was presented to the interviewee to make sure that everything she said
had been correctly captured. At this stage any discrepancies in understandings were corrected to ensure validity.

8.8 Management of emotions in qualitative research

Emotion becomes a significant issue to qualitative research, given that personal contact between the researcher and participants can lead to researchers becoming deeply involved in their subjects’ lives (see Bellas, 1999). For example studies have reported that researchers become emotionally disturbed in data collection when witnessing psychologically distressed respondents and thereby experience insomnia, anxiety and depression (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). However despite the significance of emotions in the qualitative research process, emotional labour experienced by researchers has received only limited attention in the extant literature. In this section, I will discuss the role emotions played in the data collection of this study, and I will also explain how I attempted to manage my emotions in pursuit of maintaining neutrality as a researcher.

Throughout the data collection process, there were several times that participants’ stories touched me so deeply and opened my eyes to the tragedies people experience in life. I found it extremely difficult to detangle myself from these stories that I could actually hear these respondents’ voices in my head for days after their interviews. For instance Kishani spoke about how she lost both her parents to cancer within three months and was left all alone in the world with nothing but her work and her faith in Buddhism to help her go on in life. Being the only child in a family myself this story upset me and made me think about how I would have dealt with a similar experience myself. I didn’t think that I would have had the courage to go on. Similarly Charka talked about how her husband had an extra marital affair and how she wrapped herself in her work as a means of coping with it because she didn’t want to leave
him and jeopardise her family’s reputation. I met her husband a couple of minutes before the interview and he seemed to be very nice, so I was shocked by what I heard about him. Moreover I was extremely uncomfortable and almost resentful towards her husband when I had to socialise with him after the interview. This event remained in my mind for weeks and I realised that I was speculating about how I would have reacted if I was in her shoes or if someone dear to me was experiencing a similar situation.

A particular challenge I faced was managing my emotions while respondents were telling me these stories. Hochschild (1998: 9) defines emotion management as ‘an effort by any means, conscious or not, to change ones feeling or emotion’. On one hand I was reminding myself that I was a professional researcher and that I should not get drawn into various emotions which will distract me from my purpose (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). On the other hand however I found it difficult not to sympathise with respondents and indicate to them that I shared their sorrow. Scholars have argued that the ability to be empathetic is one of the main skills needed to undertake qualitative research (for more detail see Liamputtong, 2007; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Minichiello et al., 2000). While I was able to empathise with my participants it was a challenge not to get drawn into the emotion while being empathic, especially when I was face-to-face with a person experiencing emotion.

In the extant literature scholars talk about emotions in research in the case of sensitive research topics such as bereaved parents (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). In the context of my experience I would argue that emotions are not limited to only sensitive research topics. My respondents’ emotional stories were often beyond the point of my research area. Most women just got drawn into these stories while they were talking about their career experiences. I knew that I was supposed to divert their interest back to my area of interest
but I found it extremely difficult to do so. Scholars such as King (2004) talk about strategies interviewers could use to divert participants’ attention back to the research process. One such strategy is making statements such as ‘that’s very interesting but could we get back to what we were talking earlier on’. In my case I simply could not cut off a person in distress, it seemed almost inhuman to do so. I just had to listen to what they said. Once they had finished talking about an emotional experience it took almost a superhuman effort on my part to carry on with asking the next question. Sometimes it seemed as if I was more affected by their stories than they were.

Hubbard et al. (2001: 134) argues that researchers need to find strategies to manage not only the emotions of the participants but also their own emotions. One strategy I used was constantly reminding myself that this was not about me and therefore I should not get involved. In the case of certain participants I sensed that they had unconsciously disclosed very personal information to me which they would not have revealed if they had more time to think about it. Thus I felt that they would prefer me not to get too affected by what they said. Concern towards my participants’ pride helped me go on with the interviews. However this did not mean that respondents’ words left my mind after the interview. My situation was particularly difficult because I could not get out of my participants’ lives after the interview. Since almost all respondents were close contacts of my friends and family and I interviewed most women at homes of people known to my family, I was often obliged to socialise with my respondents and their hosts after the interviews. Moreover in three instances I interviewed respondents in Scotland, Sussex and Devon and I had to stay overnight at their families’ homes since it was too late for me to get a train back to my home in Leicester, and their families who are well known to my own family would not hear of me staying at a hotel.
I found myself closely observing my respondents’ interactions with their families and trying to assess their personal situations. Even after transcribing my data I found myself dwelling about certain participants’ lives. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers can use colleagues, trusted friends and family members for support in such situations. I however was not able to do this since most of my close friends and family knew my participants and therefore I would not be able maintain confidentiality if I had I done this. However time helped me get over my emotions as did the interesting data which emerged as part of my research.

8.9 Relationships in the research process

Relationships between researchers and participants are a significant aspect of the qualitative research process. In qualitative research, researchers are not separate from the study with limited contact with participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), but rather they are quite entangled in participants’ lives. Indeed qualitative researchers have been warned about over-identification and over-rapport with participants (see Glesne, 1999).

Although each interview was limited to 3-4 hours, my relationship with most respondents was not limited to 3-4 hours. Most of my participants were on holiday in the UK and I was one of the few people they knew in this country. Therefore many women were eager to meet me again during their stay. One respondent requested me to take her shopping and indeed I was obligated to do this in return for her interview and the hospitality her family in the UK had shown me. Another respondent visited me in my own house in Leicester since she wanted to see the Midlands and I took her sightseeing around Warwickshire and Staffordshire. I had a new-born baby at this time and was struggling to harmonise my work with my domestic obligations. However I could not say no to her since her family in the UK
very kindly hosted me overnight in Sussex after my interview. One respondent in late career who was a mother of an undergraduate student at Loughborough University continued to call me regularly to check up on her adolescent son. At one point of time I was rather overwhelmed by the new friends that I had made and the favours I had to return.

Scholars have acknowledged that researchers become involved in a reciprocal process which involves giving something to research participants in return for their time (see, for example, Liamputtong, 2007 for a discussion). Here they refer to researchers sharing their knowledge and stories with participants during the interview. My study provides valuable insights into existing literature in revealing that relationships between the researcher and respondents are not limited to just the duration of the interview. It is also important to note that my obligations extended to respondents’ friends and families in the UK who introduced them to me. These people kindly hosted me at their homes for meals after the interview and even drove me back to the train station that I was obligated to keep in touch with them afterwards. Months after the interviews I hosted two families from Northallerton and Sussex at my own house in Leicester when they travelled to Midlands. I was simply returning the favours they had bestowed upon me. My research experiences make a significant contribution to the extant literature in highlighting that relationships in qualitative research could extend beyond immediate participants.

8.10 Doing insider research

Insider research refers to when researchers conduct studies on populations of which they are also members (Kanuha, 2000). In this study I was doing insider research because I belonged to the target research group: professional Sri Lankan women. There were both advantages and disadvantages of being an insider to the group researched. In this section I will talk about
these more and explain the strategies I adopted to overcome the obstacles of insider status. Being an insider certainly gives easy access to groups and allows greater understanding of the target population than a non-native researcher (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Despite these merits insider research has its potential problems. In the case of my study the most significant challenge I encountered was when respondents assumed that I already knew of what they were talking about and therefore failed to explain their experiences fully (see Karra and Phillips, 2007). Comments such as ‘you know what I am talking about don’t you’ were common. In some instances I noticed that I annoyed a couple of women by asking them to explain statements they assumed that I would understand as a native Sri Lankan woman. In such situations I explained to participants that my research position required me to capture their exact interpretations in their own words and that their interpretations may differ to mine. This explanation encouraged most women to talk in depth and detail without thinking about whether they were telling me about something I already knew.

The second problem I encountered in doing insider research was overlooking important aspects of my study since I found it obvious (see Karra and Phillips, 2007). For instance my respondents repeatedly talking about how important it was to be a woman of good moral character to survive in workplaces in Sri Lanka was not at all exceptionally interesting or unique to me when I started to analyse the first few interview transcripts. On the contrary it was just the way it was for me. I realised my tendency to overlook remarkable aspects of my data only when I discussed the initial data with my supervisor who pointed out aspects of my data which stood out from the extant literature. As Fay (1996) has stated, others outside the research experience might be able to appreciate the broad picture, and conceptualise the experience better than the insider researcher. I was indeed fortunate enough to identify my tendency to be oblivious to certain data due to my insider status at an early stage of the
research process. According to Asselin (2003) it is best for the insider researcher to gather data by assuming that she knows nothing about the area of research. However I feel that this is easier said than done. In my case I took great effort to discuss my data with other colleagues as much as possible. I also constantly compared my data to existing literature and tried to draw out the differences and similarities between the Sri Lankan, western and other South Asian contexts. In other words I attempted to extract the unique features of my data on professional Sri Lankan women’s career experiences.

8.11 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is being aware of how the researcher influences the research process, and acknowledging the impossibility of the researcher remaining outside the research. Reflexivity thus involves exploring ‘the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research’ (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999: 228). There is increased awareness that ‘how knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to what the claims are’ (Altheide and Johnson, 1994: 486). Scholars recognise the importance of being reflexive about how they interpret their data (see Devine and Heath, 1999; Henwood and Pidgeon, 1997; Olesen et al., 1994). After all, research interpretations are valid only if the researcher is able to demonstrate how they were reached (see Mason, 1996).

There are broadly two types of reflexivity: personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity. Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways the researcher’s values, experiences, and beliefs have influenced the research (Willig, 2001). Epistemological reflexivity involves thinking of how the assumptions about the world made by the researcher in the course of the research, and the research design of the study have shaped the findings of
the research (see Willig, 2001). In the following paragraphs I will talk about my experiences of personal and epistemological reflexivity in relation to this research study.

In the context of personal reflexivity, I attempted to be conscious about how my emotions towards respondents and their stories, and my insider knowledge and experience in the Sri Lankan context influenced the way I analysed and interpreted my data. For instance I noticed that I shared opinions with certain participants and was unconsciously emphasising these in my research (see Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). However I noticed this tendency quite earlier on in the study and therefore took care to ensure that my personal feelings towards respondents and their opinions did not affect the way I interpreted my data. Looking for contradictions in the data and minority views also helped me avoid this bias in research.

As I stated before in the previous section, my insider knowledge and personal experiences of the Sri Lankan context led me to emphasise certain strands of my data and overlook others (see Karra and Phillips, 2007). For instance a couple of respondents talked about gender discrimination and work-life balance in Sri Lankan organisations. Both topics were dear to me due to my own experience. During conversations with my PhD supervisor who is a very experienced qualitative researcher, I noticed that I was dwelling on the data relating to these two areas and somewhat paying less attention to areas such as ‘respectable femininity’ which was a significant theme running throughout my entire data set but not remarkable to me. After identifying this tendency, I paid careful attention to all the details in my data as Karra and Phillips (2007) advises: even the most insignificant details. Furthermore, as noted before, I always attempted to discuss my data with fellow colleagues as much as possible to identify aspects of my data that others find interesting, unique and/or significant.
With respect to epistemological reflexivity, despite the theoretical position I adopted (social constructionism) understanding individuals’ accounts as socially and culturally situated (see Burr, 2003) I found it difficult to go beyond women’s words to understand the sociocultural significance of their words. This could be due to my educational background in mathematics which influenced me to think in rather straightforward terms. I saw my respondents’ utterances as seen as clear pathways into their lived experiences (see Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) and therefore struggled to think beyond their words. My supervisor pointing out my tendency to skim through the data and emphasising the need to look at the total picture and move from description to theorisation helped me do justice to the theoretical position of my study.

With reference to the methodology, my sample comprised only professional women in Sri Lanka which represents a small segment of the country’s total population. I was aware that all my findings of this socially privileged group of women were not necessarily generalisable across the Sri Lankan population. I reminded myself of this constantly in the process of writing up my findings. In my study, respondents’ statements were note recorded rather than digitally recorded and the data was analysed by predominantly one researcher. In this sense there was much scope for bias since it was mainly my view which framed the entire research. However as I mentioned before, I attempted to discuss my findings with others as much as possible to ensure that I drew in other viewpoints as well. Apart from my supervisor I engaged in many discussions with fellow PhD researchers from Loughborough University and Warwick University and academics from Sri Lanka. These discussions were indeed extremely helpful. Nevertheless as Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue although researchers attempt to be reflexive they may not realise how they unconsciously experience events.
8.12 Data analysis

The main technique used to analyse the data in this study is template analysis. King defines template analysis as ‘a varied but related group of techniques for thematically organising and analysing textual data’ (2004b:256). A template is basically a list of codes representing the themes identified in the textual data. Once the initial codes are defined, sections of data texts are allocated to the appropriate themes. Codes are continuously modified and new codes added to the template as the researcher reads and interprets the data texts. This technique enables the researcher sort large amounts of data efficiently. Software packages such as Nudist and Nvivo 8 are often used for template analysis. I chose template analysis because it is a very flexible approach that does not come with rigid procedures and prescriptions. This technique permits the researcher to customise the data analysis according to her own requirements (see King, 2004b). In the paragraphs below I will explain how I used template analysis in my study.

Using template analysis

As discussed earlier, immediately following each interview I transcribed my data (based on the notes taken during the interviews) myself. In addition to this I also recorded my own observations of each interview which included my thoughts of the respondent in separate memos. I continued to read and reread the transcribed data and my personal notes throughout the data collection process. As I stated before, data collection and data analysis in this study were parallel and iterative processes. I started to formally list the key themes pertaining in my data only after all 24 interviews were conducted. The initial key themes included work-life policies, ideal worker norms, gender stereotyping and discrimination, domestic maids, children, extended family members and career capitals. These themes were identified in
relation to the literature reviewed, my personal experience with the Sri Lankan context, and the frequency that themes were raised by interviewees.

After the initial themes were established, I took one interview script and started to manually assign the script’s data to the themes to check whether the initial template worked. When I was satisfied with my initial categories, I added a couple of other categories to the template as well. This was however only a pilot procedure. I did not want to code all the interview scripts manually since I anticipated it to be a tedious and time consuming process which a software package could easily accomplish. Thus I chose the Nvivo 8 software package to code my data. In the process of coding the data, new themes were created, existing themes were split into sub-themes and certain themes were amalgamated together with other themes and/or deleted from the template altogether (see King, 2004b). For example the theme extended family members were split into subthemes of extended family members enabling women’s careers, extended family members constraining women’s careers and duties towards family members. Likewise the themes high cost of living and negative economic climate were amalgamated into one. The template therefore was continuously modified in the process of coding. Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1997) notion of ‘progressive focusing’ describes this process where categories were defined rather loosely in the beginning but became more specific as the analysis progressed. The final template is attached to the appendix of this thesis.

After coding the data, I read and re-read the contents of each theme and wrote the contents into a story while retaining the original quotations based on notes taken. In other words I produced a ‘coherent story’ of each data theme (see King, 2004b). This continued to develop my understanding of each theme. However I was careful to focus on the relationships and
associations between themes rather than analysing the individual themes alone. Although the Nvivo 8 package had the facility to identify links and relations between various data themes (see Gibbs, 2002) I opted not to use this facility. In my view, using a software package to detect patterns and associations in qualitative data seemed to be rather crude and reductionist. I preferred to gauge the overriding patterns and relationships between the data themes by reading and dreaming about the data myself and trying to understand the ‘big picture’. Thus apart from the coding I used the Nvivo 8 software package only to conduct analytical operations such as identifying the frequencies pertaining to each theme. I did not use the software package to make any analytical judgements.

Examining the data in the light of existing literature and constructing new frameworks for understanding

At the end of the analysis I was left with a large amount of interesting data, not all of which I could include in my PhD thesis. Therefore I was left with the task of choosing the themes which were most relevant to my purpose of my research, to explore further in conjunction with the extant literature. Given that the purpose of my study is to develop a conceptual understanding of how professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers, I decided to focus on how work organisations, home and family and wider contextual structures in Sri Lanka (which includes labour market and economic conditions, occupational structures and religious ideologies in the country) impacted on women’s career enactment. In addition I chose to explore the career implications of notions of ‘respectable femininity’ highlighted in almost all my respondents’ career stories.

The research questions were therefore formulated as follows:
1. How do

- Organisational contexts
- Home and family
- The wider context of Sri Lanka

impact on the way professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers?

2. How does moral character play out in the context of professional Sri Lankan women’s careers?

Having finalised the areas I intended to explore in my thesis, I went back to the literature. Although I had done substantial literature reviews prior to my data collection, there were some new areas such as ‘respectable femininity’ I had to read about further. However after reading the relevant literatures I confronted the most difficult task in this entire PhD thesis: examining my data in association with existing literature and considering how my findings of professional Sri Lankan women’s careers extend current understandings of women’s career enactment. This task took substantial time and meticulous reflection. Extensive discussions with my PhD supervisor helped me immensely in this process.

Based on my findings, I developed a typology of women’s career strategies. The initial typology was tested in relation to the data generated in this study. In other words, it was applied to the accounts of all twenty four respondents. The typology was continuously revised in the light of each data transcript. There were only very few disconfirming and exceptional cases (see Silverman, 2009) and these were analysed carefully and refuted.
Chapter 9: Findings

Chapters 9 – 12 present the research findings. In chapter 9 I examine women’s aspirations for life and career.

9.1 What do women want?

This chapter explores women’s hopes and wishes for career and life. Respondents’ aspirations coalesce around four key themes: material aspirations, symbolic aspirations, psychological aspirations and relational aspirations. Underpinning most of these was women’s desire to make their families proud of them.

9.2 Material aspirations

In the context of material aspirations, the women in this sample spoke about their wishes to make money, and their desires for security and high level employability in career.

9.2.1 Financial imperatives

Seventeen women aspired to make ‘big money’ in their careers. Natasha explains:

It is nice to feel that you are capable of making a lot of money (Natasha, 25)

Two respondents emphasised that people work to earn a living:

You work to earn a living after all. I don’t buy people who say that they work for passion or to get over boredom. I mean nobody would spend over 40 hours a week on work and go through all that work stress for passion. You need money to survive – it is obviously one of most important things in the world (Michelle, 51)
Whereas Michelle linked remuneration with survival, other respondents felt that good financial imperatives were essential to maintain their upper class lifestyles in Colombo:

*It would also be nice to be able to make good money rather than just enough to support myself. It is a high lifestyle in Colombo* (Shamila, 32)

Shamila defined the high lifestyle in Colombo in terms of regular dining out, entertaining and attending social events. Madhavi similarly emphasised that how two high incomes are mandatory to keep up with the active social life in Colombo:

*We dine out almost every other day, we host our friends at restaurants regularly – it is only fair - they host us as well. Then there are the weddings, almmsgivings, and parties - we attend at least two a week. It is almost always the same crowd of people so you can’t wear one sari more than twice. Thank god I don’t have any daughters or else I would have got sold out buying them clothes. Anyway two incomes are essential to keep up with this lifestyle. We spend a great amount of money on entertainment – sometimes on things that we don’t want to do. But we don’t have a choice* (Madhavi, 48)

Madhavi gives insights into the lifestyle of high social class elites in Sri Lanka, highlighting that substantial financial imperatives are extremely important to support it.

Two respondents reconciled themselves to less desirable jobs due to the financial imperatives provided by employing organisations. Shanili who is heavily overworked at her current workplace explains her decision to remain in the organisation:
What’s keeping me in NAMBA – that’s a question I’ve been asking myself? I think it is mainly the pay packages and perks – they are excellent payers, and we get bonus and several allowances (Shanili, 36)

In the context of perks Shanili was given unlimited fuel, an entertainment allowance and medical insurance from her company; all which she found invaluable. Fuel and medical cover was similarly important to other respondents. Kishani who is a lawyer by profession, explains her decision to work for an organisation rather than practice law herself:

Whatever said and done they [organisations] reimburse medical expenses. Dilan [her husband] and I both get all our medical expenses reimbursed from Dentile investments and we get up to 20,000 rupees a month for health care for dependents. They also give a hospitalisation cover, petrol cover and life insurance scheme. You can’t get these perks anywhere else except from an organisation (Kishani, 31)

The rising cost of fuel has been a longstanding concern among many Sri Lankans and was an issue raised by a number of women in this sample. Furthermore Sri Lankan state provided healthcare was considered to be less than satisfactory by most respondents where almost all the women in this sample used private medical care which was covered by their employers.

Significantly, a number of respondents associated their aspiration to make money in their careers with providing for their children. Here five women talked about having to fund their adult children’s foreign education. This was a burden on these respondents since they were compelled to pay fees and board in foreign currency while earning in Sri Lanka. Kanthi
planned to retire early from civil service and do private consultancy work, since it was more profitable to finance her children’s education:

*My husband and I budgeted for only one degree for each child and they surprised us by going on to masters and what not. As parents we cannot discourage them from educating themselves further – but we found it very difficult. It isn’t easy for parents. Actually this is why I am retiring soon, I can get my EPF and private consultancy work is more profitable so I may be able to help my children out a bit more financially* (Kanthi, 52)

Three women aspired to make large amounts of money in their careers to provide luxuries for their children:

*I am making as much as money as my husband. More than anything I am able to buy my daughters anything they want from my own money – I don’t deny them anything – my parents never denied me anything* (Diluni, 39)

Like Diluni two other respondents spoke about how they were able to buy their children everything they wanted from their personal incomes: especially items that their husbands refused. Indeed these women seemed to be spoiling their children immensely through their indulgence.

Three respondents desired financial imperatives in career to accumulate property for their adult children:
Sending children to university is not enough, you know. We have to give them something as well. We are constructing two houses for my older son and daughter.

(Rupika, 54)

Two other women were also in the process of constructing houses for their adult children. Parents’ gifting their children with property upon marriage is customary in Sri Lanka; especially in the case of girl children. Indeed this custom appeared to be a significant financial strain on some of the women in this sample.

Two respondents aspired to make money in their careers to provide for their extended families. Shanili explains:

Actually I don’t need to earn at all for myself – my husband is well able to provide for me. I work for my family. My parents are now dependent on me. Both of them are retired – the rent they get from their various properties are not enough especially in the case of hospitalisation. My grandmother is also there – she lives with my parents. None of them have medical insurance and I can’t get a good cover for them because they all have underlying health problems. My sister recently got divorced after a brief marriage – she’s a Montessori teacher – she doesn’t make much - so I occasionally help her out. Basically I have obligations. I am happy that I am able to earn enough to help them

(Shanili, 36)

Michelle similarly talked about how she was motivated to develop her career due to her financial obligations to her extended family. Michelle who came from a family of six had been compelled to help in funding her younger siblings’ education when her father’s business
went bankrupt. Since the Sri Lankan welfare state did not provide social security such as unemployment benefit, the sick and elderly often depended on their family members for financial assistance if they did not have sufficient personal savings. Indeed a number of respondents emphasised the complete lack of safety net in Sri Lanka due to the extremely limited provision of social services.

Overall money was extremely important to almost all respondents and they therefore aspired to make a significant amount of money in their careers. The only woman who stated that money was not everything in life: Swaneetha, worked as a professor of Zoology in a leading university in Sri Lanka. It is a well-known fact that public sector jobs in general and academia in particular, are far less paid than private sector jobs in Sri Lanka. However while other public sector women in this sample were employed in the few well-paying public organisations in Sri Lanka or were doing additional private work to supplement their income, Swaneetha concentrated on her passion: science. She was able to do this since she had an inheritance to depend on:

*I didn’t make a fortune out of my work – on the contrary my husband and I were very fortunate to be able to depend on our inheritance. But then money is not everything.*

(Swaneetha, 61)

Although many other women in this sample also had substantial inheritances to fall back on, they seemed to have more obligations than Swaneetha. For instance, Swaneetha was one of the few respondents who had only one child. Inheritances didn’t seem to be enough for women who had several children especially when they had to fund foreign education and accumulate property for children.
Employability at suitably high level jobs and security was important to eight women in this sample. Vandana explained her decision to get into banking in terms of high level employability:

*I always intended to join a bank after school. My father was a bank manager and you can be well assured of a decent job in commercial banking anywhere* (Vandana, 38)

Niranjala similarly explained her decision to get into management accounting in terms of high level employability:

*I want to get into accounting - job prospects are good – all the good jobs on the papers are for accountants* (Niranjala, 24)

The emphasis women placed on employability seemed to be influenced by the extremely small amount of senior jobs in the Sri Lankan labour market. This is addressed in detail in section 10.1.

A number of women highlighted that job security was especially significant to them:

*Job security is very important – how many people just lost their jobs last year* (Gayathri, 29)

By last year Gayathri referred to the recent global economic crisis.
Other women who had also witnessed people being laid off from jobs during the recession similarly emphasised that that job security was extremely important to them. However, for the women in this sample, it was not only about having a secure job. They wanted jobs with good perks (which I already addressed above) and pensions. Dilhari explains her decision to work for a public sector bank in terms of pension:

*Government jobs are secure after all. You are pensionable, you cannot be laid off work suddenly – how many people in the private sector lost their jobs with this financial crisis* (Dilhari, 46)

Two other women similarly explained their decision to work for public organisations in terms of job security and pensions. In a country with very little state provided social services, a pension seemed to assure these women of long term economic security.

Interestingly some women’s desire for economic security extended to obtaining residency in another country in case things went wrong with the Sri Lankan economy. Niranjala explains:

*Getting a residency in another country is good. There is some security – you never know where Sri Lanka will end up if it goes on like this. The war has ended but it’s very difficult to live – cost of living is very high – they [The Sri Lankan government] should do something to the economy* (Niranjala, 24)

Niranjala’s desire for economic security was influenced by her lack of faith in the Sri Lankan economy. Sherangi similarly explained her application for permanent residency in Australia in terms of economic security:
Actually I applied for PR in Australia – loads of people are applying. I don’t think I’d pack up my bags and go there if I get the visa, but I wanted to keep it [residency] in my hand. Just in case you know. I actually applied because my brother did - at the time of the war and this economic crisis. Now the war is over but the economy is still shit. I don’t think I’d ever be happy living my entire life in another country. But the visa is like a security in case things go really bad here – which would hopefully never happen

(Sherangi, 26)

9.3 Symbolic aspirations

Under symbolic aspirations I address respondents’ career related wishes which concerned honour, prestige and/or recognition (see Bourdieu, 1977). Here the women in this sample spoke about their desires to obtain titles in career and expressed their wishes to be well-reputed among others in their community.

9.3.1 Titles

Almost 90 per cent of respondents aspired for titles in career which concerned work related and/or educational achievement. Diluni, a leading corporate trainer in Sri Lanka, planned to read for a PhD to gain the Dr title:

*I think I would probably do a PhD in the future – it completes me as a management trainer – it will help me step into academia as well and I would get the Dr title through a PhD* (Diluni, 39)

Diluni was willing to engage in three or more years of study on top of her extensive corporate training obligations to obtain the title Dr which signified educational achievement. Most
other respondents however aspired for titles which signified work related achievements and aspired to reach the top of their organisational/occupational hierarchies to gain these titles. Natasha who works as a journalist explains why she wants to be a director someday:

*I want to be a program director at a TV station – some sort of a ‘director’. The title director is like you have reached the top of your career – when you say director everybody knows that it is big* (Natasha, 25)

Desire for fame underpinned Nishanya’s aspiration to become a director.

A number of women aspired titles at work in only well-known prestigious organisations. Kalpana talked about how she wants to be a general manager in a 5 star hotel:

*I should be a GM at a 5 star hotel – all my hard work over the years should end up in being a GM. I hope I will be able to bring my parents some pride in my career – they never saw anything to be proud of in my work but I hope that I could make them proud one day by reaching the highest level in the ranks – everybody wants to make their parents proud. It is the least a child can do for her parents* (Kalpana, 37)

Kalpana works as F & B manager in a leading star class resort in Sri Lanka. She was especially interested in achieving the title General manager in a 5 star hotel to make her parents proud of her. Several other women in this sample similarly aspired for titles at work to bring pride to their parents. Roshini who is an engineer by profession explains:
I hope my father could see me as a consultant – then I would feel that I reached the top of my career by making my parents proud. It is my duty after all. My father was an engineer and he hoped that either I or my sister would be an engineer as well (Roshini, 28)

Irangi likewise hoped to become a professor in order to make her parents happy:

I hope to build a research portfolio, author a book perhaps, do good teaching, and be a professor of Sociology – I want my family to be proud of me – that’s all I could do for all they’ve done to me. They always told us that they will be happy to see us in the top of teaching (Irangi, 37)

Indeed women’s parents expected their children to reach the top of their careers and obtain titles which signified their career achievements.

Notably a couple of respondents desired for titles in career to make their children proud of them:

And there are my children I hope that they too will be proud of their mother being one of the few women who made it to the top in hospitality (Kalpana, 37)

Some women explained how titles at work provided their children with cultural capital. For instance, Shanili talked about how parents educational and work related achievements can help get children into good schools in Sri Lanka:
You know a mother’s career is also very important nowadays. School admissions look into what the mother is doing. If both parents are professionals you have a better chance of getting into a good school. That’s why I did the MBA so soon actually – there is a big section for parent’s educational qualifications and job details in all school applications (Shanili, 36)

Late starter Devika’s career was similarly driven by having to get her daughters to a good school:

Well we came to back to Sri Lanka in 1987 to put the kids to school – I started to regret about not going to university – parents education and employment was a key question in every application form for schools and I felt bad that I didn’t have anything to say about myself. If both parents are top professionals they could easily get a child into a good private school. This hit me. This incident inspired me to do CIMA and get a career in accounting (Devika, 46)

Michelle who works as a HR director in a leading conglomerate explained how she was able to give her children a background of prestige through her professional position:

My professional position brings pride to my children – I am not shallow to indulge in that. But I am happy that they are better off than I was. I was able to give them a background of prestige although I have taught them that these things are not important (Michelle, 51)

Michelle implies that her professional title and its associated financial rewards provided
cultural capital for her children since they are, in theory, from a professional upper class family. Michelle was to a great extent motivated to develop her career to give her children a high status background which her parents couldn’t give her.

9.3.2  To be well-reputed among others

Nine women mentioned that they hoped to be well-known in their organisations, occupational fields and society for their work achievements. Kalpana explains:

\[ I \text{ would like to retire young, but after making a name for myself in the hospitality industry. I don’t want to retire without anybody remembering me } \] (Kalpana, 37)

Madhavi similarly notes:

\[ I \text{ was nominated for the business woman of the year award – this was on all the papers in the country. I cannot complain about my career } \] (Madhavi, 48)

Likewise Swaneetha who works as a university professor explains:

\[ I \text{ won some best paper awards, I have been appointed to journal boards, I have served as editor – I consider these as academic recognition } \] (Swaneetha, 61)

Indeed career reputation was extremely important to the women in this sample.
9.4 Psychological aspirations

Apart from largely material and symbolic aspirations, women also desired to do interesting and challenging jobs and make a positive difference to others’ lives (see Sturges, 1999). However these typically feminine aspirations were somewhat secondary to respondents’ extrinsic career aspirations.

Five women wanted to do interesting and challenging work. Natasha explains her ambition to become a program director in terms of work content:

*I don’t want to be a program director just because of the title – it is a role similar to the editor in chief of a daily newspaper. Program directors shape the overall content of a broadcast – this is very challenging* (Natasha, 25)

Rupika similarly explained her career transition from teaching to banking in terms of interesting and challenging work:

*Well I started my career as a teacher. After getting my degree from Peradeniya University I decided that teaching would be a suitable career for me because my mother and sisters were teachers. However I found teaching very boring – I felt as if I were confined to a very small space – I wanted to see more of the world. I had an interest in the business world so I decided to go into banking and applied to the DOC* (Rupika, 54)
Rupika however also stated that she didn’t think that teaching was a very ‘prestigious’ career and that teachers weren’t paid as much as they deserve. So there seemed to be a symbolic and material dimension to her career transition as well.

In contrast, two respondents wished to make a positive difference to others’ lives through their careers. Incidentally both these women worked as counsellors:

\[
\text{One of my clients once said to me – I would have committed suicide if not for you. I felt that I had made a difference in her life – I felt so glad - happy that I was able to help her. I finally achieved my purpose} \text{ (Shamila, 32)}
\]

9.5 Relational aspirations

Life was not limited to only work for these women; rather all of the 24 respondents wanted marriage and children alongside a career. It wasn’t a wonder that the four unmarried women in this sample (all in early career) were actively looking for prospective marriage partners and anticipated on being mothers in the near future. Gayathri who works as a doctor explains her desire to reach the top of her career by becoming a consultant, while having a family:

\[
\text{Ideally I would like to be a paediatrician and be married - I want to have a family and children – let my mother feel that I have settled down} \text{ (Gayathri, 29)}
\]

Gayathri’s desire for marriage and children seems to be somewhat related to satisfying her mother’s wishes. Several other respondents similarly spoke about how they desired to have a career alongside marriage and children and therefore make their parents happy:
I have been able to balance my career with my family - I had a child, my husband and I are happy. I think my parents would have been happy if they were here (Kishani, 31)

Kishani clearly prided herself in being able to balance a career with a family. Indeed parents in Sri Lanka expected their daughters to be both career women and family women, which the respondents in this sample were trying very hard to achieve. Nevertheless what is extremely striking about this data is the strong desire of these women to satisfy their parents’ wishes. Roshini’s excerpt below illustrates this very well:

I have achieved reasonable career progression for my age and work for the leading apparel manufacturing company in Sri Lanka and I have had a child as well - so I have not exactly compromised on my life out of work for work – I have been able to balance both which I consider to be successful. I fulfilled my mother’s wishes (Roshini, 28)

The intention to satisfy her mother’s wishes, underpinned Roshini’s material, symbolic and relational aspirations.

9.6 Summary

In this chapter I explored women’s aspirations for life and career. The women in this sample had material aspirations where they desired to make money, enjoy job security and maintain high level employability in career, symbolic aspirations where they wished for titles in career which signified work related and/or educational achievement and hoped to be well-reputed among others in their occupational fields, psychological aspirations where they longed to do interesting and challenging jobs and make a positive difference to others’ lives, and relational aspirations where they wanted marriage and children alongside a career. Significantly, the
desire to make their families proud, underpinned most of these aspirations. The question now arises how did these respondents go about achieving their multiple desires? The answer to this question is examined in the forthcoming chapters where I illustrate how women actively and continuously managed between various social contexts and their own individual agency in order to achieve their career and life goals.
Chapter 10: The wider context of Sri Lanka

This chapter explores how respondents accounted for and engaged with the labour market in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan economy, the internal market of Colombo, norms of respectable behaviour for women, religious institutions and astrological belief systems in Sri Lanka, in the course of pursuing their careers.

10.1 The Sri Lankan labour market, economy and the internal market of Colombo

Six respondents emphasised the lack of jobs in Sri Lanka especially in sectors such as engineering, science, academia and psychology. Shamila who returned to Sri Lanka after qualifying as a counselling psychologist in New Zealand explains:

*I thought that my job prospects in Sri Lanka would be high and flying after all that I had learnt. But I was back in square one. There were no jobs for counselling psychologists specifically. There were jobs for clinical psychologists in the few private hospitals – but it was taking a long time to expedite* (Shamila, 32)

After almost a year of waiting for a job in counselling psychology, Shamila compromised by accepting a job in human resource management in a leading mobile telecommunications company. She settled for this job since the management allowed her to act as an in-house counsellor in addition to her administration duties.

Irangi similarly talked about her two year wait to secure a job in one of the few universities in Sri Lanka:
I finished my course at Monash University, got a lot of publications out of my thesis and came to Sri Lanka with very high hopes of commencing work at a local university. But my plans were just stalled. There were no vacancies in any of the 4 universities in Sri Lanka with Sociology departments for almost 2 years (Irangi, 37)

Irangi worked for a private university college until a vacancy opened in a national university. Due to having only little exposure to a research based work environment for two years, her career development was compromised. Diluni, a chemistry graduate, did a MBA in her early thirties and switched to an organisational career, since there were more jobs in the business and finance sector than sciences.

Significantly, respondents argued that there were too many qualified people chasing after too few jobs in Sri Lanka, resulting in an extremely competitive labour market:

In Sri Lanka there are too many CIMA qualified accountants and a few Finance manager jobs, so it is really important to network to get to know about these few jobs first (Nishanya, 37)

Nishanya networked actively in order to get to the few jobs in the country first. Other women in this sample adopted the same strategy.

Four respondents talked about the impact of the Sri Lankan economy on their career development. Two women in mid-career were unable to move jobs since most companies were not hiring due to the current negative economic climate in the country:
At this point of time nobody is hiring – most companies are finding it very difficult with
the global recession and inflation in the country. So there’s no point of looking around.
I don’t put much pressure on NAMBA – looking at the number of people who have been
laid off, I am thankful for my job here (Shanili, 36)

Because she was restricted to a workplace that didn’t offer her a much deserved promotion,
Shanili felt that her career development was significantly constrained. She planned to move
to another organisation as soon as the economic outlook improved.

Two respondents emphasised the high cost of living in Sri Lanka and commented that two
incomes were essential to maintain an upper class lifestyle in Colombo:

It is not easy to live in Colombo – the cost of living is very high. You need two earners
to pay the bills and support the children. I can’t think of how the poor people live when
people like us struggle to manage (Anouka, 46)

Anouka worked as a part-time general practitioner at several medical institutions since this
was more profitable than a full time job. She had very little opportunities for training and
development since she was not a permanent employee of any one organisation. Moreover,
Anouka was compromising on her status at work since she was not able to progress upwards
along an organisation’s hierarchy. However she continued with her existing work
arrangements since financial imperatives were extremely important for her to maintain an
upper class lifestyle in the Sri Lankan economy.
Two respondents from medicine and psychology commented that there is a very small internal market in Colombo and therefore one has to be the best player in the market to prosper in their occupational fields:

> It is such as small market of people who would use a psychologist in Sri Lanka that it’s all about being that one particular name everyone would go to (Shamila, 32)

Here again the importance of networking is highlighted. Shamila circulated flyers and brochures of her services throughout Colombo, hoping to be the one psychologist everyone in the capital referred to. The other respondent who talked about the limited market in her occupational field worked as a consultant anaesthetist:

> In the case of private patients – the problem is all the consultants are competing for a very small segment of people – so it is like doing a business - you have to outshine all the competitors. My husband gets a lot of clients for me – he recommends me as the anaesthetist for the colonoscopies he does – he does about eight a day (Charka, 36)

Charka’s husband was a leading gastroenterologist in the capital and therefore she was able to overcome the limited market in her occupational field through his referrals. In other words Charka’s social capital helped her surmount her sector’s shortcomings.

10.2 Norms of respectable behaviour for women

Sixteen respondents gave insights into the powerful norms of moral behaviour for women in Sri-Lanka, emphasising that women’s survival in society depended on them adhering to the
stereotype of a woman of good character. Shamila explains her interpretation of a respectable woman:

*In Sri Lanka it means that a woman doesn’t flirt, isn’t seen alone with a man, doesn’t touch men and of course doesn’t sleep around. Most people would expect a woman to be dressed conservatively, and they wouldn’t expect a woman to spend extensive time alone with another man unless they are in the presence of a third individual as well.*

(Shamila, 32)

A few other respondents similarly emphasised that any contact with the opposite sex is utterly unacceptable from good women in Sri Lanka:

*Good character means you are good. You know, you respect your marriage and husband. You maintain your dignity. You keep a respectable distance from outside men* (Kanthi, 52)

Kanthi highlights loyalty and faithfulness to marriage as proxies of respectability.

Dilhari talked about how her father attempted to preserve her good reputation during her university life:

*My father used to drop me to classes and walk me home after every class. He used to sit and wait in the university grounds until I came out of class. My father was very good to us although he was very strict. We were not allowed to go anywhere on our own not even to a party at a neighbour’s house. But we never rebelled, to this date we*
respect him so much. Maybe they were a bit overprotective but when you have
daughters you have to protect them right? Anyway we have come so far without
hearing any unnecessary stories from anybody because they guided us when we were
young. A woman’s most valuable asset is her character. For a woman there’s no
point of having anything if you don’t have a good character or if people think you
don’t have a good character is there? (Dilhari, 46)

Thus women being chaperoned by male relatives is a central feature of their respectability
(see Phadke, 2007). Moreover, women should be protected from moral dangers to their
reputation, especially rumours (see also Patel, 2006) since ‘good character’ is a Sri Lankan
woman’s most valuable asset.

Significantly, a good reputation was not only absolutely important for women to survive in
Sri Lankan society but also influenced their occupational choices:

_I liked theatre – but my parents would have disowned me if I went into acting. For
them acting is similar to prostitution. I don’t necessarily brand people according to
their job but we can’t change the way people think_ (Charka, 36)

Charka, who works as a doctor, highlights that jobs with public exposure are unacceptable for
women. Here is another example of this point.

_I wanted to be an airhostess. There’s a lot of money there and I love to travel. But it is
not an appropriate job for a girl: especially in our society. So I decided to join a bank_ 
(Niranjala, 24)
Interestingly, air stewarding was not only an occupation with great exposure to the public, but also a job with a sexualised dimension. Radika explains:

*Air stewardesses are the most sexually active women I have ever seen in my entire life, they sleep around like crazy. If there is a relatively nice looking pilot – they catch him somehow. I am not repeating what other people say – this is what I have seen to my own eyes. The funny thing is, even the people who sleep with them talk about them. But they don’t care – they have no self-respect and people say that they sleep with foreigners when they are out of the country* (Radika, 36)

Although Radika argues that she is reporting what she has seen herself, her excerpt highlights that she assumes that air stewardesses engage in sexual liaisons with foreigners when they are abroad. Overall certain occupations are seen as morally appropriate while others are perceived to be utterly dubious. Women in Sri Lanka paid close attention to these social rules in making their occupational choices since a respectable reputation was absolutely essential for them to survive in their society.

### 10.3 Religious institutions

Sixteen respondents emphasised that Buddhism gave them the strength to cope with difficult situations in life and pursue their work and career. Vandana talked about how living by Buddhist principles helped her get through her working day and gave her the strength to face whatever came in her way at work:

*I have never been out of control – whatever comes in my way I have been able to accept it and make the best of it. In dealing with my colleagues or customers, I am*
able to keep my temper at all times. I never get depressed or angry about anything. My main motive is to live by Buddhist principles, do the right thing, make an honest living and do my duty by everybody. This thinking has helped me be happy at both work and home (Vandana, 38)

Similarly Kishani explained how Buddhist philosophy helped her cope with her parents’ sudden deaths and carry on with her work:

For some reason I became stronger as soon as my father was diagnosed with cancer in his gall bladder (just a few weeks after my mother’s funeral). The doctors told us that he wouldn’t survive it and he didn’t want to be troubled with medicine or anything – he was glad that he was able to go to my mother. They were very close. His only concern was me – I wasn’t married at that time. I wanted to put his mind to rest – let him know that I would be okay. I carried on with work and went through life as normal – I didn’t want him to worry in his last days. He was able to take care of himself on his own. He was in bed only during his last few days – 3 days actually. Buddhism is what kept me together so far and gave me the strength to move forward. This is life after all – I have nothing to be sad about. My parents were very good people and I know that they are in a very good place right now. Anyway nothing is permanent – ‘life is sorrow’ (Kishani, 31)

Here Kishani draws from the famous law of cause and effect and the notion of rebirth in Buddhism (Nyanatiloka, 2000), where she reconciles herself to her parents’ death through her belief that her parents would be reborn in a good place since they were good people in their previous birth. Moreover she draws from Buddha’s saying that nothing in life is permanent
(Nyanatiloka, 2000) to accept the fact that she had to part with her parents. Buddhism has indeed been a significant strength for these women to carry on with their lives and careers.

Two more women talked about their faith in Buddhism helping them cope with family members’ illnesses and go on with their work. For example:

*My husband collapsed at home - we rushed him to the hospital and he was diagnosed with a brain haemorrhage – he had to be operated immediately. This was the only time I felt completely vulnerable. They did an eight hour operation. I was at the temple from the time the operation started. I realised how grateful we should be for life – we want so many things - we don’t know how lucky we are for what we have* (Devika, 46)

Rupika similarly talked about how spending time at the temple helped her deal with her son’s long term illness and carry on with her work. Indeed women’s Buddhist faith seemed to support their career development, since it gave them the strength to face difficult situations in life and pursue career.

A number of women explained favourable and unfavourable career outcomes in terms of Buddha’s teachings of ‘fate’ (see Payutto and Olsson, 1995) where they implied that individuals would progress in career only if their fate allowed them to do so. Kanthi explains:

*I suppose whatever you do and however much you try – you should have career progress in your fate. Both my sisters were much brighter than me, hardworking than me but I had a more successful career than them* (Kanthi, 52)
Kanthi who worked as a director in a public ministry in Sri Lanka didn’t see her sisters’ careers in teaching as successful or prestigious. In her view, the fact that she ended up as a company director while her sisters were teachers, was not a matter of preference or aptitude, but rather a matter of fate. Vandana similarly talked about how career progression should be within one’s destiny to come through regardless of how hard she worked for it:

*However much you want something and whatever you do about it - it has to be within your destiny to come through* (Vandana, 38)

By placing much emphasis on fate and destiny in determining career outcomes respondents like Kanthi and Vandana were undermining the power of individual agency in shaping individuals’ careers. Dilhari talked about how she would reconcile herself if she was not offered a much deserved directorship in her organisation since fate and luck also play a part in determining career outcomes, however hard one tried:

*I don’t know whether I would ever be a director. Anyway I will accept whatever comes in my way gratefully. You can’t have everything what you want – your fate, luck everything plays a part. I am grateful for what I have got so far... that’s what Buddha said to us – ‘be happy with what you have’* (Dilhari, 46)

Dilhari identified a case of gender discrimination in her organisation which kept women away from the top. However she was not attempting to change her unfavourable situation since she attributed it to her fate. Moreover she drawing on Buddhist teachings that ‘one should be content with what she has’ (see Nyanatiloka, 2000), was further restraining her in trying to change her disadvantaged status. One of the Buddha’s key teachings is that ‘want’
triggers every sort of evil in society (Nyanatiloka, 2000) and thus he has suggested that people should try not to desire so many worldly things in life. This is contradictory to advancing in career unless the desire to progress is backed by a genuine vocational calling to serve others through one’s work (see Davidson and Caddell, 1994). Although all the women in this sample clearly aspired to develop their careers, none of them identified a religious calling as a key motivator underlying their desire for career advancement. Thus Buddhist philosophies did not seem to have influenced respondents’ aspirations for career progression. Nevertheless they seemed to have influenced women to be less likely to change unfavourable situations in career and accept these as part of their fate.

In contrast, several women made references to Hindu deities in describing favourable outcomes in career where they attributed success in career to their spiritual relationships with various gods (see Duffy, 2006). Hinduism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 12th century by early South Indian migrants. This philosophy is based on the belief that superior beings (gods) can help ordinary beings (see Deegalle, 2006). Devika who identified herself as a Buddhist explained her promotion to senior project officer in terms of Hindu gods’ blessings:

_ I was made a senior officer within a year – every project I recommended loans for, went excellently with all gods’ blessings _ (Devika, 46)

Madhavi likewise deemed gods’ blessings as the key resource for women to progress in their careers:

_ My refuge is Kali amma (a Hindu goddess). She has never once left my side. Some external power is important to make sure that children don’t get sick, parents are_
healthy, and servants don’t take off suddenly. I was extremely lucky to have no problems when I started off my career (Madhavi, 48)

Given respondents’ espoused commitment to Buddhism it was rather surprising that these women believed in Hindu gods as well. Notably, women prayed to Hindu gods to enhance their lives and careers. Indeed this is contradictory to the Buddha’s teachings which prescribe individual responsibility for salvation rather than relying on deities (see Obeysekere, 1963).

Significantly, Buddhism imposed an array of social responsibilities on women. For instance, a number of respondents emphasised the frequency they visited temples and participated in related activities. Vandana explains:

_ I go to temple whenever I can. This is my therapy for everything. I enjoy cleaning the temple much better than wasting time chatting to people on weekends. The satisfaction I get – I can’t describe it (see Vandana, 38).

Gayathri similarly talked about how she spent time at her temple and decorated it regularly.

Charka explained her plans for the year in relation to the Buddhist temple:

_ November is the Katina month [a significant month for Buddhist monks] so I will be very busy for a couple of weeks. I can’t really think of anything else that we would do this year. We are doing the Katina [ceremony] this time, so there is so much to do. You wouldn’t believe it but I put two weeks of leave (Charka, 36)_
Five other respondents similarly emphasised that they expected to be heavily involved in their temples’ activities. Indeed women in Sri Lanka took significant roles in sustaining Buddhism within their society.

10.4 Astrology and Horoscopes

Astrology and horoscopes (unconnected to Buddhism) are a popular belief system in Sri Lankan society. Astrology is the study of movements of stars and planets. A horoscope is the relative position of stars and planets at the time of a person's birth. Sri Lankan people believe that an individual’s horoscopes can predict his/her future to some extent. People who study astrology and make predictions about individuals’ futures based on their horoscopes are called astrologers.

References to horoscopes and astrology came up in the accounts of four respondents in the context of their career stories. However these women emphasised that they were not vehement believers in astrology although they got their horoscopes checked regularly as a precautionary measure. Dilhari explains:

> I check my horoscope to get an indication of bad periods – so that I am more aware of what I am doing in these periods. I think twice before doing anything. But I don’t base my life on what the astrologer says (Dilhari, 46)

Niranjala similarly talked about how she got her horoscope read often:

> I would consider what the astrologer says before doing anything important – there’s no harm in that. I would consult my astrologer in the event of marriage, moving jobs or
country - things like that. Of course I wouldn’t go by his word but I will keep it in mind. It is like asking an opinion - just because I ask your opinion about something it doesn’t mean I will abide by it (Niranjala, 24)

Although Niranjala stresses that she wouldn’t abide by her astrologer’s word, she has consulted this person on all the important events in her life. This suggests that the astrologer’s opinion is significant to Niranjala. Her excerpt below confirms this point further:

My horoscope says that my marriage will happen at 26 – so there’s another 2 years. I want to finish my CIMA before that. My horoscope so far has been quite accurate. He [astrologer] said that I will do a job in banking, I wouldn’t go to university, and we would build another house – everything which happened. Now it [her horoscope] says that there will be some kind of a change in my career – hopefully this refers to a move to developmental finance (Niranjala, 24)

Niranjala has indeed planned her career around her astrologer’s predictions. Her decision to move into developmental banking in particular seems to have been influenced by her astrologer stating that she would encounter a change in career.

Swaneetha likewise talked about the extremely significant role her horoscope played in her career when her family was debating about whether to send her to the UK to do her PhD or get her married:

My brothers were not very pleased about sending me to Lancaster – they were concerned that I may not be married at all – they were not interested in all this
education they wanted to see me well married and settled – and my brother wanted to get married to his own girlfriend as soon as possible and he couldn’t get married until I was married. But my father wanted me to pursue my education to the highest level and my horoscope stated that I have a late but a very good marriage - which comforted him (Swaneetha, 61)

With respect to career, Swaneetha’s horoscope stating that she would have a late but good marriage certainly worked in her favour. Indeed Sri Lanka is an enchanted society where mythical belief systems such as horoscopes and astrology, and religious philosophies like Buddhism and Hinduism noted earlier, are part and parcel of people’s everyday lives.

10.5 Summary

In this chapter I explored how the women in my sample engaged with wider contextual structures in Sri Lanka in the course of pursuing their careers. Respondents networked actively to get to the few good jobs in the Sri Lankan labour market and to overcome the limited market in their occupational fields. Some women were unable to move jobs due to the current negative economic climate in the country. Others reconciled themselves to less desirable jobs since good financial imperatives were essential to maintain their upper class lifestyles in the Sri Lankan economy. Respondents also gave insights into the powerful norms of moral behavior for women in Sri Lankan society, explaining how they paid close attention to these social rules in making their occupational choices. Finally women talked about how their career thinking and enactment was influenced by prevailing Buddhist and Hindu religious philosophies and notions of astrology and horoscopes, giving insight into the significant social roles Buddhism imposed on women in Sri Lanka.
Chapter 11: Work organisations in Sri Lanka

This chapter examines how women make sense of and enact their careers within their organisational contexts.

Respondents explained their organisations in terms of recruitment and selection practices, career paths, the typical working day, work-life policies and work norms. In this chapter I focus on how women engaged with these elements in pursuit of progressing in their careers.

11.1 Recruitment and selection practices

Recruitment and selection practices determine how candidates are hired for jobs in organisations. The women in this sample argued that good social networks, a prestigious CV and high social standing are vital to get jobs in Sri Lanka. In what follows I will address each of these elements in detail.

Social networks

Almost all respondents identified ‘knowing the right people’ or rather, privileged social connections, as vital to secure positions in organisations, although this was not explicitly stated in these institutions’ recruitment policies (see Khilji, 2003; Sparrow and Budhwar, 1997). Radika who works for a premier state owned airline explains how this happens:

_Tankan airlines engineering is dominated by my batch mates and lecturers – so I had no problem in getting in. I contacted some of my batch mates and this guy who was a senior engineer arranged me an interview with the head of aircraft maintenance. They interviewed me only once and I started work within a week._ (Radika, 36)
Although interviews and job related tests were part of the selection process in organisations, privileged social connections enabled candidates pass through formal procedures quite swiftly (see Saher, 2011).

Significantly, four women talked about how their ‘privileged connections’ arranged them employment in leading organisations when there weren’t even any vacancies open:

*My uncle knew Dilan Fernandez, – the CEO of EFCC at that time. He spoke to him and got me a place at their Panadura branch when a vacancy wasn’t even there* (Devika, 46)

Two respondents whose CVs had been personally handed over to the senior management of employing organisations though their ‘privileged connections’, spoke about how these organisations decided against interviewing other candidates for the positions in concern, and chose them on the basis of these networks:

*One of my husband’s colleagues is the Marketing Director at Binnamon, she was telling me about a job their F & B manager had got in Fiji. This was a casual conversation we had but I immediately told her that I would be interested in his job if he was leaving. I handed my CV to her the next morning - I wanted to get to the job before it was advertised. And I was successful – the board was pleased with my application and they decided not to advertise the post* (Kalpana, 37)

Indeed organisations circumvented their own equal opportunity policies and offered jobs to individuals on a ‘first come first served’ basis. Significantly however, most respondents
emphasised that connections alone could not get a person employment without the required qualifications and experience.

The women in this sample were well aware of the importance of social connections for their careers and were therefore attempting to form even more influential contacts by extensive networking. Kalpana who works in Hospitality management explains:

*I started active networking recently - it is very important in hospitality. You get to know about most job appointments through word of mouth* (Kalpana, 37)

Natasha similarly spoke about how she attempts to talk to significant people wherever she goes since they may be useful for her career:

*I usually talk to important and influential people wherever I go. You know I meet wives of politicians, company CEO’s – a lot of people. People always come in handy. Even at family gatherings I always ask to be introduced to people. And I send Christmas cards to important contacts as my friends* (Natasha, 25)

Even late career respondents close to retirement talked about how they took effort to make influential social contacts through networking:

*I am taking effort to network now since I will be retiring and looking for private consultancy work. I exchange business cards and let people know about the consultancy work I have done. At senior level it is a bit downgrading to let people know you are looking for work. The ideal scenario would be if they come to you with*
offers. But it doesn’t work like this in the real world – it is very competitive after all (Kanthi, 52)

Kanthi’s excerpt highlights that career building continues after retirement.

A prestigious CV

According to 22 out of 24 respondents, a prestigious CV in terms of having received postgraduate education from a renowned institution, and/or having undertaken roles in well-known organisations is extremely important to get senior jobs in Sri Lankan organisations. Irangi explains how a PhD from Monash University Australia helped her secure an assistant professorship in a leading private education institution:

_The CEO of Soyal Institute personally contacted me – he was desperately in need for a Sociology lecturer for the University of Camden external degree program that they conducted. He had heard of me through a friend of mine. When he heard that I had a PhD in sociology from Monash. He didn’t even want to interview me - he just wanted me to join SI immediately_ (Irangi, 37)

While privileged social connections enabled candidates pass through formal selection processes soon, a doctorate from a prestigious institution enabled Irangi surpass her organisation’s screening procedure altogether.

Specifically seven women in early, mid and late career planned to pursue postgraduate courses in order to enhance their CV’s:
I might end up doing a MBA probably. I suppose I may need a MBA in the long run.

All senior managers have MBAs (Sherangi, 26)

Sherangi who worked as an assistant manager felt that a postgraduate qualification is essential to get into a managerial position. She planned to read for a MBA from the University of Wales campus in Sri Lanka which she perceived as a renowned institution.

Fourteen respondents talked about how they worked in particular, highly branded organisations in order to develop an attractive CV. Shamila, a psychologist, spoke about how she left her job in a care home in the UK since she thought the organisation’s lack of prestige could devalue her CV:

This care home was very small - had about only 4-6 young mothers at a time and wasn’t really affiliated to a significant institution like the NHS. People want to know the organisation you worked for. I loved the work that I did – but having worked as a counsellor in a small care home is not the same as having worked for the NHS as a psychologist – it is not good enough on your CV (Shamila, 32)

Since she couldn’t get a job as a psychologist at the NHS, Shamila went back to Sri Lanka to get a job in a ‘significant’ institution, which she perceived to be important to her long term career prospects.

Five respondents felt that work experience in foreign countries was highly regarded by Sri Lankan employers for senior level jobs. Three of these women talked about how they planned to work abroad for a while to get some foreign exposure and enhance their resumes:
My husband and I planned on getting married and working abroad for a while afterwards to get some foreign exposure. It’s good on the CV. We looked at only the UK. Anything from the UK is always regarded in Sri Lanka (Nishanya, 37)

Significantly, Nishanya felt that Sri Lankan employers did not award work experience from the Middle East, Far East or Caribbean the same value as stints in economically developed Western countries. Two other respondents shared her view.

Social class in work settings
Respondents perceived elements of high social class status such as command of English, having attended leading private schools and coming from privileged family backgrounds to be important to securing jobs in prestigious private sector organisations. Kishani talked about how private organisations prefer to recruit people who are fluent in English Language:

*English is obviously important for jobs in any private company in Sri Lanka – pronunciation and everything should be excellent* (Kishani, 31)

Two women spoke about how private organisations hire individuals who have attended Colombo’s top most prestigious schools:

*Usually people who come from leading private schools speak better English than those from government schools – so they are most likely to be hired.* (Nishanya, 36)

Nishanya’s excerpt suggests that organisations looking at the schools their recruits attended are tied to the emphasis they place on the command of English.
Three respondents spoke about family background in the context of gaining employment in private organisations:

In *Sri Lanka* where you come from is very important. I mean they ask you what your parents do in job interviews. It would be discrimination in another country (Shamila, 32)

In contrast to Shamila, other respondents did not see anything wrong with considering a candidate’s family background in hiring. According to Rupika, individuals coming from credible families are likely to be trustworthy and reliable. In this sense family background seemed to be a form of job reference in Sri Lanka.

11.2 **Career paths**

Career paths define how people progress upwards through their organisations’ hierarchies. Respondents described formal career paths in their workplaces in terms of serving time and performance.

**Career paths based on time served**

Nine out of twelve public sector women stated that the number of years of service, which they referred to as seniority, was officially the key criterion to progress upwards through their organisations’ career structures. Dilhari explains:

*Seniority is important to progress in public organisations. It is good thing since it maintains harmony among employees. People won’t compete against each other* (Dilhari, 46)
Three respondents however emphasised, that ‘time served’ alone would not guarantee progression in public sector organisations without ‘performance’ which they defined as completing tasks entrusted to one well and in terms of identifiable output. Swaneetha explains the career path of the premier public university she worked for:

*Promotion to professor is based on merit as well – you cannot become a professor because of your years of service only. You have to perform* (Swaneetha, 61)

In her university, performance was defined primarily in terms of publishing research findings in academic journals.

Significantly, women from the public sector were frustrated with their career paths. They wanted to climb up their hierarchies quickly and were not willing to wait for their turn. Thus four public sector respondents described the special efforts they took to make their exceptional performance visible to the boards, in order to advance in their careers more rapidly. Rupika explains:

*The first time I took part in DOC’s launching of new branches – I discovered that I was quite a good trainer. So the next time they branched, I requested the head of operations to be involved in this branching operation. I knew him well and he gave me the opportunity to join this operation. It was a lot of work but I took it as an opportunity to get noticed by the board. On top of launching new branches and training personnel, I was also involved in briefing branch managers about the wider functions of banking like credit and treasury. During this period they recognised my*
talents and dedication. So after this operation I was made the Assistant General
Manager of branch operations at DOC (Rupika, 54)

Rupika’s excerpt highlights how she circumvented the ‘seniority’ based career path in her
organisation by completing additional tasks handed over to her well and being awarded fast
promotions for exceptional performance.

In addition to demonstrating outstanding accomplishments, four respondents from the public
sector explained how they ingratiated themselves with their superiors by giving compliments
and doing favours for them (Appelbaum and Hughes, 1998) in order to progress in their
careers soon:

*I put a lot of effort into trying to get close to the Director of our department; sweet
talked him and did everything what it takes. You know, the director gives his opinion
to the governor about who he thinks should be the Assistant Director of the
department. I just wanted to be sure that he nominated my name over others. I didn’t
have to go to this extent since I was the most senior candidate. But I didn’t want to
take any chances anyway* (Dilhari, 46)

Although Dilhari was the next in line for promotion in her department, she still ingratiated
herself with her boss to make sure that this was realised. Women from public organisations
perceived ingratiation to be an important way to help them get around their time served based
career structures.
Career paths based on performance

In contrast to public sector respondents’ ‘time served’ paths, almost all of the women from the private sector explained their career paths in terms of ‘performance’ where they described obtaining favourable ratings in the regular performance evaluations undertaken by employers as the key criterion to progress through their organisations’ hierarchies. Shamila explains the ‘performance based’ career path in the leading mobile communications company she worked for:

*Your performance is evaluated by your immediate boss every 6 months. The boss fills the performance evaluation form. Promotions and salary increments are all based on your performance evaluation* (Shamila, 32)

Most women from the private sector strived to perform to the very best of their ability and crucially to make sure that this was apparent to their bosses, in order to obtain high ratings in the performance evaluations. Nishanya talks about how she got herself promoted to Accountant from Management trainee by obtaining good scores in the appraisal scheme in her organisation due to high quality work:

*I was initially involved in a systems study of all activities at the factories, and in proposing new systems and procedures. They were very happy with my work. I obtained good performance ratings and got promoted to factory accountant within a year and a half* (Nishanya, 36).
Like women from the public sector, private sector respondents also talked about how employees in their organisations ingratiated themselves with their superiors in order to get positive results in performance evaluations, essential for promotion. Sherangi explains:

*At every level people are constantly sucking up to their bosses, hoping to get good ratings in the performance appraisals* (Sherangi, 26)

Similarly Shamila notes:

*Your progression is guaranteed if you stick up to the key people; that’s the Sri Lankan work model for you!* (Shamila, 32)

As women from public organisations, private sector respondents saw ingratiation as an important way to enhance their reputations in order to climb up the performance based career structures in their organisations.

Two private sector women pursued professional and postgraduate education to help them progress upwards their organisations’ hierarchies. Michelle explains:

*Now I am doing a University of Leicester distance learning course – a MA in HRM to develop my theoretical knowledge* (Michelle, 51)

Michelle who works as a HR director for a leading conglomerate in Sri Lanka hoped that she would be able to apply the knowledge from the MA to her work, and thereby obtain good scores in the performance appraisal scheme in her organisation. Sherangi who had already
completed the Chartered Institute of Marketing (UK) examinations talked about how the skills she acquired from this course helped her do her job exceptionally well and obtain favourable evaluations important for her career development:

*I learned a lot from CIM – things I was able to apply to work. I owe my career progression so far to CIM* (Sherangi, 26)

Further education indeed helped individuals work their way up career structures based on performance.

11.3 The typical working day

Respondents’ working day involved heavy workloads, long hours, training and development programs and after-hours social obligations. In what follows I will explore each of these dimensions in detail.

Workloads and working hours

Seven private sector respondents in early and mid-career commented on the extensive workloads and long hours which characterised their typical working day:

*I have been trying to put a number on the hours I work a day but I am too scared to count. I work day and night - it is no joke. Most of these clients’ calls come in the nights – around 8.30 pm to be precise. So I hang around office till then. We have only three people including me at the department. We are seriously understaffed but nobody does anything about it. I told them that we need more staff, and they told me*
that I can hire another person to the department if I want to. But I don’t have the time to do it - I need their help. And they never asked about it again (Shanili, 36)

Shanili’s extensive work schedule seems to be partially attributable to understaffing in her organisation. Three other private sector respondents similarly spoke about how their employers entrusted them with additional duties out their official job specifications. Nishanya explains:

*On my first day I discovered that the administration responsibilities also came under the finance manager for a couple of months! They said it is just for a few months but I have been doing it for three years. I am very annoyed when people complain to me that there isn’t toilet paper in the bathrooms and tell me to do something about it – I am the finance manager for gods’ sake!* (Nishanya, 36)

Interestingly, early and mid-career women’s jobs in private organisations also included unofficial duties such as entertaining corporate clients after hours:

*Whenever consultants from abroad or anybody like that comes to Sri Lanka, HR is required to entertain them. I guess they assign me to entertain foreign clients because I had lived abroad and could easily talk to foreigners. I once said to my boss that I am the one person from HR who entertains people the most. He said that I was the best person for this since I could talk to people easily* (Shamila, 32)

Like Shamila, three other respondents complained about having to socialise with corporate clients regularly. Significantly this extended their working hours. However, most women
seemed to have adapted to their unofficial and official duties. Notably though, two respondents were looking for work in other organisations discreetly and planned to hand in their resignations once they secured another job.

In contrast to private organisations, workloads and working hours in the public sector appeared to be less gruelling. Natasha who works as a journalist for the pioneer state owned newspaper in Sri Lanka talked about her reasonable work schedule in comparison to her friend Anouk who worked at a leading private television station:

*Work hours in government sector organisations are very good. They are completely overstaffed so there are many hands to share the work - whatever it is. My friend Anouk works about 14 hours a day at JTV. I leave work around 4.30* (Natasha, 25)

This encouraging view of conditions of service in public organisations prevailed across all public sector respondents’ accounts.

**Training and development programs**

Twelve respondents in early and mid-career spoke about having to attend regular training and development programs in their organisations. Ten women were from the private sector and two were from the public sector. Most of these programs were on topics such as teamwork, leadership, motivation, emotional intelligence and stress management. Notably, many women did not think very highly of the content of the training programs they were often compelled to attend. Kishani shares her views about a training program she had to attend during a weekend:
A program on stress management on the only free day you have... ridiculous isn’t it?
(Kishani, 31)

Although many women were considerably burdened by having to attend these programs out of work hours, they emphasised that their employers expected them to attend and participate in these programs. Sherangi explains:

In my entire life I have never been trained so much. I have been to so many programs – I can’t even remember the names of most – it is all about teams. Most programs are held out of office hours and everybody sleeps through them. But in an organisation – you just have to attend. You could call in sick or get excused if you have an emergency but otherwise you just have to go (Sherangi, 26)

Significantly, almost all women appeared to be attending these programs selectively or coming off halfway through programs discreetly. Nishanya explains:

I don’t decline every program - I go for the short ones, come off during half of the program when the program is long (Nishanya, 36)

Three other respondents spoke about how they negotiated around training courses in their organisations in a similar manner.

After-hours activities in organisations

Seven private sector respondents in early and mid-career talked about how they were required to participate in after-hours activities held by their organisations, ostensibly intended to
provide leisure and entertainment for employees and promote organisational citizenship.

Shanili who works for a leading financial services outsourcing firm explains:

*They hold too many events for employees – too much that it is not pleasurable. Within this year they celebrated Valentine’s day, Halloween, the Sinhalese new year – all those were big do’s – we’ll probably have another array of events for Christmas and New year. And we have the regular Friday night drink that everybody meets up for, and there are these cricket matches that the Namba team plays against other offices. The management encourages everybody to attend these matches to build citizenship but they play a match almost every weekend! And Saturday morning is the only time I have to do some shopping with my family or take my son to play* (Shanili, 36)

Like Shanili, other early and mid-career women were also burdened by these compulsory after-hours obligations at their workplaces.

Many women commented on the challenges they faced at home in having to attend organisational events held at night, especially since spouses and elderly family members vigorously opposed their participation. This point will be further developed in Chapter 11. However despite all the reservations women had with these regular social activities, no one was willing to risk upsetting their superiors by simply ‘not going’. Shamila explains:

*My ex-husband had issues with the regularity of office events but I just had to go. I know some of the other girls had problems too. Some of the girls who were married just had other things to do in the nights – you can bring your partner to these events,*
but most men just don’t want to go to places they don’t know much people. But nobody wanted to get the management on their bad side and risk their prospects (Shamila, 32)

In this insightful statement Shamila highlights that negative career consequences may follow those women who decline participating in these gatherings. Thus women’s response to the difficult situation their organisations put them into was attending organisational events selectively, calling in sick occasionally to avoid after-hours social activities and/or using their young children as an excuse to not attend.

Roshini spoke about how she typically attends only social occasions which her husband can accompany her to and subtly avoids others:

I try to go with him [her husband] as much as possible. I try to avoid events which he cannot attend (Roshini, 28)

Four other respondents talked about how they compromised in the same way.

Three women explained how they called in sick occasionally in order to avoid after-hours get-togethers at work:

I occasionally say that I am not feeling well. Sickness is a good excuse. But you have to be careful not to do it too often and make them wonder why you get sick on every other weekend (Sherangi, 26)
While simply not attending social events was not justifiable, staying away for reasons of ill-health was acceptable, especially for women as long as it did not happen too often.

Kishani talked about how she explains to her boss that she cannot attend every occasion at her workplace since she had a young child at home:

_Sometimes I say that I have to go home to Tirun [her son] – I don’t get a lot of time to spend with him after all and he is very small ……_ (Kishani, 31)

The women in this sample attempted to manoeuvre themselves around after-hours obligations at work by the various means noted above. However, given that bosses and managers in private organisations expected employees to participate in these social gatherings, attending events selectively may not be feasible from a career point of view.

11.4 Work-life policies in organisations

Work-life policies are initiatives provided by employers to ensure that employees can harmonise paid work with their lives out of work and achieve success in both domains. All of the 12 respondents from the public sector stated that there were no formal work-life policies in their organisations. Private sector women on the other hand had many work-life policies in their workplaces; however they did not perceive most available policies to be useful to them. Shamila explains:

_They [her organisation] are working on a 25 year work-life balance program and I was asked to contribute my perspective to it. I suggested asking the employees themselves to contribute ideas. How else could we know what they really want? But_
my suggestion was immediately rejected since they didn’t want to excite the employees. Anyway my appointment was a part of the work-life plan - to address stress issues in the workplace and to advice employees on how to lead better lifestyles etc. A simple policy such as home-working was not even considered. As I said before it’s all about fad and fashion (Shamila, 32)

Shamila was recruited as a resident psychologist as part of the work-life balance program in her organisation. In this insightful excerpt she highlights how the work-life effort in her organisation is motivated by current trends rather than a genuine intention to make home-work harmonisation easier for employees.

A number of private sector women could not access the few useful policies in their organisations such as flexi hours, due to these policies being targeted at only non-managerial workers. Sashi talked about the option to work compressed hours being inaccessible to her husband in his organisation since he was a manager. This was despite him having to accompany his child for medical treatment:

_He worked for Jemas – they introduced flex time for the first time in Sri Lanka. But this is apparently for only non-managerial workers. They [the directors] had been very sympathetic and polite but they had wondered why I (as the child’s mother) didn’t stop work until the child got better. I would have stopped working 10 hours in all the godforsaken colleges in Sri Lanka any day. But then how were we going to pay the hospital bills? In any country mothers take more care of children than fathers. But this is an emergency for god’s sake and they knew about our financial difficulties - they should have been more flexible (Sashi, 32)
This excerpt not only highlights that the option to work compressed hours is available for only non-managerial workers, but also reveals the implicit assumption made within Sri Lankan organisations that caring is mainly women’s responsibility (see Crompton, 2001) even during chaotic situations. Such mind-sets can indeed make it very difficult for dual career couples to harmonise home and work.

Nevertheless most women seemed to have adapted to the way work-life policies were implemented in their organisations where many respondents stated that it was not the organisation’s responsibility to help employees manage their personal affairs (see Lewis and Smithson, 2001). Sherangi explains:

*If you choose to come to work you have to manage your personal affairs yourself. You can’t expect the organisation to solve your personal problems Yeah I mean – my personal life is not Kialogue’s responsibility* (Sherangi, 26)

Rupika similarly notes:

*Employees’ problems out of the organisation are not the organisation’s concern. Women shouldn’t expect special privileges just because they are women* (Rupika, 54)

Rupika seems to be adopting an ‘anti-woman approach’ and aligning herself with her organisation’s rational stance (see Powell et al., 2009).

Significantly, despite most respondents having to stretch themselves to considerable extents to reconcile paid work with their lives out of work; they did not expect their employers to pay
attention to work-life harmonisation. Rupika for instance continued to work long hours while her young son was hospitalised for two months. Kishani didn’t take a single day of leave while her mother and father were dying with cancer since she didn’t believe that she was ‘entitled to’ any leave from her organisation (see Lewis and Smithson, 2001), and had therefore not wanted to take any chances in jeopardising her status at work (see Gambles et al., 2006).

Madhavi was one of the few respondents who believed that women were entitled to help from their organisations to reconcile home and work:

*Maternity leave is the only thing women in Sri Lanka get. Why do you think I have only one child? I would have loved to have more children, but I couldn’t have coped with my work. There should definitely be more policies – but what is the motivation for organisations to introduce policies to make it easier for women? I know that women are the bulk of the professional labour force – but they somehow or other manage themselves and make it work; despite there being no policies. For this sort of improvement, there should be legally enforceable public policies. But then in Sri Lanka – we have a lot more to do before improving the situation of women, we have to improve our economy, settle the displaced civilians – we are a developing country after all – we have a lot of things to see to (Madhavi, 48)*

Madhavi rightfully points out that organisations would not be motivated to provide useful and accessible work-life policies for women, since they manage their home-work dynamics at their personal cost. Although she thinks that there should be more legally enforceable work-life policies for women at state level (see Crompton, 2002), she does not seem to be very
hopeful of the Sri Lankan state taking an active stance on women’s affairs. In terms of her own response Madhavi did not appear to have done anything to change the work-life agenda in her organisation. In this sense she seems to have adapted to her organisation’s work-life focus like the other women in this sample.

11.5  Workplace norms

Norms are explicit and/or implicit social cues within organisations that coordinate employees’ interactions with others. Respondents talked about four types of norms in their organisations: norms of respect and compliance to superiors, norms of ‘being seen’ within the organisation, norms of respectable behaviour for women and norms of leaders being male. In the following paragraphs I will explore each of these norms in turn.

11.5.1 Norms of respect and compliance to superiors

Public sector respondents in particular spoke about their superiors in terms of age-related respect and unconditional compliance to whatever they said. Natasha who works for a premier state owned newspaper explains:

*The editors are like god; one thing I learned is that you don’t contradict whatever they say. You just take their word for it and revise your work accordingly. And you don’t refuse anything that is handed over to you however busy you are. You just take it up. You have to keep all the big people happy if you want better assignments, your own column etc. Everything is after all at the discretion of the editor* (Natasha, 25)

Natasha adapted to her organisation’s culture of compliance to superiors, since she perceived keeping superiors happy to be important to progress in her organisation. Like Natasha, other
respondents from both public and private organisations emphasised how important it was to keep ones’ superiors happy to advance in their careers:

*You have to keep big people happy to prosper in an organisation* (Sherangi, 26)

‘Keeping big people happy’ appeared to have influenced women to ingratiate themselves with superiors in order to enhance their career prospects in their organisations (c.f. section 11.2).

Significantly, individuals who failed to comply with superiors faced serious career repercussions. Shamila explains:

*My boss and I had issues with regard to counselling services. He expected me to share my clients inside stories with him – I was appalled and told him off on several occasions. Only later did I realise that this sort of thing didn’t happen in Sri Lankan organisations. Telling off your boss is uncommon and I guess being told off by a woman 15 years your junior would have been unbearable to him* (Shamila, 32)

Shamila was compelled to leave her organisation since her boss made trouble for her for hurting his ego. Indeed, compliance to superiors was vital for individuals to survive and progress in Sri Lankan workplaces. Significantly, respondents’ unwillingness to confront superiors about extensive workloads and after-hours activities in private organisations (cf. section 11.3) appeared to have been influenced by this norm.
11.5.2 Norms of being seen within the organisation

Women in early and mid-career emphasised how important it is to be present in their workplaces at all times. Sashi talks about the situation in the leading public university she worked for:

*Being seen is very important to the people in the department – the more you are seen the happier they are. You don’t necessarily need to work – you just need to sit in the department and heat your seat* (Sashi, 32)

Such visibility appeared to be especially important for mid-level managers. Nishanya explains:

*A manager’s presence at the organisation is necessary. People in Sri Lanka are not used to following orders through the phone or commuting queries through email – they expect physical presence. Getting them used to this would require a whole new culture change and it cannot be achieved overnight. I have to be physically present to deal with various issues that arise every minute: most of the time they are simple ones* (Nishanya, 36)

Unfortunately, the requirement to be seen within the organisation seemed to be limiting individuals’ access to work-life policies such as flexi hours (see Gambles et al., 2006). Nishanya explains:

*There are various policies – the most recent one they introduced was the option to start work early and finish early. For instance, if you start at 7.00 am you can finish*
at 3pm than 5pm. But it is very difficult for a manager to do this since everything comes to you – the manager just has to stay until the others stay. None of the managers have done this so far and I don’t want to be the first one to do it (Nishanya, 36)

Like Nishanya, most respondents seemed to have adapted to visibility requirements at their own personal cost. For instance, four respondents emphasised that they did not take leave from work even in times of chaos at homes. One respondent, however, was forced to resist expectations of presence within her department since she had to accompany her daughter to medical treatment:

Anju [her daughter] got her heart problem so I had to take days off here and there. I contributed as much as I could – you don’t necessarily need to be at the department to work. But in my absence they [her colleagues] were finding fault with things that I had done. Most of my colleagues were cool and silent and the HOD didn’t even look me in the eye – I was side-lined in all the new projects – and there were two conferences for which all the lecturers except me were sponsored to attend. I couldn’t work in such an environment – I developed insomnia – I left (Sashi, 32)

Sashi’s eventually opted out of her organisation since her colleagues side-lined her for breaking the organisation’s norms. Thus women who intended to make it in Sri Lankan organisations had to fulfil visibility requirements. Those who failed to satisfy these expectations faced significant career consequences.
11.5.3 Norms of respectable behaviour for women at work

Norms of respectable behaviour for women at societal level were analysed in chapter 9. In this section I explore how these imperatives play out in work settings. Respondents’ rules for ensuring women’s ‘good character’ at work coalesce around five key themes: maintaining appropriate physical and emotional distances from men, not interacting much with casual male acquaintances, modest dress code, not being seen alone with a man out of office hours and/or official premises, and not being seen alone at night. The problem was that women had to inevitably engage in some of these activities as part and parcel of their working day. Importantly many of these activities were seen as crucial for their career progress.

Maintaining appropriate physical and emotional distances from men

Three respondents talked about how organisations expected ‘respectable’ women to maintain a physical and emotional distance from men (see Phadke, 2007). Two women however were compelled to breach this standard of moral behaviour due to the nature of their work. Diluni who works as a corporate trainer and management coach explains:

*Especially in these NLP trainings I have to build rapport with my participants, ask them questions, discuss intimate matters – so actually I am coming close to these guys – perhaps closer than what is considered appropriate. So they obviously react. They look at each other, wink, try to get into conversations with me after sessions, ring me up at office unnecessarily. I am not exaggerating but it is very difficult to deliver trainings in Sri Lanka* (Diluni, 39)

Diluni’s role as a corporate coach which involved developing relationships with male clients breached the appropriate distance women in Sri Lanka were supposed to maintain from men.
Her excerpt highlights the consequences of this moral rupture, where some of her male clients were misinterpreting her role behaviour as illicit advances and thereby ‘coming on to her’. Diluni tried to sound as ‘formal’ and ‘professional’ as possible when she delivered training to male clients, thereby negotiating around prevailing norms of good behaviour for women. This action however involved compromising on the effectiveness of her role as a management coach.

Shamila similarly talked about the challenges she faced in maintaining an appropriate physical and emotional distance from men due to the nature her work:

*In the context of counselling I try to be in ease with my clients sometimes giving them a hug or patting them on their back, I don’t think about the gender of the client in making these gestures – they just come naturally. However the word had gotten around to my husband and his family that I was very ‘hands on’ with my clients. Somebody had told my husband that I touch men as I counsel them. So I suppose laying a hand on a man’s shoulder is considered wrong – even if it was meant to comfort a person in distress. I found this significantly challenging – I couldn’t connect with the client without thinking twice about how it would be interpreted. My cousin reported to me that some girls at office had said that I was flirting while working. Oh and I had apparently tried to hold the hand of a married guy. The easiest way to undercut any woman in Sri Lanka is spreading the word that she has a bad character – character is very important to Sri Lankan women. That’s what my boss did to me – when he became my enemy – he started to spread rumours about my character. It was very easy for him* (Shamila, 32)
Shamila was one respondent who resisted prevailing codes of moral behaviour for women since she considered them absurd. Her thinking may have been influenced by her being raised in New Zealand. However Shamila’s statement highlights the career consequences she faced due to resisting these norms, where rumours about her got out of hand and she had to leave the organisation. Her story indicates that performing respectable behaviour is very important for women to survive in Sri Lankan organisations, even though they may have to compromise on their work roles in the process.

**Not interacting extensively with casual male acquaintances**

Six women talked about how extensive interactions with casual male acquaintances were not expected from respectable women in Sri Lanka (see Patel, 2006; Phadke, 2007). Five respondents specifically voiced their concerns about breaching this norm in networking:

*Most people in Economics are men – so I am a nervous to exchange business cards with them – you can’t be sure of what they would think* (Sashi, 32)

Sashi seemed to be uncomfortable to network with men in her field since she was unsure about how her actions would be interpreted. Many other women in this sample shared Sashi’s concerns. Their response to this difficult situation was networking with men carefully:

*When I meet people from big companies or from the finance field I try to exchange business cards. It may come useful at one point or the other. But I do this cautiously, I am careful about who I give my business card to – you can’t go about giving your contact details to men just like that* (Nishanya, 36)
Although women talked about how conservative they were in exchanging business cards with men, they also spoke about how crucial networking was for careers in Sri Lanka, since there were too many qualified candidates chasing after too few jobs (cf. section 10.1) and most jobs are publicised through word of mouth and awarded on a first come first basis (cf. section 11.1). However these women seemed to ignore the fact that selective networking may not be the best way to form social connections in career.

Modest dress code

Three respondents emphasised that good, decent women are expected to dress appropriately and conservatively (see also Gherardi, 1994). They adhered to this moral rule by selecting modest attire to work. Shamila gives a classic example of how an inappropriately dressed woman would be perceived in Sri Lankan organisations:

*Most people would expect a woman to be dressed conservatively. Once I was in the lunch room in Kialogue and there were a couple of guys seated at the next table. This really pretty girl walked in wearing a nice outfit - tight pants and a stretch top. It was figure hugging but it was certainly office wear. One guy seemed to be smitten with her – since the others started nudging him and teasing him as soon as she walked in. As soon as she left – one guy just said ‘she’s nice machan but she’s definitely not a virgin’ and they all started to laugh. I was appalled (Shamila, 32)*

Shamila’s excerpt suggests that ‘virginity’ is a proxy of good character for women. Furthermore she implies that tight clothes are proxies of immorality. Nishanya likewise talked about how a girl in her organisation was shunned by her colleagues for wearing inappropriate attire to work:
This one girl (a receptionist) came to office wearing these really skimpy outfits. You should know the difference between dressing for work and dressing for a night out. And she was going out with a married man almost a decade older to her. The whole building was talking about her. She eventually found it difficult to survive here so she had to leave. She started getting prank calls and I think the other girls inevitably started to avoid her. Birds of a feather flock together you know. Except for cases like that – nobody else confronts gender issues here. If you behave respectably you are respected (Nishanya, 36)

Nishanya’s excerpt highlights that women are not only required to perform respectable behaviour in their organisations but also guard against ‘guilt by association’.

Not being seen alone with a man out of office hours and/or official premises

Three women spoke about how being seen alone with a man out of office hours and/or official premises was not expected from a good woman in Sri Lanka. These women therefore restricted their availability to male clients to only office hours. Diluni explains the way she handles prospective male clients:

Some of the younger guys ask whether I want to meet up to talk about this in detail – and I am in two minds. In our country you can easily be perceived in a wrong way in trying to make contacts with men. I tell them straight out that I am available for meetings during office hours only and my out of office hours are reserved for my children. I always meet clients alone for lunch – I don’t go for drinks at all. For one thing – I don’t take any hard liquor and for the other I am a mother - my daughters will be teenagers soon - I don’t want to be spoken of as a mother who goes around. In
England I joined my colleagues for a Friday night drink – it was anti-social not to.

But in Sri Lanka it’s different - women of my age don’t do that sort of thing (Diluni, 39)

Diluni not only explains how she works around norms of respectable behaviour for women by meeting male clients only during office hours, but also draws an interesting distinction between behavioural norms for women in the UK and in Sri Lanka. Diluni used the ‘ideal mother’ discourse (see Burr, 1995) to craft her identity as a respectable woman by telling male clients that her out of office hours are reserved for her children. Although restricting availability to male clients may help Diluni confirm to codes of moral conduct for women in Sri Lankan society, she was indeed missing out on opportunities to conduct prospective training programs.

In contrast to Diluni, Shanili integrated her meetings with male clients out of office hours with the nights out she did with her husband:

Anyway every Friday or Saturday we [her husband and herself] party out so I integrate my contacts into our outings – my husband enjoys meeting with them (Shanili, 36)

Fortunately Shanili’s husband was a very sociable individual who entertained quite a few foreign clients himself and enjoyed meeting her clients as well. Other respondents however did not seem to enjoy this privilege.
Shamila, a psychologist, talked about how her in-laws advised her not to be seen alone with male clients out of office hours and out of official premises since it might lead to misinterpretation:

*I remember my in-laws saying that I shouldn’t be seen alone with male clients drinking coffee since nobody knows that they are my clients; people may think I am having an affair. They always used to tell me to try to be in a crowd of at least three people. I used to tell them that my work is confidential - I cannot exactly drag another third person when I counsel a particular client* (Shamila, 32)

Shamila who resisted these norms of good behaviour for women faced negative consequences at both home and work. At work her colleagues started to spread rumours about her which got out of hand that she eventually had to leave her organisation. These rumours also spread to her family which resulted in her failed marriage. Significantly, confidential services, unlimited time availability and emotional connectively are the fundamental features which Shamila defines as the role of a counselling psychologist. However she was unable to offer these to clients since respectable women must not be seen alone with casual male acquaintances out of office hours. Thus Shamila was unable to be both a respectable woman and good careerist at the same time.

**Not being seen alone in the night**

Many respondents spoke about how society didn’t expect women to be seen alone at night (see Phadke, 2007). Women from private sector organisations seemed to be particularly affected by this norm since, as highlighted earlier; they often had to participate in organisational events held after-hours. Roshini who works for a leading apparel
manufacturing firm in Sri Lanka, talked about how social gatherings in the nightscape are inconsistent with rules of moral conduct for women in Sri Lankan society:

*It is not too nice for me to be seen without my husband in late nights. I don’t know how to explain it but one day I met one of his [her husband’s] friends at one of the NAS [her organisation] club nights and for some reason I was rather embarrassed to be out alone without my husband. I was wondering about what he and his wife thought about me all night. When you are married it is different to being single isn’t it? I have loads of guy friends from school who my husband knows about and we meet up for lunch, movies etc. regularly. But in the nights a married woman being out alone is unusual* (Roshini, 28)

According to Roshini, being seen alone at night was especially unacceptable for married women. Thus she targeted organisational events that she could attend with her husband and subtly avoided the others. As mentioned earlier, other respondents negotiated in a similar manner by attending social gatherings at work selectively, calling in sick occasionally or using their young children as excuses to stay home.

Significantly managers and bosses appeared to turn a blind eye to women’s manoeuvring and in many instances seemed to actively encourage it, though always implicitly. For example a number of women spoke about how their bosses allowed them to leave after-hours work meetings earlier than men just because they were women. Kishani explains:
Monday the meetings go on till about 8.30 – but I get to come around 7.45 that’s one of the advantageous of being a woman – usually women get to come off earlier (Kishani, 31)

Roshini talked about the great efforts her organisation undertook to provide security for the women who decided to participate in an overnight training program at work:

The company provided a lot of security for the women who participated, senior women from HR were assigned to go with groups which had women and I heard that the women were required to sleep in a rest house near the camp site and join others for the activities during the day. They were not allowed to sleep in tents. They just had to do it I guess – if something had happened to a woman - people would just blame it on the company (Roshini, 29)

All these data indicate that organisations encourage and support notions of respectable femininity amongst their female employees (see Radhakrishnan, 2009). However the women in this sample also emphasised that their superiors expected them to attend work events at night as a way of promoting organisational citizenship amongst employees and entertain organisational clients out of work hours (c.f. section 11.3): activities which contradicted rules of good behaviour for women in Sri Lankan society. In this sense organisations seemed to be making conflicting demands from women. However, what I find striking is that women never spoke about these conflicts explicitly but rather explained how they continuously manoeuvred between codes of moral conduct for women and their work obligations and career aspirations.
11.5.4 Norms of leaders being male

Ten women talked about how in their organisations, leaders are assumed to be male. This seemed to be underpinned by three assumptions: first, women are perceived to be less informed and less capable than men (see Bolton and Muzio, 2007), second, women with children are stereotyped as being unable to give their 100 per cent to work (see Cabrera, 2007) and third, effective leaders are assumed to be masculine (see Powell et al., 2002).

According to three respondents, women are considered to be less capable and less informed than men in Sri Lankan organisations. Diluni, a corporate trainer, spoke about how senior managers in organisations doubt her expertise:

*Some of older men are like – ‘do you think you could actually train senior managers and I lose my own confidence as soon as they take that tone. I explain to them that I am a facilitator who could develop team work, motivation and leadership within their managers rather than teach their managers about how to do their work* (Diluni, 39)

Diluni negotiated around the gender stereotyping she encounters by explaining to her male clients that she is a ‘facilitator’ rather than a ‘teacher’. Diluni also spoke about how she transforms her clients’ opinions about her expertise by showing them demo tapes of trainings she conducted in the UK:

*Anyway demo tapes of trainings I conducted in England overcome most of these barriers - as soon as anyone sees my tapes they look at me in a new way – ‘oh you trained managers in England!’* (Diluni, 39)
Interestingly, work experience in England helped respondents overcome gender related prejudices in Sri Lankan organisations. The status such experiences afforded seemed to outweigh the fact that they were women.

Two respondents emphasised that women with young children are stereotyped as being unable to give their 100 per cent to work:

Two of my colleagues were talking about who to appoint as a factory accountant to one of our garment factories in Pannala. They were both partial towards a particular girl but they didn’t want to put her name forward because she had young children and they thought that travelling would be difficult for her. I told them ‘you better ask her before deciding on anything, she might agree to it’ – I mean it was a definite promotion to her (Michelle, 51)

Michelle gives a classic example of gender stereotyping at work and the possible impact of this on a woman’s career progression. Madhavi who stated that she had never experienced or witnessed gender stereotyping and discrimination throughout her career, gave an interesting example of how she herself stereotyped women according to their care giving obligations:

As an organisational head I am hesitant at times to hand over critical tasks to girls with small children. It is nothing to do with gender; I am a woman as well. But we don’t want to take any chances of absenteeism or lack of input at critical times since we don’t have much time to spare ourselves. Our transformation team was headed by this girl last year – she was the best candidate to do this but her child took ill during the last week of the project and she was missing in action! She was excused from the
project and nobody had issues with her for this. But her role was very difficult to take over at the last moment and we were considerably inconvenienced. A girl with young children would never be disadvantaged in a job just because she has young children. But when handing over critical tasks – people may take the candidate’s commitments at home to consideration. Women are the main personalities at home in any country – we cannot change Mother Nature after all. (Madhavi, 48)

Madhavi emphasises that this type of gender stereotyping would only happen in allocating extremely significant assignments to women with young children. Given that many respondents explained their career progression in terms of completing important projects entrusted to them well and thereby being awarded promotions in recognition of their performance, I asked Madhavi whether she didn’t think stereotyping women with young children as being unable to give their best to work, would have any impact on their careers. Madhavi hesitantly replied that there may be an extremely slight impact if any.

Ten respondents stated that leadership is associated with masculinity in Sri Lankan organisations which disadvantaged women seeking managerial positions. Devika talked about the gender prejudices she faced as the head of the transformational team in charge of bringing together two companies after a hostile company takeover:

\textit{In the beginning they were like ‘who the hell is this woman out of nowhere who’s trying to preach to us’. But at the same time – they were less resistant to me than the guys in our team. I think a woman may have appeared less threatening and perhaps more understanding to them. They had a lot of grievances with EFCC and I always listened to whatever they said. This got the MEC team to cooperate with us – they}
were not like the citizens of conquered country who were bitter towards their conquerors. They slowly got to trust me (Devika, 46)

Devika won her clients’ favour by listening to their grievances and sympathising with them.

Kalpana who works as a hotel manager talked about how employers in the hospitality industry perceive women to be soft and therefore incapable of managing a big crew. In order to overcome this perception, Kalpana explained to interviewers of how she has successfully managed critical situations previously.

In contrast, Michelle used dismissal to counteract stereotypes and demonstrate her strength and competence as a leader:

I told you about me putting procedures through to the Sierra sites – each time I introduced something – in a couple of days they start ignoring everything. As soon as everybody at the construction sites knew that I was taking over – they thought that they would have a ball with me. I actually sacked one supervisor to make an example out of him to others. It wasn’t easy for me to do this, but I didn’t have any other way to get them to cooperate with me. After sacking one supervisor- they were all on their toes (Michelle, 51)

Other respondents seemed to have resorted to adopting masculine characteristics in order to avoid these prejudices (see Irvine and Vermilya, 2010). Nishanya explains:
In the beginning he [her male subordinate] seemed uneasy with me. I guess he wasn’t used to a female superior before – especially one who was very young. But I was very strict from the beginning and quite authoritative – so he got used to me very soon and did his work very well (Nishanya, 36)

Two other respondents talked about how they used similar means to appear as effective leaders:

My husband is surprised of how aggressive I sound at work sometimes. But I feel that this is essential for me being a woman. People expect a manager to be doer – to get things done by hook or by crook. You have to project this image always (Kalpana, 37)

Adopting masculine characteristics may help Kalpana overcome gender stereotypes at work. However, by acting like a man, she was indeed contributing towards maintaining the mindset that good leaders are male and masculine (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001).

### 11.6 Late career women

While early and mid-career women were burdened by heavy workloads, after-hours obligations and gendered work norms in their organisations, the situation of late career women was strikingly different. For instance, a number of older workers in the private sector commented that their workloads were much less than what they used to be a couple of years ago:

I can run the show through the phone. I have about eight senior managers reporting to me. As the head of a unit – you don’t spend time on actually doing things – it is more of a managerial role that you take (Madhavi, 48)
Having subordinates to depend on appears to have considerably eased late career women’s workloads. Significantly these women were not required to attend training and development programs in their organisations:

*We have many training courses for the young people. AS [her organisation] pays a lot of attention to this area. We often invite CEO’s and other prominent corporates in the country to talk about topics like leadership. We [older workers] have been there and done that, but they [the young people] have a lot to learn* (Michelle, 51)

Michelle implies that older workers did not require additional skills as young people did due to the vast experience they had accumulated over the years. Notably, late career women were not burdened by regular organisational events either:

*These dances are not for old people like us. We can go if we want to but only the young crowd goes* (Michelle, 51)

Indeed these women had the choice to attend or not attend these social gatherings: a privilege that respondents in early and mid-career did not share.

Significantly, older women’s greater sense of personal agency seemed to be due to their superior statuses which gave them a great deal of authority over their workplaces and exempted them from organisational norms applicable to other employees. For instance, Madhavi who was the head of strategic planning in her organisation, talked about how she was above presenteeism expectations in her workplace:
I am at the top of my career right now – so I could take off when I want to. At junior levels you generally don’t come in and out as you please – you have to be there. (Madhavi, 48)

Swaneetha similarly drew a distinction between the time flexibilities of seniors and juniors in her department:

Once you are an experienced academic you have leverage to do as you please. At demonstrator level – you can’t really expect to come in and out as you please. None of the demonstrators in my department do so right now and when I was the head of the department I wouldn’t have allowed it because I would expect them to hang around and learn – there is a lot to learn from more experienced colleagues – you have to watch what others do, get involved, ask questions – it is a learning experience (Swaneetha, 61)

This excerpt not only highlights that late career women are above norms of visibility within the organisation but also illustrates that they are the gatekeepers of prevailing rules.

Significantly, older workers appeared to be exempt from codes of good conduct for women as well. For instance, Swaneetha stated that she networked with men freely since she was an ‘old woman’ and had nothing to worry about, but the situation would have been much different if she was ‘young and pretty girl’. Thus rules of moral behaviour governed only younger women in Sri Lankan organisations. Indeed late career women occupied extremely privileged positions in their workplaces.
11.7 Summary

In this chapter I explored how women make sense of and enact their careers within their organisational contexts. Women explained their organisations in terms of recruitment and selection policies, career paths, the structure of the working day, work-life policies and work norms. Respondents attempted to make influential social contacts through networking since most jobs in Sri Lanka were publicised through word of mouth and awarded on a ‘first come first served’ basis. They also pursued postgraduate courses and worked in high branded organisations since a prestigious CV was important to get senior jobs in Sri Lankan organisations. With respect to career structures respondents from the private sector worked hard to obtain favourable ratings in regular performance evaluations, to progress upwards through the performance based career paths in their organisations. The majority of public sector women made their exceptional accomplishments visible to the boards to circumvent the ‘time served’ based career structures in their workplaces through promotions for outstanding achievements. Respondents from both sectors also ingratiated themselves with superiors in order to climb up their career structures. Significantly public sector women experienced favourable conditions of work in comparison to women from the private sector who were bombarded by heavy workloads and after-hours obligations. Early and mid-career women from the private sector adapted to their workloads and attended after-hours events selectively since they did not want to upset their bosses and risk their career prospects. The majority of women from both sectors adopted male characteristics in order to appear as effective leaders while adapting to work norms of respect and compliance to superiors, expectations of presenteeism and rules of good behaviour for women at work since they did not want to jeopardise their prospects in career. The few women who resisted these rules faced negative career repercussions. Significantly late career women were exempt from work norms applicable to other employees due to their superior statuses.
Chapter 12: The Sri Lankan home

This chapter examines the interplay between women’s home roles and responsibilities, and career enactment.

Women talked about their homes in terms of domestic labour, domestic maids, children, spouses and extended family members. Here I focus on how respondents engaged with these elements in the course of pursuing their careers.

12.1 Domestic labour

Almost 90 per cent of the married women were significantly burdened by domestic chores at their homes. With the exception of two respondents, no other women’s partners did housework. Devika explains:

*He* [her husband] *doesn’t even get up from the sofa to get the TV remote from the coffee table – I have been telling him to be mobile a bit more – for health reasons* (Devika, 46)

Charka similarly notes:

*Upali* [her husband] *doesn’t even get down from his car to open the gate* (Charka, 36)

Most respondents adapted to their structural arrangements at home by taking on the bulk of domestic labour themselves, or by sharing chores with adult female members of the family and domestic maids (see Wijayatilake, 2001).
Culturally influenced gender ideologies appeared to influence men’s limited participation in the domestic sphere (see Kamo 1988). For instance, the majority of women seemed to have internalised the notion that men do not do domestic chores and therefore did not expect their spouses to share housework with them:

_Do any Sri Lankan men help in the house? Well he would if I tell him to – but I always preferred him keeping away from domestic affairs. Men make a bigger mess when they try to help_ (Nishanya, 36)

Irangi similarly talked about how bad she felt about her husband having to do domestic chores during a period of chaos at home:

_He did everything – he helped in cooking, cleaning, attending to my parents and me. I never intended to make a woman out of my husband – but I couldn’t manage without his help during this period. I didn’t plan for my husband to do woman’s work like cleaning and cooking. I suppose I am conventional but I don’t like to see men in the kitchen. My husband chauffeurs everybody around, washes the car, attends to all heavy work around our house like woodwork, painting and never allows me do any hard work. Likewise I don’t expect him to chop onions or wash dishes which I consider to be my work_ (Irangi, 37)

Twenty two out of twenty four women likewise separated domestic roles and responsibilities in stereotypical ways. Only two respondents shared housework with their spouses:
I always get him [her husband] to do things with me together – little things like helping in the ironing and washing the dishes. When his mother came over she used to watch him doing work with puppy eyes...She was sorry for her son having to do basic housework, she always used to tell me that she had never gotten work out of him. I used to tell her that my mother had never gotten work out of me either, but we had to do some housework since we had only a ‘daily’ coming in. My father was never involved in the house but things are changing now or have to change for that matter – men have to help with the house (Roshini, 28)

Rupika was another exceptional respondent who defied conventional patterns of domestic labour:

Women should try to get the husband involved in some things at home. I got my husband to sit with my children and do their homework every day. That is something that I clearly said that he should do. I always did a bit of housework so he helped me in everything I did - whenever I cook he cuts the onions, he does the dishes if the servant is not there. The problem is that most women in Sri Lanka are not used to delegating their housework – they think that men are incapable of doing housework or looking after children, so they continue to do everything themselves. The end result of this is generations and generations of men continuing not to contribute to housework or children. My mother-in-law and sisters-in-law used to talk about this – but I put my foot down. When I explained to them that this was important, they saw my side of the story (Rupika, 54)
Rupika not only highlights how women themselves contribute towards carrying on culturally influenced gender ideologies from generation to generation but also illustrates that prevailing arrangements and mind-sets can change if women want them to.

12.2 Domestic maids

Domestic maids played a significant role in Sri Lankan households where women being able to go to work and develop their careers depended on having good maids at home. Many respondents talked about their maids extensively and emphasised the time they spent on supervising them (see Constable, 1996). Charka explains:

*It isn’t easy to give orders to so many people and supervise them – from the time I get home I am dealing with the staff at home; it’s my part time job* (Charka, 36)

Significantly, high turnovers, substandard work, unreliability and misusing facilities were part and parcel of domestic helpers. Indeed women were compelled to deal with these shortcomings.

High turnover

Three respondents complained about the high turnover of domestic maids:

*My mother went through menopause quite bad – she had to get her womb removed, she couldn’t manage the house alone so we had to get a maid. Our time was so bad that every maid who came left after a couple of weeks.* (Dilhari, 46)
In response, Dilhari got a distant relative of hers to stay over at her place and help them out during this crisis period. Two respondents employed multiple maids so that there would be others to fall back on in the event of one leaving:

I keep three girls at home – there isn’t much for them to do – but if one leaves there are two more to depend on (Madhavi, 48)

One woman encouraged domestic helpers to remain with her longer by providing them nice conditions of service:

We have three women to help – one to play with the children, one for cooking and one for housework. We have a driver and a man for the garden. We have built them huge quarters. When there are more of them they like it – they have each other for company. I have a TV in the kitchen for them and our house is near the Wimalavihara temple so they have a place to go for leisure (Charka, 36)

Charka has indeed taken considerable pains to accommodate her staff comfortably.

Substandard work

Four respondents complained about the poor quality of their domestic maids’ work, and explained how they undertook most of the household tasks themselves:

I end up doing a lot of work – the maid says that she has swept the house but there is plenty of dust on the floor. You have to be behind her to get it done properly and they never do the corners or under the furniture. Most of the time, I sweep again after she
sweeps – we can’t live like animals. Even after cooking the kitchen is very oily – everything has to be checked. I guess I am a bit obsessed with cleanliness but it is unhealthy to live among dust and dirt (Radika, 36)

Kanthi similarly notes:

_“I have a servant but I cook at home. My husband has a cholesterol problem and every servant we’ve had so far abuses oil in cooking. She [the maid] does only the washing and cutting”_ (Kanthi, 52)

Having maids did not necessarily ease the burden of housework on women, since they undertook a significant part of domestic chores themselves.

**Unreliability and misusing facilities**

Roshini gave a classic example of how domestic maids could be unreliable:

_“One day I got late to come home since we had an urgent after hours meeting at work. This woman had left my son all alone and gone off. My son was all alone in his cot at home when I came. The front door wasn’t even locked. I just screamed - what couldn’t have happened. I can’t believe that any woman could do such a thing - who would leave a small baby all alone and just leave like that?”_ (Roshini, 28)

After this experience, Roshini moved into her in-law’s place. She put up with her mother-in-law in return for the reliable childcare she provided.
Two respondents talked about how their maids misused the telephone at home, and helped themselves to their refrigerators immodestly. However both women ignored these shortcomings. Kishani explains:

*I know that there’s waste going around - I turn a blind eye or otherwise I will never be able to keep working. I know that they overuse the phone - I pay massive phone bills. But putting up with the expense is better than the mental stress of getting involved with all these people. I really don’t care as far as Tirun [her son] is okay and there’s food on the table. Replacing these servants isn’t easy you know – you have to train them all over again and you don’t know about the replacement you get – it could be worse than the first* (Kishani, 31)

Kishani’s put up with her maids’ imperfections since she was dependent on them to keep going to work. She further explains this below:

*I am no good in housework – I can’t manage without a servant even for a day. My husband is very socialable - he has several circles of friends and he invites them often for drinks and meals. I can’t even make a salad on my own and cleaning is something I hate doing – so I really need these people you know. I basically let them do anything they want* (Kishani, 31)

Other respondents were similarly dependent on their domestic maids although they did a substantial amount of housework themselves. Two women highlighted the efforts they took to accommodate ‘good maids’ when they found them:
I found a very good servant – a very respectable woman from Anuradhapura. She responded to my paper advertisement. Only once in a way you come across good people so I was determined not to lose her. I employed her husband as our gardener and allowed her family live at our place. It is a separate area from our house so they don’t get in our way. It is a relief since I am able to go to work without thinking of the children (Diluni, 39)

Overall domestic maids were indeed ‘mixed blessings’ where women couldn’t do with or without them. The respondents in this sample were compelled to continuously and actively manage their maids in order to keep going to work and develop their careers.

12.3 Children

Nineteen respondents had children and spoke extensively about their obligations to them. Late career respondents in particular seemed to play significant roles in their adult children’s lives; caring for grandchildren and looking for marriage partners for adult children. Ingrained in respondents’ accounts were strong ideologies of parental duty which seemed to have influenced their obligations to their offspring.

Checking up on children and cooking for them

Three respondents spoke about how they repeatedly checked up on their teenage children abroad even while they were at work. Devika explains:

At this point of time I call Australia and UK about ten times a day. As parents we have to keep an eye on them when they are young. It is our duty (Devika, 46)
Swaneetha similarly notes:

_Even when we are at work, we give him [her son] a call every 3 hours just to make sure he is okay. If we don’t call he panics and asks ‘Amma [mother] why didn’t you call?’ He knows it is unusual for us not to call often. What are parents there for after all?_ (Swaneetha, 61)

Two respondents spoke about how their adult children expected them to supply them with home cooked food. Devika explains:

_I make ‘love cake’ and ‘lamprise’ all the time – they [her children] never ate these when they were in Sri Lanka. But after they went abroad they want all sorts of food mailed to them_ (Devika, 46)

Rupika similarly cooked for her adult children and grandchildren often since they kept coming to her house for meals:

_Our children keep coming home so I cook for them myself and let them take the leftovers home_ (Rupika, 54)

Although these respondents had domestic help at home, they cooked for their children themselves. According to Rupika, a mother’s love made food taste very special.
Supporting children in studies and career development

Five respondents talked about how they helped their children in their studies and supported them in their career development. Some of these women had adapted their careers to accommodate to children’s requirements. For example, Vandana opted to work for a public sector bank since it had favourable working hours in comparison to private sector banks, and thus allowed her spend more time on her children’s home-work. Her career progression however would have been much faster had she joined a private sector bank. Vandana provides a classic example of a woman who sacrificed her own career development for her children.

Likewise, Devika stayed up all night with her teenage daughter while she studied, despite having to go to work the next day:

She [her daughter] is studying very hard for her A’ levels - She wants me to stay up with her while she studies so that she doesn’t fall asleep, so I am up till about 3 in the morning My mother stayed up with me while I studied - but she didn’t go to work. I do this despite going to work. This is motherhood – you do everything for your children (Devika, 46)

Two respondents gave insights into how they supported adult children in their career development:

I want my son to do his masters in the US in an Ivy League school – so I have to get him to do GMAT after he graduates. I don’t know much about GMAT myself. Actually I have to learn about it a bit more (Madhavi, 48)
Devika similarly intended to research about medical schools in the UK, and the application process to these schools, since her younger daughter decided to study medicine:

*I have to grapple with the UCAS form for my younger daughter - she’s going to study medicine and we don’t know a thing about applying to medical schools* (Devika, 46)

Devika was very keen on her daughter studying medicine since she wanted at least one of her children to be a doctor.

**Looking for marriage partners for children and caring for grandchildren**

The norm in Sri Lanka is for parents to introduce prospective marriage partners for their children. Devika explains her plans for her daughter:

*I want my daughter to come back and work in Sri Lanka for a while. Hopefully she may meet somebody who she likes or we’ll have to introduce someone to her – which I would have to put my mind into* (Devika, 46)

Kanthi likewise worried about whether her older son who was studying in the US would ever get married. She planned to introduce a prospective partner to him once he was done with his studies.

Four respondents in late career talked about how they cared for their grandchildren or expected to care for them in the near future:
We look after my grandchildren on weekends, but this is a pleasure that I look forward to the whole week (Rupika, 54)

Significantly, two women planned to adapt their careers to participate in caring for grandchildren:

My daughter has a lot of plans for me – she wants me to come to the UK and live with her. I have told her that I want to live among my people and her grandmother is alone as well. I will be lost in the UK – I have my work, friends, everything in Sri Lanka. But if she has a child I will go and do my duty as a grandmother and mother (Anouka, 49)

Anouka, who works as a general practitioner, was willing to forgo her career in Sri Lanka to be a full time child minder for her daughter, since she believed this to be her duty. Kanthi similarly spoke about how she hopes to retire soon in order to help her daughter have another child:

My daughter has a four year old son. She is a doctor - so I take care of him [her grandchild] most of the time. She wants to have another child – so I have told her to hold on till I retire. When you have children – there is no end to that responsibility (Kanthi, 52).

Indeed the women in this sample went into great extents to accommodate to their children’s needs: often utilising the time they had to develop their own careers and at times making substantial career compromises. On one hand, these sacrifices seemed to be a reflection of
women’s never-ending sense of duty towards children which permeated throughout their accounts. However, on the other hand, respondents’ extremely high educational, career and marital aspirations for their offspring seemed to have influenced them to invest much effort on their children’s education and lives.

The point is that these women were extremely attached to their children, which they somewhat camouflaged under a discourse of parental duty and responsibility. For example, a couple of late career respondents planned their own lives around their adult children:

*Well my boy is graduating next year and he wants to work in Colombo, we have no life apart from him – we managed these two years with the greatest difficulty, so we are thinking of moving to Colombo with him* (Swaneetha, 61)

Swaneetha who works as a university professor four hours away from Colombo was considering leaving her job and following her son to Colombo. Kanthi similarly expected her adult children abroad to return back to Sri Lanka to live with her:

*One boy is in UK, the other boy is doing a PhD at Monash and my younger daughter is an accountant in Dubai - she has one child. My husband and I want them to come back to Sri Lanka. We didn’t bring them up to live alone during our last years, and we like to enjoy our grandchildren. We have told them to come – if they come we both will be running a small day care at our place for all our grandchildren* (Kanthi, 52)

Indeed amidst women’s duties and obligations to children they also expected a lot of them. In other words it is clearly a ‘two way street’.
12.4 Spouses

Respondents talked about their partners extensively, explaining how spouses encouraged and/or constrained their careers.

12.4.1 Spouses supporting women’s careers

Five women were thankful to their spouses for not complaining about their work obligations. Indeed these respondents had extremely low expectations:

*He [her husband] is very considerate of my work, he never complains about me working in the night or anything. I am very lucky to have him* (Radika, 36)

Similarly Nishanya notes:

*My husband never gives opinions on me taking so much time for work or neglecting my child – some husband’s do you know* (Nishanya, 36)

These respondents suggest that it is the norm in Sri Lanka that men complain about women’s lack of participation in the household, regardless of the financial contribution they made to their families by going to work.

12.4.2 Spouses constraining women’s careers

A number of women gave insights into how spouses constrained their careers in terms of: not supporting their career development, being possessive and protective and thereby not understanding their obligations to work, and having to trail behind their spouses when they went abroad.
Spouses not supporting women’s career development

Four women complained that their spouses expected them to build their careers around their domestic responsibilities and their central roles as wives and mothers. Charka spoke about how her husband who was a consultant gastroenterologist never had big plans for her career, unlike his own:

*Those days he used to say that I should have more time to spare when we have children. He thought that I should be a General practitioner and run a small dispensary or work reduced hours in a private hospital* (Charka, 36)

Vandana similarly talked about how her husband wanted her to work in a public sector bank while he moved to a private bank, since work hours in public banks were favourable than private banks. Vandana adapted to her spouse’s wishes by joining a public bank. However her career progression was compromised since career paths in public organisations are based on time served rather than performance. Vandana’s and Charka’s stories provide classic examples of women’s career development being circumscribed by their spouses’ wishes and career aspirations.

In contrast, late starter Devika spoke about how she resisted her husband who preferred her to remain home with their children without going to work:

*My husband didn’t see a point in me tiring myself in that manner when we had a very comfortable life. And my daughters were teenagers then - very active teenagers. So he preferred me to keep an eye on them. But when I told him that I really wanted to do this he understood* (Devika, 46)
Devika explaining her career dreams to her husband worked in her favour where he understood how important this was for her.

**Possessive and protective spouses**

As noted in earlier in chapter 11, four respondents spoke about how their spouses did not like them working at night, attending organisational events alone and at times liaising with casual male acquaintances at work. Roshini explains her husband’s feelings about her participating in work related social gatherings without him:

> My husband is really open minded but he is quite uncomfortable of me being seen alone in the night. He trusts me and understands that I have certain obligations to the organisation I work - but when people he knows comes and tell him that they met me alone in the night – it’s not very nice (Roshini, 28)

In response, Roshini tried to attend official get-togethers with her husband as much as possible. Shamila similarly spoke about how her ex-husband had issues with her socialising with her colleagues after work:

> In Sri Lanka it is unusual for a girl to say to her husband – ‘I’ll be an hour late honey – I’ll be catching a quick drink with my office buddies’. My husband used to say that I am probably the only wife in Sri Lanka who said this to her husband (Shamila, 32)

Shamila who resisted her spouse faced a failed marriage. In contrast to Shamila, other respondents subtly got around their spouses by selectively participating in social gatherings held at night.
Trailing behind spouses

Eight respondents had quit their jobs or taken leave from work in order to follow their spouses abroad at one point or another in their career. Five of these women felt that trailing behind their spouses had significantly constrained their career progress. Charka explains:

*My husband left to the UK on postgraduate studies as soon as we got married. After a couple of months he was whining about how lonely he was and how much he missed me and pestering me to come to him. I quit my job and came to the UK- I had worked as SHO for only 11 months - I broke my career completely – you have to work as SHO for 2 years at a stretch to become a registrar. I was planning on doing the anaesthesiology part 1 exams as well. I just left everything and went to him. Once I came back to Sri Lanka, I had to start again as SHO – it was humiliating to work as a SHO with my juniors– it looked like I was not good enough to finish up soon* (Charka, 36)

Dilhari similarly spoke about the career repercussions she faced after following her husband to the UK:

*I took 2 years of no pay leave from work to accompany Sarath [her husband] for his PhD. It is difficult to come back after a long period – you are not up to date with things that have happened while you were absent – you have fine tune yourself all over again. I had to recommence work as a senior statistician –if not for this leave I would have got promoted to an assistant director way sooner. My colleagues who joined with me were in higher positions than me. So I was quite down due to this. I would have been at least an Assistant Governor at this point if I had been a man – for*
one thing it would been me going on the PhD and my partner taking leave from work to follow me (Dilhari, 46)

Dilhari makes a point that it is always the woman who trails behind the man and face career repercussions.

**Being the wife of a successful man**

Devika gave insights into her significant duties as the wife of a successful man:

*I totally forgot to mention my duties as a successful man's wife. You know that my husband is the CEO of Lanka Mell operations? A thing that I do on a regular basis is hosting dinners at our place for the board of directors and foreign partners. I don’t have to cook, we always order the food. But entertaining at this level is considerably stressful. I have to groom myself, get the house organised - it is not the regular kind of dinners you know - these dinners are like a mini event. I surf the net to get ideas sometimes - I laugh to myself when I think about what on earth am I doing? Two weeks ago I hosted a sit down dinner at our place - believe it or not I designed all the canapés myself, I put floating candles on our pond and served dinner in the garden - it sounds silly but this is how elite corporate gatherings are hosted. I have told my husband no more of these things in our house until my daughter finishes her exams* (Devika, 46)

Devika impended substantial time and effort on hosting her husband’s corporate dinner parties at their home: energy she could put into developing her own career by networking or even hosting her own colleagues and superiors at home.
12.5 Extended family

Women spoke at length about their extended families, giving insights into how they both enabled and constrained their careers.

12.5.1 Extended family members supporting women’s careers

All respondents talked about how family members supported their careers; in terms of encouraging them to pursue further education, and looking after their dependents while they were at work (see Lewis et al., 1992).

Encouraging women in higher education

Eight women spoke about how their parents encouraged them to follow postgraduate and/or professional courses of education, which is important to secure senior jobs in Sri Lankan organisations. Sherangi explains:

> I didn’t choose to do CIM [Chartered institute of Marketing UK] – my mother forced me and I couldn’t be bothered to argue with her. Since I didn’t have a degree she was insistent that I should at least have CIM. CIM is big in Sri Lanka and she is well aware of it. I had to go for classes during the weekends it was hectic (Sherangi, 26)

Sherangi who works as an assistant brand manager felt that being CIM qualified was essential for career advancement in marketing. She was therefore thankful to her mother for forcing her to do this exam. Radika similarly talked about how her parents insisted that she do a postgraduate course in Imperial College London, while she worked at Airbus UK full time:
I was trying to decide between doing a masters and applying for a job. The people at Airbus really liked the project I did for them during my placement so they encouraged me to apply for their graduate trainee program. I applied and I was selected so I decided to go for Airbus. My parents really wanted me to do a masters at Imperial College. They know only about Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial, LSE and Kings College. And to them Imperial is the premier school for engineering. I got them to understand that getting a job at Airbus was a significant achievement. But they still wanted me to do the masters part-time at Imperial College. I was stationed at Bristol - travelling to central London was very hard. But I am masters qualified today thanks to them (Radika, 36)

Indeed these women’s parents had extremely high educational aspirations for their children, similar to women’s ambitions for their own children addressed in section 12.3 earlier.

Caring for women’s dependents while they were at work

Parents, in-laws and relatives managed respondents’ households and took complete care of their children while they were at work, since domestic aides had to be closely supervised at all times and women did not trust young children to them. Nishanya explains:

I have no need to do household work - my mother visits every day and manages the household and the maids, she picks my daughter up from school and does everything (Nishanya, 36)

Kishani similarly talked about how her relatives took turns in caring for her mother when she was dying from cancer:
My mother's aunt, her brother's wife, her cousin's wife and my sister-in-law all took turns in looking after her [mother] My great aunt who was close to 90 even did the cooking at our place ... we have a very close family whatever said and done (Kishani, 31)

Kishani was able to go to work without taking a single day off since her family looked after her mother during office hours.

12.5.2 Extended family constraining women’s careers

Despite all this support provided, extended family members also clashed with domestic maids and adult children thereby forcing women to intervene in their arguments, disregarded women’s rules and boundaries and intervened in their personal lives, interfered in women’s work obligations and expected women to fulfil a set of obligations to them (see Rout et al., 1999): all which took up time and effort respondents had to develop their careers.

Clashing with domestic maids and adult children

Five women talked about how elderly family members collided with domestic maids and adult children and how they had to resolve these frequent quarrels:

Dilantha’s [her husband] aunt complains that so much of waste is going in the kitchen or the maid and the man are talking to each other too much. They [domestic staff] complain that she watches over everything they do, hide food – these issues are more complicated than the cases that go on in court (Kishani, 31)
Kishani ignored these arguments since it was too much of a hassle to get involved in them. Vandana similarly explained her father-in-law’s doings:

> Our maid gets annoyed with my father-in-law a lot. You cannot blame her - he is very stubborn and he purposefully does things to make work harder for her. He makes a mess when she has just finished cleaning and she keeps on complaining to me. I keep on explaining to her that people are difficult when they get old – and tell her not to accumulate sins by being hard on them. It works for a couple of days until he does something else. What to do. This is life. We are born, we live, get old and die - it’s all a part of life (Vandana, 38)

Vandana draws on two Buddhist teachings noted in chapter 6: first, being patient and tolerant at all times and second realising that all beings age and eventually die (Nyanatiloka, 2000). She seems to be using these teachings to convince her maid to overlook her father-in-law’s shortcomings.

Significantly elderly family members also clashed with teenage children:

> My husband’s mother used to listen to my daughter’s phone conversations on the other line – my daughter used to scream at her from the top of her voice when she discovered her on the other line. On one hand I was glad to be out of the house in the morning. There’s a limit to solving arguments (Devika, 46)

In response, Devika tried to explain to her mother-in-law that teenagers nowadays had an opinion and voice of their own.
Dilhari similarly spoke about the frequent arguments between her father and son:

*My son is sitting for his O’levels. As soon as he starts to study my father comes into his room and asks about what he is studying and tries to teach him and what not! My son has a bit of a temper he starts yelling at him – every day after work I solve numerous arguments. My husband doesn’t like my son being disturbed in his studies. So I have to calm them down before he gets involved. I keep telling my son to remember that he too will grow old one day* (Dilhari, 46)

Significantly none of these women directly confronted their relatives however unreasonable they were. Rather they convinced their maids and children to tolerate elderly family members’ weaknesses.

**Disregarding women’s rules and boundaries and interfering in their personal lives**

A number of women spoke about how extended family members disregarded their rules and boundaries and interfered in their personal lives. Irangi explains:

*My daughter was getting very undisciplined due to doting grandparents – my mother never stuck to my rules. It is really amazing since she was quite stern with me when I was a child. But she thinks she knows best after all.* (Irangi, 37)

In response, Irangi enrolled her daughter in a full time nursery.

Roshini talked about how her mother-in-law had absolutely no regard for her privacy and how she repeatedly intervened in her life:
My mother-in-law never knocks on our room door - she just comes in and then apologises – she doesn’t do it intentionally, she just doesn’t think it is important to knock. When my husband and I go out in the weekends with our friends she constantly reminds us that we are not teenagers anymore but parents...She’s always telling my husband not to drink since he will get liver problems – (as if he was an alcoholic). And I may lose my fertility due to alcohol according to her (Roshini, 28)

Roshini put up with her mother-in-law in return for the reliable childcare she provided. Roshini going to work and developing her career was to a great extent dependent on her two year old son being in good hands.

Sashi spoke about how her maiden aunt who lived with them reported everything that happened inside their house to other people:

She shares everything that happens in our house with our relations. But she is a retired teacher so she disciplines the children, sees to their homework and more than anything she is a person who is capable of taking a child to hospital in case of an emergency. You can’t depend on a servant for that kind of thing (Sashi, 32)

Sashi turned a blind eye to her aunt’s doings since she provided a source of reliable childcare which domestic maids couldn’t offer.

Interfering in women’s work obligations

Six respondents talked about how family members interfered in their work. Kalpana explains the pressure she encountered from her parents when she worked night shifts:
I was proud to be working at Hilton. I had a team of people reporting to me so I had no issues at work. But at home – god those days were nightmares. I got home very late almost every other day and I had to prepare myself for what my parents had in store for me. My mother was in tears most of the time... This was the first insight they got into my career and they were just appalled ... especially when I called them and told them I was remaining overnight. They used to send my brother to the hotel to check whether I was actually at the hotel or elsewhere. There’s nothing much I could do except explaining to them over and over again that I had to work. One thing I used to do was getting my younger brother over to the Hotel – he loved to come – he used to hang around the Blue Elephant [the hotel night club] and eat himself to death on my account; my parents were happy with this arrangement (Kalpana, 37)

As noted earlier in chapters 10 and 11 women working in the night is not considered to be respectable in Sri Lankan society. Thus Kalpana bribed her brother to remain with her at the hotel during night shifts so that her parents wouldn’t worry about her respectability being compromised.

Shanili similarly spoke about how her in-laws would not appreciate her entertaining foreign clients out of work hours if they knew about it:

*My in-laws are not aware of everything I do. But you can be sure that they will not like me entertaining foreign clients alone – they are extremely conservative people*

(Shanili, 36)
In order to accommodate to their demands, Shanili integrated her foreign clients into the outings she did with her husband whenever possible.

Roshini talked about how her mother-in-law didn’t think that girls should participate in organisational events held at night alone:

*She [mother-in-law] herself is confused about how she should react to it – whenever I go anywhere she just goes on about how these new organisations should think about girls before asking them to join events at ad-hoc hours. And then she tells me to go and come off as soon as I can* (Roshini, 28)

Roshini’s response to her mother-in-law’s wishes was attempting to attend social gatherings with her husband.

Significantly, despite extended family members’ interference in women’s work and personal lives, none of the respondents in this sample confronted their families. This seemed to be a result of culturally influenced ideologies of respect towards elders. Indeed several women emphasised that they never told off or contradicted their parents, in-laws and relatives however difficult they were. Some of these women seemed to believe that it was sinful to hurt elders’ feelings. Vandana explains:

*You don’t have to go from temple to temple praying for merit – you can accumulate merit at home by doing your duty and refraining from hurting elders’ feelings* (Vandana, 38)
Only one respondent talked about confronting elders when they were wrong:

*Sri Lankan women were never compelled to put up with their in-laws. I cannot recall any woman in my mother’s generation doing so and my friends don’t either. We are taught to look after our elders but looking after them doesn’t mean taking garbage from them* (Diluni, 39)

In her excerpt, Diluni draws a distinction between looking out for elders and complying with them unconditionally, which most other women in this sample did not seem to consider.

**Obligations towards extended family**

Respondents talked about obligations to their extended families in terms of having to accompany parents and in-laws to medical treatment and religious destinations, drive them around and socialise with them regularly. Six respondents spent all weekends with their parents and in-laws:

*Sunday we are at my parent’s house. Saturday we are at my husband’s parents’ house. Gosh I just realised that we hardly ever get to spend the day alone* (Shanili, 36)

Likewise, Sherangi’s weekend involved chauffeuring her mother around:

*I am the designated driver at our house. During the weekends my mother visits her friends and does her shopping. My father is too lazy to drive her and my brother gets out of it somehow. So it ends up in my hands. My mother enjoys my company better so I get caught for this every weekend as soon as I finish classes* (Sherangi, 26)
Three respondents accompanied their elderly parents and in-laws for medical treatment regularly:

*My mother-in-law is aging and has constant problems. Both her daughters are abroad so I have to take her for her various treatments... I suppose she feels comfortable to go to a doctor with a woman but then she should either go with a maid or ask her daughters to come back to Sri Lanka. A maid is not good enough for her - she is such a difficult woman - she always wants one of us to accompany her. I don’t do it out of choice - to be really honest the only reason I accompany my mother-in-law on her various expeditions is because she would go around telling all our relations that I don’t look after her. She is quite a story teller - she would make me look like the bad person without any trouble* (Diluni, 39)

Diluni makes it clear that she doesn’t help her mother-in-law out of choice but rather she felt that society would look down upon her if she withheld her duties. In contrast, other women seemed to place much value on caring for elderly parents.

Significantly, respondents spoke about duties that were not limited to parents and parent-in-laws but extended to siblings and distant relatives as well. Dilhari explains:

*We are looking for a bridegroom for my younger sister. She is in her late thirties – her marriage has been getting delayed. We are now actively looking for a partner for her. All the visits and everything take time you know* (Dilhari, 46)
Niranjala similarly talked about how she tutors her younger brothers every day and helps her grandmother and great aunt regularly:

I tutor my brothers – one is doing his A’levels, the other one is doing O’levels ... they go for tuition classes as well but they don’t do enough if I don’t sit with them. Then my grandmother and her two sisters live two doors away from us – all three of them are over eighty. They have a maid but she can’t do their work on her own. Every Sunday I go to bathe them. My mother is the one who makes their dinner – so I carry the dinner to their house everyday – this takes about an hour – I always get caught to a conversation. I have dedicated my Sunday mornings to take my Archie’s [grandmother and great aunts] to the temple. It is not an easy thing to do every weekend, but I get a lot of satisfaction from it... I am not complaining though – they looked after us when we were small – I am thankful to be able to do a small thing like this for them (Niranjala, 24)

Several other respondents likewise emphasised that they would always do their duty to their extended families whatever their circumstances were. Roshini spoke about how she would live with her difficult mother-in-law if it came to a stage that she couldn’t manage on her own:

He [her husband] loves his parents dearly and wants to see them all the time - but not to live in with them - at least not now. Eventually though, they may have to live with us. When they grow older – it comes to a point that they just cannot manage on their own. I am not that self-centred to shirk my duties – I will never be able to look at
myself in the face again if I don't do my duty – I will somehow or the other get used to her [mother-in-law] (Roshini, 28)

Thus women’s strong sense of duty towards family influenced their extensive obligations to parents, in-laws and other relatives. Indeed these obligations compromised the time and effort respondents had to develop their careers where women had to squeeze work around their central family roles. This is a contrast to chapter 9 where respondents’ family ties influenced them to progress in their careers to make their parents and children proud.

12.6 Summary

In this chapter I examined the interplay between women’s home roles and responsibilities, and career enactment. The Sri Lankan home comprised domestic maids, spouses, children and extended family members. Respondents turned a blind eye to their domestic maids’ shortcomings and tolerated difficult extended family members in return for the domestic help and childcare they provided. Given that women’s partners did not share housework or childcare, respondents being able to go to work and develop their careers depended on having domestic aides and family members at home. However it is notable that women spent substantial time on managing their maids and relatives especially when they clashed with each other. Respondents explained how their spouses both enabled and constrained their careers. Some women adapted their careers to their partner’s wishes while others resisted their spouses and followed their career dreams. Spouses and extended family members were also seen to oppose early and mid-career women participating in organisational events held at night. However women got around them by selectively attending these social gatherings. Respondents from all career stages had extensive obligations to children and extended family members. Late career women in particular were seen to take significant roles in their
children’s lives often caring for grandchildren. Indeed these obligations compromised the time and effort respondents had to develop their careers. However the majority of women emphasised that they would always do their duty to their family members.
Chapter 13: Discussion, contributions, conclusion and directions for further research

This chapter presents a discussion of the empirical findings and highlights the contributions these findings make to existing understandings of women’s careers. Finally this chapter concludes the thesis by outlining directions for further research.

13.1 Discussion

In this section I will answer the research questions I raised at the end of the literature review.

1. (a) How do organisational contexts impact on the way professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers?

Women described their organisations in terms of recruitment and selection practices, career paths, the typical working day, work-life policies and work norms. Women from all career stages took great efforts to make influential social contacts through networking (see Forrest and Dougherty, 2004; Emmerik et al., 2006) since senior managerial positions in both sectors were awarded through personal contacts (see Saher, 2011) and on a ‘first-come first-served’ basis. Indeed recruitment practices in these organisations were inconsistent with prevailing equal opportunity policies, and good social networks were instrumental for individuals’ career development (see Ibarra, 1993) in Sri Lanka. Respondents also developed their CVs further by pursuing postgraduate education and accumulating work experience in various organisations and geographical locations, since a prestigious CV (in terms of having studied at renowned institutions and having worked for well-known organisations particularly in the West) is extremely important to secure senior jobs in public and private organisations.
With respect to career structures, respondents from the private sector worked hard to obtain favourable ratings in regular performance evaluations, to progress upwards through the performance based career paths in their organisations (see Lyng, 2010). The majority of public sector women made their exceptional accomplishments visible to the boards (see Singh et al., 2002) to circumvent the ‘time served’ based career structures in their workplaces (see McDonald et al., 2005) through promotions for outstanding achievements. While early and mid-career women from the public sector ingratiated themselves with superiors (see Appelbaum and Hughes, 1998) to help them get around hierarchies based on time served, private sector respondents ‘sucked up’ to bosses to gain good scores in performance appraisals. These findings which illustrate how women use impression management techniques alongside high quality work, contradict Singh et al.’s (2002) argument that women managers rely on simply job-focused strategies for promotion.

Highlighted in respondents’ accounts was the centrality of career capitals (see Mayrofher et al., 2004) to move individuals through the hierarchies at work. For instance, a couple of private sector women talked about how further education enabled them perform well in their current organisations. Similarly a public sector respondent explained how an internal work contact helped her get involved in a critical organisational project which gave her the opportunity to display her exceptional performance to the board and be awarded a rapid promotion for this (cf. section 11.2). Throughout the data human and social capitals (see Mayrofher et al., 2004) were crucial to move women up their career structures. Respondents were well aware of the significance of these assets to their career development. Therefore they worked extremely hard to acquire these capitals in order to fulfil their career goals, which to every woman meant hierarchical advancement.
It is notable that respondents’ aspirations for career and the agency that they impended towards realising these goals, is a stark contrast to findings of non-professional women in Sri Lanka who simply wish to maintain their jobs and relegate just enough time and effort necessary to do this (Lynch, 2007). Given the absolute centrality of human capital to move individuals up Sri Lankan organisations’ hierarchies, I would argue that professional credentials significantly influenced women’s capacity to progress in career.

Respondents talked about their working day in terms of workloads, work-hours, training and development programs, and after-hours workplace socialising. Most early and mid-career women from the private sector reconciled themselves to their unfavourable work schedules (see Lyng, 2010), since they were unwilling to confront bosses about these issues, contradict norms of compliance to superiors (see Saher, 2011), and thereby risk their career prospects (see Singh et al., 2002). A few respondents however planned to resign from their jobs. Significantly there appeared to be a paradox between the home-work harmonisation of public and private sector respondents. For instance, public sector women who had very few work-life policies in their organisations did not find home-work harmonisation problematic due to favourable workloads and family-friendly work-hours. In contrast, although work-life policies such as flexi-time were widely available within most private organisations, these policies were often inaccessible to managerial workers and were inconsistent with norms of ‘being seen’ within the workplace at all times (see Gambles et al., 2006).

Private sector respondents in early and mid-career were burdened with having to attend regular training and development programmes during non-standard hours, and after-hours social events in their organisations (see Watts, 2007). However none of the women in this sample declined these obligations directly (see Dryburgh, 1999) since they did not want to
upset their superiors. Instead women’s response was attending social gatherings at work selectively (see Watts, 2007), calling in sick occasionally, leaving halfway through training courses held in the weekends after showing their faces, and/or using their young children as an excuse to not attend. While such informal negotiation did nothing to alter existing organisational arrangements or challenge the status quo, it enabled woman to more effectively harmonise home and work.

Overall this evidence suggests that respondents were operating within largely gendered organisations. Progression along career paths depended on working extremely hard and demonstrating exceptional performance (see Singh et al., 2002; Lyng, 2010), being seen within the organisation at all times (Gambles et al., 2006) and participating in after-hours social events at work (see Sommerlad, 2002) in the case of private organisations. Moreover getting jobs in organisations depended on significant social networks (see Saher, 2011). Although these rules are in theory applicable to both men and women in organisations, they impact on particularly women (Britton, 2000) who face challenges in engaging with prevailing career structures due to their domestic responsibilities, and/or prevailing norms of moral conduct for women that deem activities such as attending work events at night alone as unrespectable (see Phadke, 2007). As noted earlier, public organisations did not make the same unreasonable demands from women as private organisations. However, while favourable conditions of work enabled public sector women juggle their competing demands, they progressed more slowly than their male counterparts who worked longer, harder and more visibly.

Given this evidence, it is notable that most respondents, particularly women from the private sector, did not speak of these disadvantages explicitly. Women’s denial of gendering in
organisations could be part of their struggle to avoid being seen as different from men in the workplace (see Lewis, 2006) and projecting the image that they are strongly united with the organisation (see Dryburgh, 1999). However I feel that the attention private organisations paid to equal opportunity (see Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998) and the symbolic value of Sri Lanka’s private sector being modern, western and better than the public sector, has obscured their gendered nature.

Early and mid-career women worked extremely hard to blend into the ‘norm’ of the organisation which men easily occupied (see Lewis and Simpson, 2010). These women put in long work hours despite significant domestic obligations, attempted to attend organisational events held at night despite concerns of prevailing norms of moral conduct for women and adopted masculine characteristics in order to appear as effective leaders (see Priola, 2007; Irvine and Vermilya, 2010). Far from challenging these norms, however, the data generated in this study suggests that respondents’ actions contributed towards maintaining gendered elements of organisations. For instance, women refraining from taking leave from work maintains ideal worker norms in workplaces (see Gambles et al., 2006). Likewise women acting like men in order to appear as effective leaders reinstates the norm that good leaders are male and masculine (see Powell et al., 2009). The consequence of such actions would be that other women who are less able or less willing to confirm to dominant organisational cultures continuing to be disadvantaged in their careers.

This is illustrated by the case of Sashi who was compelled to leave her organisation when her colleagues sidelined her for taking extended amount of leave when her young daughter went into long term sickness. Vivian Burr (2003) argues that marginalised voices may be an important source of resistance to dominant cultures. However women who were marginalised
in organisations such as Sashi seem to have left their workplaces silently rather than voicing
the injustice prevalent in the system (see Hopfl, 2010). Other women who hear similar stories
are likely to not challenge existing arrangements. The point I am trying to make is that order
will be maintained in gendered work contexts as women pursuing hierarchical advancement
conform to prevailing work norms in the process (see Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Bolton and
Muzio, 2007).

Significantly the late career women in my sample were not as deeply influenced from
gendered work contexts as early and mid-career women due to their superior statuses.
However, they were indeed the guardians of the status quo. As noted, Rupika talked about
how women should not expect special privileges such as flexible work arrangements just
because they were women (see Powell et al., 2009), Kanthi emphasised that employees’ lives
out of the workplace are not the organisation’s concern and Madhavi spoke about how she
stereotyped fellow women according to their caregiving burdens (see Irvine and Vermilya,
2010) and avoided assigning critical tasks to them due to the betterment of her organisation.
These findings highlight the special role older women in Sri Lanka play in reinforcing the
gendered workplace, constraining younger women’s career development in the process.

I would argue that mature women’s comparatively privileged status in organisations reflects
the emphasis placed on respect to elders within Sri Lankan culture. However this authority
and influence is a stark contrast to the western literature that depicts older women as largely
invisible within organisations (see Clarke and Griffin, 2008), subjected to age related
discrimination by employers (see Walker et al., 2007) and often eclipsed by their younger
counterparts (see Porcellato et al., 2010). Clarke and Griffin (2007) draw attention to how
older women workers invest in beautifying themselves in order to fight invisibility and age
based discrimination. In this sense these scholars suggest that for women, youth is a form of ‘career capital’ (see Mayrhofer et al., 2004). My findings however reveal that older age is a career capital for women in Sri Lanka (see Duberley et al., 2010). Indeed the late career women in this sample did not seem to find it as difficult to resist gender prejudices in organisations as early and mid-career women did (cf. section 11.5.4). Thus women’s older age seemed to have helped them surmount stereotypes which constructed women as unsuitable for top managerial positions. In Sri Lanka age related wisdom overcomes gender based disadvantage.

(b) How do home and family impact on the way professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers?

The empirical chapters highlight how the typical Sri Lankan home comprises extended family members and domestic maids in addition to the usual spouse and children familiar in the western literature. The data introduced in the empirical chapters illustrate the influence of all these parties on Sri Lankan women’s careers. In this section however, I focus on particular aspects of my findings which provide new insights into the existing literature. While women in the West often struggle to find suitable sources of childcare (see McRae, 2003) and are constrained in their careers in the process (see Kirchmeyer, 1998 and 2002; Metz, 2005; Walters, 2005) the women in my study had readily available resources for housework and childcare in the form of extended family and domestic maids (see Lewis et al., 1992). The problem Sri Lankan women encountered, however, was how to manage their unlimited resources. Indeed many respondents talked at length about the strategies they employed to deal with their housemaids (see Constable, 1996; Muttarak, 2004) which included taking on part of the domestic chores themselves, offering maids extremely favourable conditions of
service in order to overcome their high rates of turnover, and in some instances turning a blind eye to their helpers’ unacceptable behaviours. Significantly a number of respondents referred to managing domestic staff as their ‘part-time’ job. However women in Sri Lanka simply couldn’t manage without maids, since their spouses did not share domestic chores (Nath, 2000) and most women didn’t think that men should do housework (see Budhapriya, 2009). Thus women’s capacity to go to work and develop their careers depended to a large extent on having reliable housemaids at home. In this sense domestic aides were absolutely central to Sri Lankan women’s careers.

Similarly, although extended family members were readily available for childcare in most households (Gambles et al., 2006; Rout et al., 1999), they also brought with them a set of issues which required substantial involvement on the part of women. The strategies respondents used to manage family members included intervening in their arguments with domestic staff and adult children and privately pleading with maids and adult children to put up with their elderly parents. Indeed women could use this time to pursue education and/or networking activities which were essential for their career development. Moreover the way that respondents managed their households, contributed towards maintaining existing arrangements that they experienced as constraining and inhibiting. Elderly parents and in-laws, along with spouses, opposed early and mid-career women’s participation in work activities at night (see Phadke, 2007; Patel, 2006) thereby forcing women to attend organisational events selectively and judiciously. This posed a significant obstacle since participating in after-hours activities was instrumental for career progression (Sommerlad, 2002) in private sector organisations. Furthermore women from all career stages had extensive obligations to their extended family members (see Rout et al., 1999; Rana et al.,
1998; Poster and Prasad, 2005) which took up a considerable amount of respondents’ personal time. Indeed only few respondents resisted such expectations.

Nevertheless it is important to note that the impact of extended family on Sri Lankan women’s careers is not simply an issue of time and effort. On the contrary, a number of women in this sample attempted to develop their careers in order to make their families proud and financially support their family members. Moreover families directly supported women’s career development by encouraging them in further study. Together my data highlight that Sri Lankan women’s career development is significantly centred on their extended families. In one way, however, there seemed to be an element of social desirability in the data where respondents appeared to be trying to position themselves as individuals who lived for their families: the legitimate and socially accepted thing for a woman in Sri Lanka to do. A key point here is that these women’s families had very high expectations of them. On one hand they wanted women to be ideal daughters and daughters-in-law who reared children and performed familial duties. However they also wanted women to progress in their careers, as long as they were not compromising on their respectable femininity. Indeed the women in this sample appeared to be attempting to live up to these somewhat conflicting expectations.

The other key insight my findings offer is the impact of young and adult children and grandchildren on women’s careers. Most late career respondents were taking a big part of their adult children’s career development to their own hands, cooking for their children’s families despite the availability of domestic maids, and looking after grandchildren on a regular basis. All these findings illustrate that women’s obligations to children are not limited to young children as the literature typically assumes (see Walters, 2005). Nevertheless, what is particularly striking about this data are not women’s duties and obligations towards their
children, but rather the absolute centrality of young and adult children in Sri Lankan women’s lives and careers. For instance, some women in this sample talked about how their career development was motivated by their children: in relation to using their professional status to get their children into good schools, providing children with luxuries from financial imperatives of career and bringing children pride and status from their professional positions. To my knowledge these issues have rarely been examined in the careers literature. Interestingly, the women in this sample had expectations from their adult children similar to the kinds of expectations their extended families had from them. For example, some respondents clearly expected their adult children to live near them and provide them with grandchildren, while doing postgraduate studies and progressing in their careers. These findings illustrate how cultural ideologies and expectations pass on from generation to generation and ramifications that extend beyond family spheres, impact on women’s work lives in profound ways.

In sum my findings of how home and family impact on the way professional women in Sri Lanka think about and enact their careers yields four significant new insights. First, my data highlight the complexity of the domestic sphere, which in the western careers literature is typically portrayed monolithically. Second the empirical data which illustrates how families at once both enables and constrains women’s career development and poses some very challenging paradoxes for women, contributes valuable insights into existing literature which tends to conceptualise family as mainly a hindrance to women’s careers with reference to unequal domestic divisions of labour (see Crompton et al., 2005), childrearing (see Kirchmeyer, 1998; Metz, 2005; Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005; O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005) and extensive obligations to extended families in the case of South Asian women (see Budhapriya, 2009). While some contributions recognise that families enable individuals’
career development, this is limited to mainly psychological effects of how parenting style and attitudes influence adolescents’ vocational identity development (see Lopez, 1989; Penick and Jepsen, 1992), and how families influence individuals’ vocational goals (see Lindstrom and Benz, 2002; Newman, 2004) and guide adolescents in career planning (see Blustein et al., 2002).

Third, my findings which illustrate Sri Lankan women’s extensive domestic roles in early, mid and late career contrast the prevailing view that relegates such preoccupations to mainly the mid-career phase (see O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005). However my study does not simply offer insights into women’s extensive domestic roles. Rather I also illustrate how women manage home and work by means such as using young children as excuses to bosses to go home from work early and sacrificing personal time to fulfil duties to family members alongside work obligations. Fourth, the empirical data which highlight the complete entanglement of home and work in Sri Lanka makes a valuable contribution to the work-life balance literature. For instance women undertook multiple home-work roles at the same time when they were checking up on their children while they were at work or integrating work clients into their personal outings. These findings which reveal how women fleetingly move between different home-work roles and identities during significantly short spans of time highlights that it is extremely difficult to identify where one role ends and the other begins (see Cohen et al., 2009). Likewise respondents’ families knew about everything that goes on at work and therefore many women were very careful about their conduct since they didn’t want to jeopardise their families’ reputations (see Hewamanne, 2008). The effectiveness of ‘news’ networks in Sri Lanka in distributing information from work to home and vice versa, could probably be due to the smallness of Colombo and everybody in the upper class circles knowing each other. While I cannot
comment with certainty on the reasons, these findings illustrate that the very concept of boundaries between home and work is meaningless.

(c) How does the wider context of Sri Lanka impact on the way professional Sri Lankan women make sense of and enact their careers?

The empirical data highlight how the women in this sample continuously engaged with a range of wider contextual social structures in Sri Lanka in the course of pursuing their careers. First respondents provided insights into how the Sri Lankan economy, labour market and occupational sector structures influenced their careers. For instance, one woman was compelled to reconcile herself to a job which provided only few opportunities for career development, since most companies were not hiring due to the negative economic climate in the country (see Rampell, 2009). Several women attempted to make influential social connections through networking (see Forrest and Dougherty, 2004) to get to the few good jobs in the country first. Similarly one respondent did an MBA and switched to an organisational career since she perceived career prospects in chemistry to be bleak in Sri Lanka. This finding not only highlights how women adapt their careers to prevailing labour market conditions, but also challenges studies which suggest individuals’ career changes in mid-career to be motivated by mainly internal concerns such as jobs interest and harmony between work and personal values (see Cabrera, 2007), rather than external motives such as pay and better prospects (see Holmes and Cartwright, 1994).

A few respondents networked extensively in pursuit of being the one person in their occupational field that all clients referred to, thereby competing for the larger portion of their limited customer base. Overall these findings make a significant contribution to existing
women’s career models such as the KCM (see Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005) which I would argue do not pay sufficient attention to the impacts of economic (see Rake, 2009), labour market (see Evetts, 2000) and sectoral constraints on women’s career development.

Second the women in this sample gave insights into how prevailing religious ideologies influenced the way they enacted their careers. Sixteen respondents emphasised that Buddhism gave them the strength to cope with difficult situations in life and pursue their work and career. Thus women’s Buddhist faith seemed to support their careers. However a number of women explained favourable and unfavourable career outcomes in terms of Buddha’s teachings of ‘fate’ (see Payutto and Olsson, 1995) where they implied that individuals would progress in career only if their fate allowed them to do so. In this sense women’s interpretations of Buddhist philosophies seemed to work in opposition to their career development. Notably, these findings seemed to support Weber et al.’s (2000) argument that Buddhism is inconsistent with capitalist development in society. However, on the other hand, the women in this sample didn’t seem to think that fate entirely determined their chances in life, where they talked about how they shaped their careers through their own actions. For instance respondents made their exceptional performance visible to boards to circumvent the time served based career structures in their organisations and networked with influential people in order to get to the few good jobs in the country first. These examples highlight that women certainly believed that they could change their existing statuses and therefore worked extremely hard to improve their circumstances.

Significantly respondents used religion to enhance their lives and careers. First they lived ethical lives as according to Buddhist principles, hoping that the good karma they accumulate (see Nyanatiloka, 2000) would payback in this lifetime, enabling them spend the rest of their
lives without any major problems. Second they paid tribute to the Buddha regularly at temple, in order to cope with family members’ illnesses and even the stresses of everyday life. Third women asked Hindu gods to bless their expeditions (see Duffy, 2006). Given respondents’ espoused commitment to Buddhism it was rather surprising that these women prayed to Hindu gods, especially since Buddhism does not involve prayer to local deities (Obeysekere, 1963; Gombrich and Obeysekere, 1988). However scholars have noted that Buddhists in Sri Lanka have worshipped Hindu gods since the 12th century (see Deegalle, 2006). According to Obeyesekere ‘however much doctrinal Buddhism devalues magic and the gods and divests them of power, universal human motives require the existence of these phenomena’ (1963: 150).

My findings on the interplay between Buddhism and women’s career development make two significant contributions to the extant literature. First these findings highlight that it is not Buddhist philosophy which impact on individuals’ careers, but the way people use this doctrine in their day to day lives. For instance, rather than attempting to attain spiritual salvation by denouncing all attachments (see Nyanatiloka, 2000), women in Sri Lanka prayed to Hindu gods to achieve successful outcomes in career, and used Buddhist faith to cope with difficult situations in work and life and pursue career, and to convince themselves that they should be content with their lot (see Nyanatiloka, 2000) rather than chasing after desired career statuses, when they were unsure about the outcomes of these statuses or when they did not achieve the statuses they wanted. Either ways Buddhism and Hinduism together which provided significant sources of strength and support for women, helped them pursue their career goals. Indeed these findings challenge Weber et al.’s (2000) argument that Buddhism is inconsistent with capitalist development. The point is that Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka which is entwined with Hinduism, is very different to Buddhist theory Weber and his
colleagues investigated. And as the data of this study highlights, this version of Buddhism certainly helped women advance in their careers.

Second, my findings illustrate that women’s careers in Sri Lanka are shaped by the extent to which they fulfil the social conventions that have emerged around Buddhist philosophy. For instance the empirical data highlight how the women in this sample took every effort to portray themselves (see Burr, 1995) as individuals highly influenced by Buddhist values when they explained their career enactment and daily lives in terms of Buddhist teachings. Similarly women also emphasised the all-important and central roles they played in sustaining prevailing Buddhist practices within their community, when they were accompanying relatives to temple or getting involved in ceremonies at temples. Indeed it appeared as if women needed to fulfil these wider social responsibilities to get on in Sri Lankan society (see Perera, 1997). Based on my data, I would argue that women in Sri Lanka need to be seen as possibly sustaining Buddhism in their country, and performing Buddhism in a very public way, to create a good impression at work. Good Buddhist women are likely to be respected by employers since they are perceived to be ethical and dutiful and likely to pass on Buddhist values to the workplace. In other words the point I am trying to make is that Buddhism is an important part of Sri Lankan women’s employment because it is a central element of the social ideal of a respectable woman.

Finally the influence of astrology and horoscopes on women’s careers is highlighted in the empirical data. For instance, one respondent explained how her career related decisions are superseded by a trip to her astrologer and another respondent revealed how her father sought refuge in her horoscope’s prediction that she would have a late but good marriage when deciding whether to send her abroad for PhD study before marriage. On one hand horoscopes
were something women used to make sense of their chances in career and what happens to them. However, on the other hand, they were used as a second opinion to confirm what women wanted to do in their careers, since none of the respondents in this sample restrained themselves from doing something they wanted to do because their horoscopes predicted a bad period for them. Based on these findings, I would argue that astrology provided a source of support for women in their career enactment where it legitimised and reassured their decisions.

In sum, these findings which highlight how mythical beliefs systems and religious philosophies are part and parcel of individuals’ everyday lives, challenge the secularisation thesis advocated by great social theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. Secularisation refers to the belief that religion, superstition, myths and magic would lose its influence as societies modernise and draw on science to explain life (see Norris and Inglehart, 2004). While Sri Lanka was certainly moving towards modernity in terms of higher education and employment for women and western influenced organisational practices, traditional ideas of astrology and religion were also central aspects of people’s lives. And significantly, as noted earlier, the respondents in this sample drew on these notions to further their careers. These findings illustrate that modernisation has not completely disenchanted the world as Max Weber postulated (see Gerth and Mills, 1991), but rather enchantment was absolutely tied up to Sri Lankan women’s journey towards modernity where these women used enchanted dimensions to do modern things such as getting a career.
2. How does moral character play out in the context of professional women’s careers in Sri Lanka?

Respectable femininity is the overarching discourse of my data where respondents, their families (see Phadke, 2007; Dhillon, 2003) and organisations (see Radhakrishnan, 2009; Patel, 2006; Phadke, 2007) seem to be centrally preoccupied about protecting women from perceived moral dangers and maintaining their good reputation. Respondents argued that good moral character is very important for women’s careers in order to gain respect from subordinates and superiors, and a number of women gave examples of how ‘unrespectable’ behaviours were sanctioned. However I see a significant problem here. I propose that being both a woman of good character and a successful careerist at the same time are two conflicting imperatives.

First, respondents agreed that social capital is very important for careers in Sri Lanka. However early and mid-career women networked cautiously and selectively, since extensive contact with unknown men is not expected from respectable women in Sri Lanka. Indeed this tentative behaviour restrained women from getting on career-wise and maintained prevailing norms which required women to keep a distance from men. Second, a number of early and mid-career respondents met male clients only during office hours and official premises since they were concerned about how society would judge them if they were seen alone with a man out of the workplace. According to Sommerlad (2002), the ability to informally socialise with clients and bring in additional business to the company is becoming the main avenue for career progression in contemporary organisations. In this sense, women restricting their availability to male clients could be expected to disadvantage them when applying for senior management positions, since employers may doubt their commercial competence.
Third, respondents particularly from private organisations, attended organisational events at night selectively since respectable women did not travel alone at night without their spouses. However these women also emphasised that their bosses expected them to participate in these events as means of developing organisational citizenship among employees, and talked about how important it was to keep superiors happy to progress in their organisations. Thus in their struggle to confirm to the codes of good behaviour invaluable for women’s hierarchical advancement, respondents not only ended up displeasing superiors and damaging their prospects in career, but also maintained the rules of moral conduct which disadvantaged them.

The question then arises, how the women in this sample accounted for the contradictory demands placed on them by organisations. Notably, in their interviews respondents never talked about these competing requirements. Rather, they described how they constantly manoeuvred themselves around notions of respectable femininity and their obligations to work and career. From the organisational side, although career structures, both formal and informal, made no allowances for gendered social norms or moral imperatives, managers and bosses appeared to turn a blind eye to women’s manoeuvring and in many instances seemed to actively encourage it, although always implicitly.

Overall my findings illustrate the imperative of conforming to the rules of moral character for women to get on career-wise, while at the same time illustrating how these rules can conflict with progressing in career. To my knowledge, in the western careers literature, the only author to have considered morality as an explicit career issue is Alan Mckinlay. In his work on 20th century Scottish banking, Mckinlay (2002) provides insights into how employees’ progress in organisations was dependent on them conducting themselves as individuals of
high moral standing in terms of self-disciplined behaviour and adherence to the organisation’s ethics and principles. Likewise in Sri Lanka, women’s career progression is dependent on them conforming to the rules of moral conduct for women or rather ‘performing respectable behaviour’ in their careers. However what is particularly interesting about Sri Lanka is that these rules of moral conduct for women are also at times in conflict with progressing in career. While the South Asian literature provides insight into how women negotiate around notions of ‘respectable femininity’ in their careers (see Lynch, 2007; Hewamanne, 2008, Radhakrishnan, 2009), these studies do not consider the possible career consequences of manoeuvring around notions of ‘respectable femininity’. Based on my data I would argue that Sri Lankan women actively negotiate within norms of moral behaviour for women in society, reproducing these rules in the process.

13.2 Contributions
This section highlights the key contributions of this thesis to existing understandings of women’s career enactment.

13.2.1 A theoretical framework of women’s career enactment
Based on the findings of this research study, I introduce a theoretical framework for understanding Sri Lankan women’s career enactment. The proposed model comprises two key dimensions: context and action, and is based on the iterative relationship between women and their social contexts (see Burr, 2003) elucidated in the empirical data. The strategies respondents used to develop their careers were influenced by their social environment, and these actions in turn impacted back on the social contexts women were situated within.
Social context

Following Giddens (1984) I formally define social context in terms of rules and resources. Resources comprise material objects such as people, material artefacts and information, as well as non-material factors such as status and hierarchical position (see Layder, 1994; Giddens, 1984). Spouses, extended family members, children, domestic maids and women’s tangible assets described in the empirical data are examples of material resources, while hierarchical positions which allowed women command over others at work and privileged social status which opened doors for them in private companies are examples of non-material resources. By defining resources as entities which allow people to get things done and make changes to their social world, Giddens implies that resources enable individuals (see Layder, 1994). I however emphasise that resources can both enable and constrain. Extended family members who at once enabled and constrained the careers of the women in this sample can be taken as an example of this point. Significantly, when resources enable individuals get ahead in their careers, we can usefully conceptualise them as career capitals (see Mayrofher et al., 2004).

Rules are generalisable procedures that people follow in social life (see Giddens, 1984). They include long-term structural arrangements in society, beliefs systems, traditions, norms and ideologies. Career paths in organisations, domestic divisions of labour at home and labour market and economic conditions are examples of long term structural arrangements (see Evetts, 2000) while horoscopes, astrology and religious philosophies are examples of social belief systems. Traditions refer to established ways of doing things (Giddens, 1979) such as living in joint families in the case of certain South Asian societies (see Lewis et al., 1992). Norms are explicit and/or implicit social cues within societies that coordinate individuals’ interactions with others such as norms of good behaviour for women at work, evidenced in
the empirical data of this study. Finally ideologies are socially accepted ways of looking at things (or worldviews) which include sense of duty towards family and ideas of men’s and women’s work expressed by the women in this sample.

I emphasise that women’s careers are so deeply implicated within their social contexts that it is almost impossible to understand their careers apart from these contexts. Moreover I make a point that various social contexts such as home and work are inextricably interrelated (see Cohen et al., 2009). However I do not see contextual conditions to impact on women’s careers in a causal and deterministic manner as scholars heavily influenced by the sociological tradition (e.g. Proctor and Padfield, 1999; Ginn et al., 1998). Rather, in the light of my research findings, I argue that women have a great degree of choice between the opportunities and constraints available to them within their contexts (see Evetts, 2000). I will explain this point in detail under the next dimension: action.

Action

Under the action dimension I give prominence to the role of individual agency in women’s careers. Here I conceptualise individuals as knowledgeable and rational beings who are capable of making choices about their careers. However, I do not see women’s choices as occurring in a contextual vacuum as I would argue certain scholars do (see Hakim, 2000; O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005). Rather I propose that women make career choices in the light of opportunities and constraints within their social contexts (see Evetts, 2000). For instance my findings reveal how women networked extensively to overcome the limitations of the Sri Lankan labour market on their careers. This example highlights that through their agency women did at times transcend contextual factors. I also emphasise that the actions women take in their careers impact back on the contexts which
influence them (see Weick, 1995). For instance studies (including my own findings) reveal how women who adopt masculine characteristics to appear as effective leaders, contribute towards maintaining the norm that effective leaders are masculine (see Powell et al., 2009). Hence institutions, norms and established ways of doing things will change when people transform them (see Giddens, 1984).

I emphasise that women will experience and deal with the opportunities and constraints within their social environment, in very different ways (see Evetts, 2000). As noted earlier in chapter 2, a few scholars talk about the actions individuals take in their careers in relation to their social contexts (see Evetts, 2000; Duberley et al., 2006; Richardson, 2009; Al-Ariss, 2010). Most of these authors use the term ‘modes of engagement’, highlighting how individual career actors navigate tensions within their social environments through maintenance oriented and transformation oriented modes, in order to develop their careers (see Duberley et al., 2006; Richardson, 2009; Al-Ariss, 2010). In contrast, Evetts (2000) considers how specifically women engage with social structures in their careers, through adaptation, manipulation, negotiation, resistance and confrontation. I decided to follow her approach since she talks about career strategies in terms of ‘what people do’ rather than the implications of their actions. Based on my empirical data, I identified eight actions women use to advance their careers. These strategies appeared to lead to four broad social outcomes.

**Strategies:** Compromising, Deceiving, Networking, Manipulating, Explaining, Resisting, Opting-out and Adapting

**Social outcomes:**

1. Women getting what they want/maintaining existing social order
2. Women getting what they want/ transforming existing social order
3. Women not getting what they want/maintaining existing social order
4. Women not getting what they want/transforming existing social order

Here, ‘what they want’ refers to women’s aspirations for life and career noted in chapter 9, where I presented findings on my respondents’ hopes and wishes for career and life.

In what follows I will explain this typology in relation to existing literature as well as the findings of my study. In the discussion below ‘what women want’ will be taken as career progression, money, fame, good reputation and keeping families happy, in line with my empirical findings documented in chapter 9.

Compromising

Compromising refers to giving up one or more things to gain another. For instance Crompton (2001) gives insights into how female bank managers compromise on the number of children they have, to meet the long hour demands of the new banking industry in order to progress in their careers. Reconciling themselves to only one child or no children certainly helped Crompton’s female respondents climb up their organisations’ hierarchies. However most of these women were not able to have the large families they desired (see Crompton, 2001). A number of women in my study compromised in the same way when they sacrificed their personal time to fulfil their organisations’ requirements (see also Lyng, 2010; Dryburgh, 1999), and limited networking with men to preserve their moral honour. Although completing heavy workloads and a maintaining a respectable reputation enabled respondent’s advance in their careers, women bore the costs of limited personal time and loss of career building opportunities. Furthermore, such actions had the effect of retaining prevailing gendered
organisational cultures (see Britton, 2000) and codes of good conduct for women (see Phadke, 2007) that constrained respondents’ career development. In the light of these examples, I conceptualise compromising as a strategy which allows women attain only part of what they desire for life and career while preserving existing social arrangements.

Deceiving

Deceiving involves making up information or giving information that is very different to the truth. Scholars haven’t highlighted deceiving as a career strategy used by women. However a number of women in this sample were deceiving bosses when they were calling in sick to avoid after-hours work events or coming off halfway through training and development programs held at weekends after showing their faces. Deceiving helped women spend more time with their families at home. However, given that informal workplace socialising is important for individuals’ career development (see Sommerlad, 2002; Dryburgh, 1999), women who avoid social gatherings at work regularly are likely to be disadvantaged in their careers. Moreover, actions such as calling in sick to avoid these events, does nothing to change the gendered nature of the typical working day in organisations (see Britton, 2000). In the light of these examples I conceptualise deceiving as a strategy which does not disturb the existing social order, because it does not challenge prevailing norms or structural arrangements but rather provides a way for individuals to wriggle their way through existing arrangements. However deceiving did enable women get what they want in particular instances where the people concerned believed the stories respondents said.

Networking

Networking involves making contacts, building relationships and exchanging information with other people in order to expand and/or improve one’s career opportunities (Brass et al.,
The women in this sample networked actively (see Forrest and Dougherty, 2004; Emmerik et al. 2006) to get to the few good senior jobs in the Sri Lankan labour market and secure the greater share of their limited occupational sectors. This strategy certainly seemed to help women get what they want, where many respondents had in fact secured jobs through their privileged social connections. However, it has no effect on changing prevailing social arrangements because it simply lead to women fighting among each other to snatch a share of the limited portion rather than increasing the existing portion size. Thus in the light of my empirical data, I define networking as a strategy which will allow women achieve their intentions if they are able to surpass other respondents with similar motives and secure jobs, but would have no effect on changing the existing social order.

**Manipulating**

Manipulating involves managing to one’s advantage through indirect exertion of influence. Evetts (2000) recognises that women use manipulation as a strategy in response to contextual conditions which impact on their careers. However she doesn’t illustrate exactly how women manipulate in their careers. The findings of this research study highlight several examples of manipulation. For instance women manipulated their superiors’ opinions when they ingratiated themselves with bosses (see Appelbaum and Hughes, 1998) in pursuit of improving their existing positions in their organisations’ formal career paths. However, while ‘sucking up’ to bosses gave women the extra push they needed to climb up their career structures, such deeds maintained the informal exchange relationship in Sri Lankan organisations which significantly influenced individuals’ career development (see Saher, 2011). This example highlights that manipulation leads to women fitting into prevailing expectations rather than challenging them. However, in certain instances, manipulation also enabled women transform prevailing social arrangements. For example, public sector women
who circumvented the ‘time served’ based career paths in their organisations by shrewdly demonstrating their exceptional performance to boards, would thereby contribute towards changing these career structures to performance based in the long run. In sum the above findings highlight that manipulation allows women get what they want in instances that people fall under their influence, although it has variable effects on changing the existing social order.

Explaining

Explaining refers to making an idea or situation clear to someone by describing it in more detail, revealing relevant facts or justifying in relation to evidence. The women in this sample convinced protective spouses to allow them follow their career dreams, clarified to bosses that they could not attend after-hours social events at work since they had young children at home and reasoned with domestic maids and adult children that they should tolerate difficult elderly relatives. Respondents explaining their career aspirations to spouses often enabled them go to work and develop their careers, thereby challenging the norm that women are only homemakers and caretakers (see Gambles et al., 2006). However, women reasoning with domestic maids to tolerate extended family members did not end the tension at home, and was not a permanent solution to the domineering stance elderly family members took. Likewise women using their young children as an excuse to not attend social occasions at work left both the cultural expectation to attend work events and the existing structure of the working day untouched. While such strategies enabled women to move around these obstacles, it does nothing to fundamentally change the obstacles.

In the light of this data, I conceptualise explaining as a strategy which will help women get what they want if their explanations make sense and the people concerned appreciate the
problems with existing arrangements. However the potential for this strategy to transform the existing social order in Sri Lanka is questionable since there is a really powerful normative dimension in this context, particularly in relation to norms of compliance to superiors, codes of good behaviour for women and ideologies of respect to elders: all which are backed by prevailing Buddhist philosophies. Still it is important to note that in-roads towards change may be made when cracks appear on socially accepted standards of behaviour. In fact the empirical data from this study suggests that cracks have already started to appear on normative dimensions in the Sri Lankan context. Private organisations requiring women to participate in after-hours events at night and address bosses by first names; both which are in contradiction to prevailing social rules in Sri Lanka can be taken as examples of such cracks.

Resisting

Resisting involves opposing, refusing to accept and comply with prevailing rules and/or attempting to change existing conditions. People can resist through argument and/or by action. A few studies offer insights into how women decline to accept contextual elements that are constraining to their careers (see Evetts, 2000). For example Watts (2010) highlights how women stand up to those who oppose their authority at work and thereby challenge the existing status quo in organisations. Likewise studies reveal that certain women enter management positions, bring new ways of doing things to organisations and thereby challenge the gendered social order in workplaces which constrain their career progression (see Helgensen, 1990; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Sharma, 1990; Jogulu and Wood, 2006). In this study two respondents opposed prevailing gender ideologies by getting their spouses involved in the domestic sphere. These respondents were able to enjoy a more equitable gender division of labour at home, while contributing towards changing mind-sets that men do not do housework, by sharing their stories with others. Similarly Michelle rejected gender
prejudice in her organisation by sacking a disobedient worker. Michelle was able to put a stop to the unrest workers caused at the construction sites, while changing perceptions that women are ineffective leaders.

Although these examples seem to suggest that women are able to get what they want and change the extant social order through resistance, Shamila who refused to comply with rules of moral behaviour for women and norms of compliance to superiors at her workplace, was compelled to leave her organisation. In the light of all these findings, I propose that women’s success in transforming the existing social order by resistance depends on the strength of the extant norms of prejudice in the context and whether they are able to convince others to change. As noted earlier, codes of good conduct for women and norms of respect to superiors are reflections of the powerful normative dimension in Sri Lanka. Thus employees may not be able to transform these rules overnight (see Berger and Luckmaan, 1967). It is important to note that women who face unsuccessful outcomes in resisting social structures such as Shamila might contribute towards further reinstating them, while women who are successful in opposing contextual elements as Michelle will be able to pave the way towards transforming the existing social order.

Opting out

Opting out involves making a decision to withdraw and leave, possibly because one cannot deal with contextual barriers. Al-Ariss (2010) draws attention to this strategy in highlighting how some Lebanese migrants in France give up on employment altogether because they cannot deal with the legal and discrimination barriers. In this sample, two women who were bombarded by extensive workloads in their organisations planned to leave their jobs. Similarly Sashi withdrew from her organisation in an emotional sense, because it did not
make sufficient allowances for women’s roles out of the workplace, even in extraordinary circumstances. Given that all three respondents exited or planned to leave their organisations silently without voicing the injustice of the system (see Lyng, 2010), their actions had no effect on changing existing social arrangements which women experienced as constraining to their careers. However these respondents would certainly be able to fulfil their desires if they secure alternative jobs which satisfy their expectations. In the light of these findings I conceptualise opting-out as strategy which can change the prevailing social order if women bring out the true reasons behind their decisions to withdraw to the public, and would enable women attain what they want if they are able to get jobs they like in other organisations.

**Adapting**

Adapting refers to reconciling, accommodating or adjusting to overriding notions. Evetts (2000) recognises adaptation as a strategy women use in response to contextual conditions which impact on their careers. However, here again she doesn’t illustrate exactly how women adapt in their careers. A number of women in this study adapted to work norms of respect and compliance to superiors in order to win their favour. While keeping superiors happy certainly helped respondents advance in their careers, it simply lead to women fitting into existing organisational cultures rather than challenging them. In the light of my empirical findings, I argue that adaptation will continue to maintain the prevailing social order, but would enable women achieve their desires if they do not have strong feelings about the overriding notions they adjusted to.

In their accounts, the women in this sample dynamically picked and chose from one or more of the above strategies in relation to their contextual circumstances. Some strategies were often used in combination. For instance the strategy of resistance was almost always
The few women who spoke about resisting inequitable domestic labour at home also highlighted how their resistance effort was supplemented by significant explanations. The successes of resistance in allowing women obtain what they want and changing existing social order appeared to be dependent on respondents’ accompanying explanations making sense to the people concerned, as in the cases of the spouses and family members of those women who resisted prevailing gender ideologies. Thus explanations seemed to be essential to allow women get what they want through resistance. Similarly, the strategies of compromising and adaptation seemed to always work together. For instance respondents who compromised their personal time to fulfil heavy workloads were inevitably forced to adjust to their new work-life arrangements. Thus adaptation was essential for women to take full advantage of the outcomes of compromising. Likewise respondents who adapted to norms of unconditional compliance to superiors had to sacrifice their individual agency at most times. In other words, adaptation always involved making a compromise.

Overall, four significant features of the above typology enable us understand women’s career enactment in a deeper and meaningful manner than existing women’s career models. First this framework appreciates social context and individual agency as explanations of women’s careers as opposed to studies which tend to emphasise predominantly one of these variables at the expense of the other (see Hakim, 2000 and critics’ debate). In this sense this model refrains from taking an overly deterministic or voluntaristic stance to conceptualising women’s career development. Second, this model recognises individuals’ aspirations for life and career as important components of their career development. Thus this framework is not a pure structuration replacement for the predominantly developmental psychologically influenced (see Gilligan, 1981) women’s career models (see Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005’
O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Third, this framework depicts the dynamic nature of career in recognising that women’s careers are continuously modified and re-modified as they repeatedly engage with their social contexts (see Burr, 1995).

Fourth, this framework, which illustrates the different types of actions women take in their careers, makes a significant contribution to the careers literature which gives only little attention to individuals’ career strategies. Significantly this typology develops Duberley et al.’s (2006), Richardson’s (2009) and Evetts (2000) work in two important ways. First this framework which talks about career strategies in terms of manipulation, compromising, and deceiving enables scholars understand specifically ‘what women do’ to develop their careers within their social contexts. As noted earlier, Duberley et al. (2006) and Richardson (2009) classifies individuals’ career strategies or rather ‘modes of engagement’ in career, into maintenance and transformation orientated modes (see also Al-Ariss, 2010). In my data however I found maintenance and transformation to be the social implications of the strategies women used to develop their careers rather than the strategies themselves. Second, my findings which clearly distinguish between eight strategies women use to progress in their careers develops Evetts (2000) theoretical framework which highlights five strategies women use in their careers. While I note that Evetts’ (2000) arguments were not based on empirical research work, my data confirms the strategies of manipulation, adaptation and resistance Evetts (2000) has highlighted. However the term negotiation in Evetts (2000) framework seemed to encompass many different types of career strategies such as compromising and manipulating, and I found it difficult to distinguish between resistance and confrontation as Evetts (2000) had done.
Theoretical framework of women’s career enactment: a diagrammatic representation

Social Context

- Symbolic Aspirations
- Material Aspirations
- Psychological Aspirations
- Relational Aspirations

CAREER

Networking

Manipulating

Compromising

Deceiving

Adapting

Opting out

Explaining

Resisting
13.2.2 The South Asian model of women’s careers

The empirical data of this study highlights that women’s careers in Sri Lanka are different to women’s careers in the West, popularly documented in the extant literature. Furthermore, these findings also reveal the limitations of the highly individualistic western women’s career model when applied to the South Asian context. In what follows I will outline the key features of women’s careers in Sri Lanka and highlight how these understandings could be used to identify blind spots in the extant literature and further develop prevailing ideas of women’s careers in the West.

The first distinguishing feature of women’s careers in Sri Lanka is the centrality of family for women’s career advancement. For instance families cared for women’s offspring while they were at work and encouraged them to pursue postgraduate study which was essential for career advancement in Sri Lankan organisations. Moreover the social and cultural capital (see Mayrofher et al., 2004) women acquired through their families were absolutely essential to secure jobs in particularly private organisations. Most importantly women aspired to develop their careers in order to provide for their families and make them proud. While family members constrained women’s careers by interfering in their work obligations and expecting women to fulfil obligations to them, women in Sri Lanka got around them through the various strategies noted in the above section. Thus Sri Lankan women were able to work through their families rather than separating themselves from them.

Significantly women like Shamila who chose an individualistic route to develop career, by disregarding her family’s wishes, were not successful in advancing their careers. These findings challenge the western women’s careers model which implies that separation from family is essential for women to get ahead in career, highlighting how women are constrained
by domestic labour and childcare and often forced to take career breaks or adopt flexible work arrangements to harmonise home and work. Lewis et al. (2007) argue that women have to cautiously manage the time they spend on families in order to progress in career. In the case of Sri Lankan women however it is not a question about managing time and effort, but rather families were totally inextricable from women’s careers. Thus the findings of this study, raises the following question: could it be the case that the western home-work model depicts life in the West to be more individualistic than it actually is? This question is still to be answered.

Second, the findings of this study reveal a moral dimension to women’s careers in Sri Lanka. As discussed, good moral behaviour was essential for women to progress in their organisations while it was also at times in conflict with pursuing their career goals. Notably, only a few studies of careers in the 20th century talk about character as a dimension of career, where scholars such as Mckinley (2002) highlight how good character in terms of self-disciplined behaviour was essential for individuals to climb up their organisations’ hierarchies. The existing careers literature however rarely talks about moral character. Significantly my findings highlight that character in the context of career is not simply a thing of the past. In addition, I reveal the paradox involved in performing good character, where women are at times, compelled to compromise on their career development, to conform to prevailing rules of respectable behaviour. Most importantly my study highlights how the moral dimension to women’s careers is maintained and reproduced by women’s own actions. In the light of these findings I raise the following question: is moral character really insignificant in western countries like the UK? Here again, could it be that western societies are portrayed to be more modern and liberal than they actually are?
Third this thesis highlights the extremely privileged statuses of older woman workers in Sri Lanka. Late career women were not impacted by protective spouses and/or concerned elderly family members as early and mid-career women were due to their positions as wise elders (see also Malhotra and Mather, 1997). Likewise they were not deeply impacted by gendered work contexts as early and mid-career women, due to their high hierarchical positions in organisations. The authority and influence of late career Sri Lankan women, contradicts the extant literature that depicts older women to be largely invisible within organisations (see Clarke and Griffin, 2008). The favourable position older women in Sri Lanka occupied in their careers are probably due to ideologies of respect to elders within Sri Lankan society which are backed by prevailing Buddhist beliefs. Whatever the reasons are my findings highlight that the declining older woman worker is not a universal phenomenon.

Finally permeating the empirical data is how women’s career enactment in Sri Lanka is influenced by societal belief systems such as Buddhism and astrology, and traditional ideologies such as sense of duty towards family and respect to elders. These findings contrast the western women’s career model which rarely recognises wider societal factors as important constituents of women’s careers (see O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Maneiro and Sullivan, 2005). Significantly, my findings highlight that religion, traditions, myths and magic do not altogether disappear as societies develop (see Gerth and Mills, 1991), but rather individuals use these notions to help them walk towards modernity. This raises the following question. Are traditional notions non-existent in the more economically developed western societies that scholars pay only little attention to these in the context women’s careers? Could it be the case that scholars have exaggerated the effects of secularisation so that we need to re-examine the extent to which enchantment continues?
Women’s careers in Sri Lanka: the big picture

**Labour market & economy**

**Buddhism, fate & destiny**

**Occupational sector structures**

**Work Organisation**
- Recruitment & Selection
- Career paths
- Work life policies
- After hours obligations
- Workloads & working hours
- Norms of compliance to superiors
- Expectations of presenteeism
- Norms of good behaviour for women at work

**Home & Family**
- Domestic labour
- Spouses
- Young & adult children
- Domestic maids
- Extended family
- Cultural capital
- Family expectations
- Material resources

**Hinduism**

**Traditions**

**Cultural Ideologies:**
- Respect to elders
- Sense of duty

**Astrology**

**Norms of respectable behaviour**
13.3 Conclusion and recommendations for further research

In this study I used a social constructionist approach to explore 24 professional Sri Lankan women’s accounts of their careers. My empirical findings revealed three social contexts which influenced the way these women developed their careers: work organisations, home and wider contextual structures in Sri Lanka. Highlighted here were rules of good conduct for women in Sri Lankan society which significantly impacted on my respondents’ careers. I argue that this moral dimension is not exclusive to Sri Lankan women or women from other South Asian countries. I suggest that concerns of moral character in relation to women are still prevalent in western societies, although scholars have given only little attention to this. The problem in western societies is that these issues are not spoken about in as explicit a manner as they are in countries such as India and Sri Lanka. It may be that talk of gendered moral behaviour is seen as anachronistic in societies that are seen as modern, liberal and diverse. Thus I call upon scholars to develop my work further by looking into the moral dimension of western women’s careers. Bringing moral character back to the careers field would most definitely make an important and overdue contribution to the extant careers literature.

Based on the empirical findings of my study, I designed a theoretical framework of Sri Lankan women’s career enactment, highlighting how women engage with the social contexts they perceive to impact on their careers via eight different types of actions which had various social outcomes. I feel that this framework which uses the iterative relationship between individuals and society (see Burr, 1995) to explain women’s careers in Sri Lanka, makes a significant contribution to existing understandings of women’s career development in South Asia as well as to the way scholars understand career in general. However I call upon scholars to test and develop this framework further. First, insights into further career
strategies and social outcomes than those highlighted in my study could be revealed by testing this framework across women in other South Asian contexts. Second, it is important to investigate whether men in Sri Lanka use similar strategies to advance their careers. Third, it will be particularly interesting to explore whether women from more economically developed countries use similar strategies to develop their careers within their organisational, familial and wider socio cultural contexts.

In this study I focused on how women make sense of and enact their careers in a country which is in the throes of modernisation. While traditions of duties towards family, norms of moral conduct for women, Buddhist ideologies and astrology are central to the Sri Lankan context, there is also widespread acceptance of dual earner families, higher education and employment for women and western influenced organisational practices. My findings captured how women struggle to develop their careers in the midst of these often competing and contradictory societal forces. I suggest that scholars develop my findings further by answering the following questions. Are the career strategies highlighted in this study more prevalent in changing societies than others? What kind of roles do traditions and enchantment play in individuals’ careers in other modernising societies? Answering such questions would make significant theoretical contributions to existing understandings of careers.

Finally a significant empirical finding of this study which warrants further investigation is the contrasting careers in public and private organisations in Sri Lanka. For instance career paths in public organisations were based on time served while career structures in private organisations were performance based. Moreover, private organisations which positioned themselves as modern and western influenced and had many work-life policies, required
employees to work long hours and participate in regular social gatherings. In contrast, traditional public organisations which had no formal work-life agendas had predictable work hours and paid only little attention to after-hours activities. My study provides insights into how women from both sectors enact their careers within their respective work contexts through the various strategies noted above. However, a thorough comparison of public and private sector careers in Sri Lanka was beyond the scope of my study. Given that my empirical findings highlight the paradoxical consequences of different policies in the two sectors, I invite scholars to undertake comparative research studies to investigate this further. This would make a significant empirical contribution to the existing careers literature.

While I emphasise the key contributions of my study and suggest ways that scholars can develop my findings further, I also recognise the limitations of this research. First, it is important to note that all the empirical data of this study was collected in the UK and therefore it is possible that being out of the Sri Lankan context may have influenced women to make sense of their career experiences differently than if they were in Sri Lanka. However, given that being away from the home context is likely to encourage individuals to critically reflect on their circumstances; it could be that interviewing respondents in the UK did offer certain advantages. Second, this sample comprised an extremely privileged group of women and does not represent the entire Sri Lankan population. Thus I would recommend further research exploring career experiences of people occupying different social positions.

Third I was indeed an insider to this study and developed close relationships with most respondents in the course of data collection and afterwards. This proximity to the research subjects and my insider status to the Sri Lankan context may have influenced the data I collected and my interpretations (see Karra and Phillips, 2007). However I did take great
efforts to minimise possible biases due to insider status through explicit reflexivity (see Nightingale and Cromby, 1999; Willig, 2001). Furthermore it is important to note that I would have not been able to collect such rich empirical data, without insider knowledge of the Sri Lankan context (see Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Moreover my close proximity to research participants helped me understand their life-worlds better.

We already know that careers are deeply entangled to the social contexts within which they unfold. Indeed a growing number of scholars recognise this (see Eaton and Bailyn, 2000; Peiperl et al., 2000; Gunz et al., 2000). The challenge is now to understand how individuals enact their careers in the midst of competing, contradictory and dynamic social forces. I have started the journey with the findings of my study, but we still have a long way to go to.
Bibliography


APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Consent to interview form

Professional women’s careers in Sri Lanka

The proposed study explores how professional women in Sri Lanka make sense of and enact their careers within their organisational, familial and wider sociocultural contexts. This study is undertaken in partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Loughborough (Business School). Thus the information gathered during the interview will be used for the purposes of this study only.

This interview is estimated to take approximately two – three hours. During the interview, you will be asked basic biographical questions about yourself as well as questions about your career history, organisations you worked for, superiors, subordinates and colleagues, family and friends and career aspirations. However, please feel free to expand on the topic and talk about related ideas freely. Also, if there are any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering please indicate this and we will move on to the next question.

The interviews will be note recorded by the researcher and the final interview transcript would be presented to you for clarifications and amendments as required. As mentioned before, all the information collected will be kept confidential. The transcripts will be kept in a secure place and only the researcher will have access to this information. Your name as well as the names of organisations you worked for will be disguised before the information is presented to the public.
Participant’s Agreement:

The purpose and details of this study has been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further knowledge and I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

I have read and understood the information on the consent form and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and I will not be required to explain reasons for withdrawing.

I have the right to review and comment on the final transcript and withdraw information prior to submitting the final transcript to the interviewer.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence. However I grant permission for this data to be used in publications and presentations with my personal identity and identities of organisations I have worked for disguised.

I agree to participate in this study.

_____________________  ___________________
Participant’s signature  Date

_____________________
Interviewer’s signature
Appendix 2: The interview guide

The questions listed below serves as a rough guide to keep track of the main themes and points to be addressed during the proposed semi structured interviews. The following introducing, follow up, probing and attitudinal questions are not listed in any chronological order and are likely to be supplemented by further interpreting and specifying questions.

1.0 Biographical information

1. When were you born and where did you grow up?

2. Tell me about your family? What did your parents do for a living? Do you have any siblings? How was your childhood?

3. Schools attended.

4. Ethnicity and religion.

5. Are you married? What does your spouse do for a living? Where does he work?

6. Do you have any children? How old are they? What are the schools they attend/attended?

7. Where do you live?

8. How would you describe your occupational career?

9. What is your current job designation? Who is your current employer?

2.0 Career

1. In the context of career, tell me about how you decided on what you wanted to do.

   • What were primary factors which influenced your choice of career?
• Did anyone have a special impact on your choice of career?

3. Give me details of higher education and/or training you pursued.
   • Where did you pursue these courses of study?

4. Did you have any special career plans upon graduation?

5. Tell me about your first job.
   • How did you get this job?
   • What did you like and dislike about this job?
   • How long did you serve?
   • Why did you leave?

6. Tell me about your career to date
   • How did you get hired and/or promoted in each employment position you have held? Did anyone or anything play a significant role in this?
   • What were the major turning points in your career?
   • Were there any challenges you confronted in the context of your career? How did you deal with these?
   • What was the best job you ever had? And the worst? Please explain.

3.0 Current employment

1. Please describe your existing workplace culture.

2. How do you feel about opportunities for training, growth and development?
3. How do you feel about your superiors?

4. How do you feel about your pay and other perks? Do you run a vehicle? Is it company provided?

5. Describe a typical day at work.

4.0 Gender role stereotyping and discrimination

1. Tell me about gender relations in your organisation.
   - Do men and women talk, relax, eat and have fun together at your workplace?
   - Do you think men and women in your workplace share the same career progression and pay structures? If no, why?
   - How does your organisation address gender discrimination?

2. What is the ratio of male: female managers in your current workplace? Have you ever had a female CEO?

3. Do you believe that men and women have similar work attributes? Managerial attributes? Do you think the men in your workplace would share your opinion?

4. How do you feel about male subordinates? How do you think men would feel about female superiors?

5. Have ever you felt that you faced challenges in your career due to your gender? Tell me about your experiences? How did you deal with this/how do you plan to deal with this?
6. Do you think your career would have been different had you been a male?

5.0 Career capitals

1. Tell me about the resources which were significant for your career advancement.
   - What is the role qualifications and field specific experience play in career advancement?
   - What are your views of foreign experience?
   - What kind of a role has social connections/networks/associations played in your career?
   - Do you try to network? Please share your experiences of networking
   - Do you think family background has any impact on individual’s careers within your organisation? Please explain.

2. What kind of people would be most likely to be hired and/or promoted in your organisation/occupational field?
   - Please describe their portfolios.

3. In your view, what resources are especially invaluable for women for career advancement? Why do you say these resources are important for women?

6.0 Home-work harmonisation

1. Tell me about your experiences of work-life balance
   - How many hours a day do you spend doing work or thinking about work?
   - What kind of a role do you play in your home sphere?
• Who manages your household while you are at work?
• Do you employ any domestic staff?
• Do your parents/in laws live with you/or visit you regularly?
• How do you feel about your current household arrangements?
• What kind of a role does your spouse play in your home sphere?
• How do you manage home and work?
• What do you do for leisure? Do you pursue any hobbies? Are you able to devote time to this as you desire?

2. Describe your typical day.
   • Are you able to take time off work to attend to your domestic affairs?

3. Tell me about the work-life balance policies within your workplace.
   • How do you feel about the existing policies?
   • Are you able to access these policies?
   • Do you have any ideas for improvement?

4. Have you ever experienced an unexpected situation, where you have felt out of control? Tell me about such a situation and how have you dealt with it.
   • Did your employer help you restore equilibrium?

7.0 Career success and plans for the future
1. Do you feel that your career has been successful so far?

2. Please describe what career success means to you.
3. Tell me about your plans for the future.
   
   - What are your plans for your children?

4. How do you feel about migration? Or employment overseas?

8.0 Religion

1. Does religion play any role in your life? What kind of a role does it play?

2. Has your religious belief influenced your career thinking or career related decision making at any point in your life?

9.0 Character

1. What does ‘good character’ mean to you?

2. What are the rules of good behaviour for women in your workplace?

3. Do all women in your workplace adhere to these rules?

4. What would happen to women who fail to comply with these rules?
## Appendix 3: Final coding template

### Work Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment &amp; selection:</th>
<th>Career paths</th>
<th>Work-life policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Newspaper advertisement</td>
<td>- Time served</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Job bank</td>
<td>- Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Social networks</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workloads &amp; working hours</th>
<th>Training &amp; development programs</th>
<th>Organisational events</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideal worker norms</td>
<td>Gender stereotyping and discrimination</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superior-subordinate relationships</th>
<th>Ideal worker norms</th>
<th>Gender stereotyping and discrimination</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Respectable femininity at the workplace</th>
<th>Relationships between male and female colleagues at work</th>
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### Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic labour</th>
<th>Domestic maids</th>
<th>Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Young children</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Adult children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandchildren</td>
<td>Extended family members</td>
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</table>

- Enabling to career
- Constraining to career
- Duties towards family members
- Enabling to career
- Constraining to career
- Trailing behind spouses

**The Sri Lankan context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour market</th>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Internal market of Colombo</th>
<th>Religion</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Few jobs</td>
<td>- Negative economic climate</td>
<td>- Bribery and corruption</td>
<td>- Buddhist philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Too many qualified candidates for jobs</td>
<td>- High cost of living</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Hindu gods</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Astrology and Horoscopes</th>
<th>Respectable femininity</th>
<th>Political environment of Sri Lanka</th>
<th>The small world of Colombo</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Bribery and corruption</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Religion
- Buddhist philosophy
- Hindu gods
- Activities at the temple
- Fate & luck

The small world of Colombo
### Career capitals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment experience</th>
<th>English Language</th>
<th>Schools attended</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Foreign</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Local</td>
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<td>- Professional</td>
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<td>- Postgraduate</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family background</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Physical appearance</th>
<th>Social networks</th>
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### Aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To be at the top of the hierarchy</th>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>To make a difference to the world</th>
<th>To be well-known among others</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To make parents proud and provide for them</td>
<td>To have a family alongside career</td>
<td>To make children proud and provide for them</td>
<td>To make money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To do interesting and challenging work</td>
<td>Job Security</td>
<td>Employability</td>
<td>To work for prestigious organisations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Career choice

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Opportunities in the labour market</th>
<th>Financial imperatives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Ideas of prestigious occupations</td>
<td>Ideas of respectable occupations</td>
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</table>

### Others

<table>
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<th>Turning points in career</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Doing new things at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing several part-time jobs</td>
<td>Leisure and hobbies</td>
<td>Migration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Sample interview transcript 1

Biographic Information

Occupational career – Engineer

Current job designation – Engineer (NAS Holdings Ltd – factory located in Panadura: 1 hour from Colombo)

- Age – 28 years, Born in 1981 (Sri Lanka)
- Sinhalese, Buddhist
- Married, 1 child, Spouse – Pilot
- 0 - 18 Sri Lanka, 18 – 22 Canada, 23 – to date Sri Lanka (currently residing with husband’s parents in a suburb close to Colombo)
- Father – Engineer, Mother – (expired) homemaker, 1 twin sister, Attended a leading private school in Colombo and an international school for A’levels afterwards

What influenced your choice of career?

My father was an engineer and he hoped that either I or my sister would be an engineer as well. My sister wasn’t very interested in technology – she wanted to study languages. But I wanted to be an engineer

Did you want to be an engineer solely because your father wanted one of you to study engineering?

I didn’t decide to study engineering only because my father wanted me to. Since small days I was very interested in physics and maths. I took part in all technology fairs at school and I was awarded many prices for things I created.

That’s interesting tell me about some of the things you created at school?

Well I made a mini hydro power plant and an automated production line and a car
How old were you then?
About twelve - my father always encouraged me to create things – we did these little things as activities. My sister wasn’t very clever at school so he concentrated on me.

What do you mean by your sister not being clever at school?
She wasn’t very good at math or science

Was she good in any other subjects?
Well yes she did well in English literature and music. Why do you ask?

I wanted to understand what the word ‘clever’ meant to you
I didn’t mean that only people who score well in maths and science are clever. But these subjects require more intellectual aptitude than languages don’t they?

Well yeah I suppose so. Do many people you know share this view?
Yes, don’t you think so?

I haven’t thought about it actually.

Ok let’s move on, you said that you were at an international school so I presume you did your London A’levels. Am I right?
Yes

Why did you decide to do your London A’levels?
I wasn’t looking at entering university in Sri Lanka – I intended to go abroad for studies. Of course students go abroad with their local A’levels as well. But London A’levels are better
What do you mean better?
The syllabus is more up to date and interesting than our local one

Okay, any particular reasons for not opting to go to University in Sri Lanka?
Foreign degrees are more recognised by employers in Sri Lanka

Where did you get your degree from?
University of McGill Canada

I have heard about this University – I know it’s a really good school. However not many people in Sri Lanka go to Canada for higher studies do they? Why Canada?
My mother’s sister lived close to this university – so my father felt safe to send me there – she could keep an eye on me. But I didn’t stay at her place. I lived on campus. But she made me meals, did my laundry and checked on me all the time

That’s nice… So how long was the degree and what exactly did you study?
It was a four year degree and I studied Industrial engineering.

Why did you choose to study Industrial engineering?
I was always interested in production processes – my father was mechanical engineer (at his time there were no degrees in Industrial engineering) but he worked in factories – he was General Manager in several leading manufacturing firms in Sri Lanka. I used to visit the factories with him when I was a child, look at the production processes and discuss ways of increasing efficiency of the production line. Anyway most of the good private sector engineering jobs in Sri Lanka are in manufacturing plants; there really isn’t much scope for
electronic or electrical engineering in Sri Lanka unless you opt to work in an organisation like the government owned electricity board for the rest of your life.

**So you wanted a job in the private sector?**

Yes

**Wouldn’t you consider working for the government sector?**

No

**May I ask why?**

The nature of the sector – it is not up to date, is inefficient - I mean name one single government department where you could get a simple thing done on time – not one huh? I went to get my passport extended 3 weeks ago; I spent the whole day at the passport office and finally bribed a person to get it done soon.

**Who did you bribe?**

Some small guy who was hovering around me and offered to get me to the top of the queue for 500 bucks

**So what happened?**

I said okay and was called to the top of the queue immediately. Anyway just imagine the way things work in such organisations – I wouldn’t want to work in such a place. Anyway the crowd is different
What do you mean the crowd is different?
You know what I mean – not exactly the crowd that we belong to is it?

Please explain
Well it is not the upper middle class crowd is it? – Of course there are likely to be many respectable and educated people… but I wouldn’t feel comfortable with them

Why wouldn’t you feel comfortable with them?
Because we are so different – they wouldn’t exactly go partying in the night with their friends and wear not so conservative clothes would they? I am not saying that I am comfortable with only people who wear the latest clothes and go partying - but if I had to work day in and day out in an organisation with such a crowd I would have been very uncomfortable because I would always be thinking of what others think of me and thinking twice before saying or doing anything. I want to be comfortable in my workplace and make some friends. You just cannot go on for 8 hours otherwise could you?

Okay, we’ll leave this topic for now – very few women pursue careers in engineering and one of my respondents said that engineering is not the ideal career for a woman. How do you feel about this?
Women in general seem to prefer subjects likes social sciences rather than math. Don’t ask me why I really don’t know. As for engineering not being the ideal career for a woman - your respondent may have said this because engineering in general is male dominated – most women may feel uncomfortable to be one of the few or perhaps the only woman engineer in a place. But then it really depends on where you work – I am the only woman in the production department at our factory but I don’t feel awkward or uncomfortable. Perhaps because there
are plenty of other women in other departments in our factory and all the workers in our factory are women … so basically we have more women in our factory than men – that’s the advantage of working for an apparel manufacturing company.

So you consider it advantageous to work in a setting that is female dominated?

If you are uncomfortable in being the only woman around – yes it is advantageous.

There are some questions I want to ask you about your factory but we’ll get to that later… first tell me what did you do after graduation?

My sister and I toured Europe and America … that was our graduation gift from my father and we got to go alone

Wow so how long did you tour?

About three months, we stayed with relatives. Then we headed back home and got straight into job hunting

Didn’t you consider employment in Canada?

No it is very quiet there and cold… You know what? You really have to go abroad to appreciate how happening Colombo really is

What do you mean by ‘happening’?

Colombo is a 24 hour city –it’s more ‘happening’ than Ibiza. The clubs are open until 5 am and then there are the after parties until 7 am - basically we party until the next morning… In Canada and even in the UK clubs shut at 2.30. We have an abundance of fancy restaurants to dine out, beaches, resorts and coffee shops to have coffee at 4 am in the morning …..Live
music shows on weekdays. You name it … in these countries you don’t see much people on
the roads on weeknights – it is quite dull in comparison to Colombo

**So the best thing about Colombo to you is the entertainment?**

No the best thing about Colombo is that we know everybody - You always meet somebody
you know when you go out. And moreover it’s the influence we have in our own country

**What do you mean by influence?**

Where else can you get away with even drunk driving? At home we bribe the police or get
somebody we know to take a call to a big shot in the police to get ourselves released

**Nowhere else I hope – law and order in Colombo is appalling**

It is, I agree. But we are not really affected by it are we? We know all the right people or
somebody who knows the right people

**Yeah that’s true**

**How did you go about looking for jobs in Sri Lanka?**

I combed the Sunday observer but most jobs on the papers were in accountancy and
marketing. So I targeted the leading manufacturing sector companies where there are jobs for
engineers and put my CV into their job banks.

**Leading companies?**

The really big ones like Unilevers, NAS and Brandix
Didn’t your friends and family help you get a job?

My father was talking to people he knew in the manufacturing sector but I applied to every job bank I could as well. I really wanted to get into NAS and they called me for an interview 3 days after I submitted my CV.

So your own application worked before your father’s connections. That’s really good.

Okay tell me why did you really want to get into NAS?

Most of my friends were working there – not as engineers but accountants, merchandises etc. Also NAS uses newest systems and procedures, they are high payers, it’s a hip place to work, a great company culture and they take care of their people well.

I have several questions for you… What did you mean by NAS being a hip place to work for?

Well it’s a very modern organisation – we have music running for eight hours – the latest stuff, the offices are painted in really bright colors, the interior is so modern – it is not the usual dull and boring looking organisation – there are heaps of young people.

What did you mean by NAS having a good company culture?

The culture is not bureaucratic at all – you can do your work as you please with minimum interference from the top - you don’t have to ask permission for everything. Even superior subordinate relationships are very informal. For instance we address our CEO by our first name – in most other companies they address seniors by at least Mr or Mrs if not Sir or Madam.
Let me interrupt you – do the blue collar workers also address the CEO by his first name?

Of course not – only executive level staff

Please continue, you were describing the company culture at NAS

They take good care of their employees.

How do they take care of their employees?

They provide transport, they pay subscription fees for any professional affiliations you hold like CIMA & CIM, they fund study programs – some of our senior managers were funded on a 3 week executive training program at Harvard and they fund sportsman as well. There are many national athletes employed at NAS (even those who have won Olympic medals) NAS is big on sports – they support their athletes intensively by giving them time off work to train, funding them etc. Oh and they see to employees’ leisure needs …

There are several things that caught my attention from what you just said – first of all tell me about opportunities for training and development as NAS?

As I said they sponsor study programs like MBA’s

Do they give study leave?

Of course

Go on tell me something more about T&D

They sponsor selected senior managers for short executive training programs at schools like Harvard and they hold various programs for executive staff. For instance people in the
production department are often given training on quality management, supply chain management and everybody attends regular training on team-working. NAS is very focused on teams and outward bound training is very popular right now.

**What is outward bound training all about?**

Haven’t you heard about it before? It basically involves each department forming themselves into a team and going on a three day camping trip to the wilderness. The team has to fend for themselves (cook, put up the tents etc.) and the training company designs all sorts of challenges for the teams.

**What sort of challenges?**

The teams had to build a raft themselves and get through a stream, climb these really steep rocks, find their way through the forest – things like that

**Did you ever go on one of these?**

Goodness no – I am not a camping sort of person – I wouldn’t survive it

**So participation is optional?**

No it is compulsory

**Then how did you manage to get yourself excused?**

I am the only girl in my department – they didn’t expect me to go camping with a bunch of guys alone

**Who’s they?**

The management
Did they say this to you?

Yes my boss said that I can decide whether I want to participate since I would be the only girl in the production team – there are advantages of being a woman - I mean I got away from the outward bound training program without even having to ask

Was this program compulsory for girls in other departments?

Actually in the beginning they said that it was compulsory for everyone – but there was a lot of chaos – many girls complained to HR, their parents complained as well and loads of girls were giving in false medical certificates stating that they weren’t physically fit enough for the challenges. The management didn’t want to aggravate the chaos further – so they said that participation is optional for women

So did women participate at all?

A few of them did – the majority didn’t though – the company provided a lot of security for the women who participated, senior women from HR were assigned to go with groups which had women and I heard that the women were required to sleep in a rest house near the camp site and join others for the activities during the day…. They were not allowed to sleep in tents

Why did the company provide so much of security for women?

Well they just had to do it I guess – if something had happened to a woman - people would just blame it on the company

That is quite interesting information on outward bound training – tell me about some of the training programs you participated in?
I attended a session on manufacturing systems conducted by the University of Moratuwa, a session on Operations management and a load of training programs on Quality Management and team-working leadership etc. I can’t even remember the names of most

**Were these programs useful?**

Not exactly – to be really honest NAS goes a bit overboard with this training business – there are too many training programs and most of these are not even needed. I remember an 8 hour program on emotional intelligence – the first part was interesting but 8 hours of it was just too much – it was repetitive and people were just dozing off in their seats… I don’t mind if training is held during office hours – but when it is held during the weekends everybody gets really annoyed

**Are most training programs held out of office hours?**

Yes but the management tries to make amends since everybody gets really annoyed

**How do they make amends?**

They hold the program in this really lavish hotel so people go for the hotel rather than the training.

**How do you find these out of office hours training programs?**

I am not too fond of having to attend training programs during weekends - in one way I don’t mind going to a really nice resort for a weekend training - my husband is on long flights during most weekends so I am stuck at home alone with my in-laws. But then I miss my son.
How do your in-laws feel about you going away on weekends when your husband is away?
They are not too happy about it— but they can’t really say anything because it is work related— I am not going away alone to have fun after all

What about other women with families?
Married women have a lot of issues with anything held out of office hours usually?

Why?
They just want to get home to their families as soon as possible I suppose – my son is still a baby but you need spend more time with older children

So what strategies do women use to deal with trainings organised out of work hours?
They try to tactfully avoid the longer programs – by calling in sick etc.

Couldn’t they just let the management know that they have other things to do out of office hours?
I suppose they could but I don’t think anybody does this

Why not?
I don’t know it just isn’t done – You have to participate in training programs – everybody does; your personal issues are your own concern

But don’t you think that these programs should be organised during office hours?
Everybody thinks training programs should be organised within office hours.
But who cares about what we think. All organisations in Sri Lanka have programs out of office hours – it’s not only NAS. The organisational culture at NAS is made for very young people.

**Why do you say that the organisational culture at NAS is made for younger people? Please explain.**

Well everybody says this. I am surprised you haven’t heard of this before. Well people with family commitments (especially women) would in general find it difficult to cope with their frequent out of office training programs and the numerous events they hold.

**Events - tell me about some of the events NAS has?**

We have so many mega events – we celebrate practically everything from Halloween to Valentine’s Day and we have a special theme for every event – decorations and everything is spectacular – their budgets are unlimited. And we have balls and club nights.

**Do they allow people to bring a guest – for instance can you take your husband?**

Yeah, they allow guests for most events.

**Some of my respondents didn’t talk about company events as favorably as you did**

I am not surprised – that’s why I said that the culture is more appropriate for younger people who don’t have family commitments. A lot of women I know have problems with these events – once NAS organised this fairytale ball which was only for employees – each department in every factory had to dress up in a particular theme – my unit decided to go as Egyptian dancers – NAS sponsored our costumes. I had a great time at this ball but some mid aged men and women said that they felt pretty silly dressing up in costumes. This event was
covered by the media and some women were terrified of their pictures appearing on the papers. One young girl’s full photo appeared on the papers and her wedding was called off – she was photographed hugging a guy in her unit

**Wow, so younger girls are likely to face problems too**

Well yes, Sri Lankan parents are in general conventional and rather strict with their daughters so it is very likely that most girls face problems with frequent office events - but most of the girls I know (at least the ones who are not married) actually like to attend these events so they often tell their parents that it is compulsory for them to attend even when it is not

**Were your parents strict with you?**

My parents always gave us a lot of freedom – but most of the girls I went to school with didn’t get so much of freedom – their mothers just followed them everywhere. Most of them were not even allowed to go for parties that boys attended. There was no point of being so strict – most of my friends whose parents were very strict did everything they wanted behind their parents back.

**You are right. Anyway how does your husband feel about you attending certain events without him?**

To be really honest – he’s not very enthusiastic about me being seen alone at night at organisational events without him. He trusts me and understands that I have certain obligations to the organisation I work for. But when people he knows comes and tell him that they met me alone in the night – it’s not very nice. I try to go with him as much as possible. I try to avoid events which he cannot attend.
Okay, we talked so much about NAS that I couldn’t ask you anything about your job and how you got recruited…. tell me about the recruitment process you went through

On the first day they called me in, I had a brief interview with somebody at HR. It wasn’t an interview actually they just took down my basic details and I was asked to sit for a 1hr aptitude test afterwards. I was told that I will be contacted again. They called me the next day and asked me to come in to meet the CEO. It turned out that he knew my father and I started work the next week.

**What position were you hired for initially?**

Management trainee – production

**Why do you think they recruited you?**

I had a 2:1 degree in industrial engineering from McGill

**What else?**

Well they liked the fact that I had studied industrial engineering and taken courses on Operational research and project management. And they liked my personality and attitude?

**What do you mean? Please elaborate.**

They liked the fact that I am very easygoing and I was fun loving and like to work with other people –they look for that kind of people

**Did they tell this to you?**

Yes in exact words
What kinds of people are likely to get jobs in NAS?

What do you mean?

Well what sort of a portfolio would somebody employed at an executive level have?

They would have a good degree from a recognised university or CIMA

What would NAS consider as recognised?

The universities in Sri Lanka and foreign universities that have some standing - universities that we have heard about – for example not a degree from some college that nobody has heard about

What else?

Anybody should score well in their aptitude test and be able to present themselves properly

Present themselves?

Do you really need me to explain everything? Well present themselves – talk properly, answer to the point, be friendly – I’ve used all the words I know

(Laugh) Is it important that they speak good English?

It usually is – all executives at NAS speak English

Do you think the school a person has been to influences the likelihood of him/her being hired?

I don’t know – most people seem to be from leading private schools or international schools or the few prestigious government schools
Getting back to you how long was the management training?
Two years

What did you do during this training?
I started with basic things like observing the production process; assisting in scheduling, quality control etc. but after about 6 months I was doing what I do right now as an engineer

What do you do now as an engineer?
I monitor the production process; I take care of quality issues and manage the supply chain

So after the management training you got promoted to engineer I presume? Who do you report to?
The production manager

How is he?
He is all right – there’s nothing much to say about him actually – he’s not an interesting enough person to describe

Are there many other engineers in the production department?
There are 6 engineers and a chief engineer

Does anyone report to you?
Several production assistants report to all the engineers
How would you describe gender relations at NAS?

NAS has a culture of equality - women are not treated any differently to men.

Do men and women talk, relax, eat and have fun together at your workplace?

Of course.

Do you think men and women in your workplace share the same career progression and pay structures?

Yes.

What’s the ratio of male to female managers at NAS?

I don’t know the exact ratio but there are very few women managers and very few older executive women in general – at least in the factories. Most women move away when they get married and have children because of the commute. But there are more women managers at the head office in Colombo.

What about gender relations in your department?

I have never faced any problems or noticed that I am treated any differently to others for that matter.

How do you find being the only woman in your department?

I have never felt as if I am the only female executive in my department – I guess this is because all the workers in our factory are women. Anyway I don’t spend all my time in my department - I am very mobile – most of my friends at the factory are merchandisers so I visit them frequently.
Do you have lunch with the people from your department?
No - I can’t hang out with a big bunch of guys alone!

Pardon me if I misunderstood you, but from what you told me I gathered that you had many male friends and men and women in your organisation hung out together frequently…
Oh god your interview is more confusing than a production bottleneck – I am comfortable with the opposite sex and some of my friends at NAS are guys. But the guys in production are different – they don’t hang out with women like that – they are nice and we talk during work, I have attended their weddings and other occasions with my husband but they are still different.

What do you mean they are different?
They wouldn’t expect a woman to hang out with them alone – they are rather conventional and not as comfortable with the opposite sex as we are

So you are comfortable with them but they are not comfortable with you?
Well I guess I am not too comfortable with them either – we come from totally different worlds. The way we’ve been brought up, our exposures everything has been totally different. They are nice people and would help me out in work etc. but we would never be buddies

So you don’t hang out with your colleagues in production due to the nature of the crowd rather than their gender?
Yes their idea of gender relations is different to ours
Please explain what you just said to me with an example.

Well – I would never hug one of the production guys if I was wishing them for their birthday, they would never expect it. I would just shake hands. They expect a certain distance between men and women. It is just the way they are – they are different.

How do you find home-work harmonisation? You must have gotten married and had your son during your time at NAS. Tell me about your experiences of home and work.

There have been ups and downs. When my son was born, my husband and I lived alone in an apartment. I took my three months of maternity leave early – I started my leave a month before my due date. I was terrified of going into labour in the factory and being rushed into Panadura hospital.

I reckon the facilities in Panadura hospital were not up to your standards

That’s a very polite way of putting it …. Anyway I had two months of leave left after the baby came

Did you take care of the baby alone?

More or less - I had a girl to help me and my father came down from Australia for the confinement. He was eager to do all that my mother would have done for me if she had been here. But for me, he just being there was enough

Did your husband help with the baby?

Immensely he was so thrilled it was a boy – he switched into flying only Asia sectors since he wouldn’t have to be away for so long and he was very involved. Everyone was so amazed at how good he was with my son. I myself never expected him to be so good
Why didn’t you expect him to be good with kids?

Just the way he was brought up I suppose – his mother had done everything for him – even delivered his tea to his bed. She still continues to do so although I try to tell her not to. He’s not an invalid after all.

Didn’t he help you out before the baby came?

He tried to but he wasn’t used to doing anything. His mother had completely spoiled him. But I always got him to do things with me together – little things like helping in the ironing and washing the dishes. When his mother came over she used to watch him doing work with puppy eyes.

Why did she do that?

She was sad at her son having to do basic housework – she always used to tell me that she had never gotten work out of him. I used to tell her that my mother had never gotten work out of me either, but we had to do some housework since we had only a ‘daily’ coming in.

Did she imply that men don’t do housework?

Obviously – but she never had the guts to say this to me in exact words. My father was never involved in the house either but things are changing now or have to change for that matter – men have to help with the house and children. Anyway I am at work.

Ok. So after the baby came your father remained with you and you said you had a girl to help you, how was this girl?

Very good – she was only 16, but very intelligent. She would do her work with minimum supervision and was quite a good cook and fond of the baby.
How long did she remain with you?
Only 6 months, her father took her away – she was an estate Tamil. They get married very early.

How long did your father stay?
He stayed for three months. My sister had twins in Australia and she was at work so she needed him more than I did.

I was wondering how often your mother in law visited you.
Oh she visited daily. She used to visit quite often before the baby came as well - with food enough to feed a town. Whatever said and done she is a really good cook

So you like her food and didn’t mind her bringing in food to your house?
At times I have gotten a teeny bit annoyed

Tell me about such a time.
Well I try my hand in the kitchen during weekends and one day I made lasagna for my husband. Just as I had finished cooking, she and my father in law turned up at our place with so many containers full of food. She had made string hoppers – she saw the lasagna but she just started to put it into the refrigerator saying that she brought string-hoppers and we could all eat string hoppers now.

Oh – that’s bad – what did you do?
I was just too shocked at what was happening no words came out of my mouth – but my husband knew I was upset. He was caught in the middle. He suggested that we eat both the
string hoppers and lasagna since he was so hungry. Then my mother in law told me to eat the string hoppers since she made it especially for me with the flour I liked. I felt bad instantly

**Oh. So she does mean well.**

Yeah in her own way she is quite fond of me – she just can’t help being herself

**How would you describe your mother-in-law?**

She is very conventional, has very strong opinions and is very sure of her opinions. And she seems to think that my husband and I are kids and it’s her duty as an elder to set us right.

**What do you mean by she’s conventional?**

Well she’s a typical traditional Sri Lankan woman – she’s always telling my husband not to drink since he will get liver problems (as if he was an alcoholic)

**Hasn’t she told you not to drink?**

She has because women don’t drink according to her. And I may lose my fertility due to alcohol! I don’t know where on earth she gets her ideas from

**From the way you describe her I wonder how she feels about you participating in official outings when your husband is not around.**

Not very well – but she herself is confused about how she should react to it. Whenever I go anywhere she just goes on about how these new organisations should think about girls before asking them to join events at ad-hoc hours. And then she tells me to go and come off as soon as I can. Anyway she has a small point after all – at least about the night outs – it is not too nice for me to be seen without my husband in late nights.
Okay let me ask you something – why do you think it is not nice for you to be seen without your husband in the night? Is it because your husband is uncomfortable about it?

No. I don’t know how to explain it but one day I met one of his friends at one of the NAS club nights and for some reason I was rather embarrassed to be out alone without my husband. I was wondering about what he and wife thought about me all night. When you are married it is different to being single isn’t it? I have loads of guy friends from school who my husband knows about and we meet up for lunch, movies etc. But in the nights a married woman being out alone is unusual. Do you go out in the late nights without your husband?

I meet up for dinner with my friends alone but I do not go alone late in the night

Haven’t you been out clubbing before you were married?

I went clubbing alone before I was married but I haven’t been out clubbing alone after I got married. I don’t see anything wrong with it but I guess I don’t go because most other married people in Sri Lanka wouldn’t go.

Yeah - you don’t want to be the odd one out and be talked about do you? My husband is really open minded but he is quite uncomfortable of me being seen alone in the night. He trusts me and understands that I have certain obligations to the organisation I work for- but when people he knows comes and tell him that they met me alone in the night – it’s not very nice.

Yeah. Well let’s move on, we were talking about your home-work experiences. So you returned back to NAS after maternity leave?

I took an extra two weeks off actually – from my annual leave. I needed more time to get settled. And I found it difficult to leave my son so suddenly. But I went back eventually.
**How did you manage your home front?**

We looked for a nanny to take care of the baby and finally found a retired hospital attendant who agreed to visit daily and take care of the baby from 7am to 7 pm. We paid her a thumping amount about 6 times more than what we’d pay a usual maid. And my mother in law visited our home every day to keep an eye on everything. We employed a usual maid for cooking and cleaning. But one day I got late to come home since we had an urgent after hours meeting at work and this woman had left my son all alone and gone off. My son was all alone in his cot at home when I came. The front door wasn’t even locked. I just screamed - what couldn’t have happened? That day I knew my mother was watching over my son wherever she maybe

**I am sure she does …wow that’s an awful experience**

I can’t believe that any woman could do such a thing. Who would leave a small baby all alone and just leave like that. And we were so good to her - I put up with everything she did

**What did she do?**

She used to take the baby to her bed when he was restless. I was rather uneasy about this – you can’t exactly let your child share your maid’s bed can you. But I didn’t want to hurt her feelings; I was glad that she showed some genuine affection towards my son. And apart from that she used to make unlimited phone calls from our place, help herself to the fridge – we never said anything. I just wanted her to be happy and take good care of my son. Anyway to continue the story, I couldn’t come into terms with what had just happened at that point. I just called a cab, took my son and went straight to my in-laws. Basically we moved into my husband’s parents’ place immediately – I never thought I would do it but I did. And I will remain here until my son is old enough for nursery. You cannot depend on outsiders to care
for your child. My mother in law would sacrifice her own life for her grandson – an outsider wouldn’t do that.

_So how long have you been with your in-laws?_

About 9 months now

_How do you find it at your in-laws?_

I have no privacy whatsoever but I will put up with anything for my son

_What do you mean by you having no privacy?_

My mother-in law never knocks on our room door - she just comes in and then apologises. She doesn’t do it intentionally she just doesn’t think it is important to knock. When my husband and I go out in the weekends with our friends she constantly reminds us that we are not teenagers anymore but parents. Little things like that - basically constant nagging.

_Have you ever lost your temper and said anything to her?_

Just this one time.

_Would you care to tell me about it? You don’t have to if you don’t want to._

No its okay – I have gotten over it now. Once I was returning home after a NAS bonfire night. I had to go for this since it was also a going away party for a close colleague of mine. My husband was away on a flight so I went alone. Anyway I had to catch a ride home with a friend. Two other girls were also dropped by this guy – but unfortunately I was the last one to be dropped home and it was pretty late in the night. Both my in laws were waiting for me at the gate – and they were in shock when I turned up alone with a guy. I usually call a cab but
it was a Saturday night and it was very difficult to get cab. She did have every right to be mad at me. I wouldn’t have said a word if she had scolded me. But she just said – I don’t know about how you have been brought up or what you’ve been taught by your mother- but women in this house are not used to such behaviors. I just fired up. I was obviously brought up by my mother and I lost my mother who was no second to a god. I told her - you can say anything to me but I will never listen to you say a single word to my mother. You are not even half as good as her.

**I understand that you had to say that**

Yeah well I burst into tears then and there and she apologised. She said she didn’t mean it as an insult at my mother. And anyway we patched things up

**Okay let’s move on – what kind of a role do you play at home now?**

I don’t have any housework to do since everything is taken care of by my mother-in-law. But living with my in-laws mean I spend time on other things.

**Things like what?**

Well whenever someone visits them, they call me to the living room and want me to show the baby and then I end up chatting to those people until they leave. It is not a big deal but most of these visitors are unexpected so I get interrupted often

**What are the work-life balance policies available within your workplace?**

I am not really aware of all the policies – all I know is that there is nothing of use to me. There are various support mechanisms for the factory workers (for instance they have regular medical clinics for women – where doctors come to the factory and women can consult them,
get advice, treatment etc. If you are pregnant or if you are feeding a baby the company provides extra nutritional meals and allows time off to feed the baby (if you are within the catchment area of the factory)

**So these policies are only for the factory workers?**

Well any woman can consult the doctor or get the meals – but executives don’t really need meals provided by the factory and they sort their own medical care privately (from top consultants in Colombo). But NAS reimburses medical expenses of their executives and their families

**So are there any work-life policies for specifically executives?**

If you are studying - there is study leave. You don’t have to take it from your casual, medical or annual leave. If you are a sportsperson – they give leave to attend events. Things like that.

**What about the people who have families, are there any policies for them?**

We don’t have that many executive women who have children at the factories – as I said before it really is a very young crowd.

**Do you have any suggestions for new work-life policies for female executives?**

The option to work from home a couple of days would be good. But it is very unlikely that they will implement such a policy. Everyone says that NAS is a good place for young people to start work, but then they have to move out.

**Who is everyone?**

Well this is a common view shared among most people
Do you think so?
Well yeah I guess so that’s why I am considering moving into consultancy

That’s news – tell me about this
I am trying to get into management consultancy in Ford Rhodes or Price Water Coopers. They do various consultancy work in factories so my experience in production at NAS should be useful.

When do you plan to move?
As soon as possible actually – I have submitted my CV to their job banks, given my CV to several of my friends working in those organisations to handover to senior persons and my father said that he would try to speak to the CEO at Ford Rhodes who was a University batch mate of his. As soon as something comes through I would give my 3 months of notice to NAS.

May I ask why you intend to make a move into consultancy?
Well I can’t live at my in laws forever – I want to have my own house, decorate my own living room and bring up my own child. I cannot do all this while working in a factory – it takes too much time to commute and factories in any company are located out of Colombo.

So you are planning on moving to consultancy because it is easier to reconcile home and work?
Yeah. I want to have more children – life is not only about work after all. But I don’t want to be a full time housewife either. If I could work flexible hours under the designation consultant - I’ll be perfectly happy.
**Is the designation important to you?**

It definitely is – I want to be known as a person doing something important - ‘Consultant’ sounds important and senior – better than ‘manager’ like an expert.

**Are there any other reasons behind your decision to move into consultancy?**

Well to a certain extent I am not really sure of my career progression as an factory engineer – usually factory engineers go on to become factory managers/production managers/operation managers and then finally become the General manager/CEO of a factory. But to this date I don’t know of any female factory General managers or even production managers for that matter – it is always men. I have never noticed any gender discrimination in NAS but I am not sure of my chances of being one of the few or perhaps even the only female factory general manager in Sri Lanka - given that there have been none of them to date.

**This is very interesting – so you are concerned about gendered nature of your profession?**

Well yes, I never thought about it upon graduation but during my time at NAS I got to thinking about it. I was trying to find one single female production/operations manager in any factory in Sri Lanka but I wasn’t able to – maybe I didn’t look well enough.

**Are you looking for specifically a part time consultancy position?**

No I will take whatever I get at the moment – get familiar with how things happen there and eventually try to move into a position with flexible hours.
What are your other future plans?
Actually I am thinking of doing a masters in Operational Research and/or project management. These courses are made for consultants

What do you mean these courses are made for consultants?
Consultancy is about projects after all. Each assignment is a project. You have to study the situation, give a proposal of what you intend to do, do it and give a report to the client on it afterwards. I took modules in Operational Research and Project management for my BSc so I know about these subjects. A MSc in OR or PM would give me a competitive edge as a consultant.

Competitive edge?
Advantage over other consultants

Where do you plan on doing this?
There’s is a MSc program in Project Management from the University of Southern Queensland at this institute called Open Arc. But I am also looking at a distance learning MSc in OR from the University of Strathclyde

Can I just ask you how you exactly plan on managing your home and work once you move into consultancy?
Well as soon as my son is two he could go to nursery – there is this really good new nursery called SAMS. But I don’t want to keep my son at the nursery till 6.00 - it’s too long. But he could remain there for part of the day and my mother-in-law could pick him. I could collect him from her place.
And if you have another baby what do you plan on doing then?
My mother in law could take care of the baby while I am at work. I wouldn’t trust children to servants again.

Don’t you intend to have maids at all?
We will have to have a maid – we cannot manage without one for cooking and cleaning - but I would never give a maid the responsibility of my children again.

How does your husband feel about your plan?
He is very eager to get this expedited – he loves his parents dearly and wants to see them all the time but not to live in with them (at least not now) eventually though they may have to live with us.

What do mean?
When they grow older – it comes to a point that they just cannot manage on their own.

How do you feel about this?
I am not that self-centered to shirk my duties – I will never be able to look myself in the face again if I don’t do my duty. I will somehow or the other get used to her. But right now they are fine on their own so we are actually tiring them out by living with them.

Yeah I know what you mean…. Well I know you have to get going so let’s move on.
Have you ever experienced a situation out of control? And did your employer help you restore equilibrium?

I have felt out of control when I have gotten depressed about little things at home with my in-laws (stuff I told you about). I have carried them to work but feel much better after I have talked about it with my friends. I haven’t shared many things with my superiors except when my maid left the baby alone at home. When I told my boss about it he was very understanding and let me take leave - I had medical leave left so I took a couple of days of leave out of it.

Were there any challenges you confronted in the context of your career? And if so how did you deal with these?

Well I have made considerable sacrifices to keep going to work – I mean I have sacrificed my basic privacy by living with my in-laws so that they can take care of my child while I am at work. And oh I traveled to NAS (1 ½ hours in the bus back and forth) during my pregnancy – everybody kept telling me that it just couldn’t be done but I somehow or other did it.

Who’s everybody?

My family and friends. It was certainly difficult especially during morning sickness.

Do you consider your career to date to be successful?

Well yes I suppose so – being an engineer at NAS is not too bad for 28

What do you mean?

Well I have achieved reasonable career progression for my age and work for the leading apparel manufacturing company in Sri Lanka and I have had a child as well - so I have not
exactly compromised on my life out of work for work – I feel that I have been able to balance both which I consider to be successful. I fulfilled my mother’s wishes

**What would ultimate career success mean to you?**

I don’t understand

**What I meant is how would you describe career success?**

Career success to me would be if I become a top consultant like my father – he didn’t work for consultancy companies but he became a consultant though his extensive experience in organisations. So many people in the manufacturing industry know him and he is often called by various organisations to give his opinion on serious issues.

**So career success to you is about being known among others as an expert in your field?**

Yes. I hope my father could see me as a consultant – then I would feel that I reached the top of my career by making my parents proud. It is my duty after all. My father was an engineer and he hoped that either I or my sister would be an engineer as well

**Do you think your career would have been different if you had been a male?**

If I had been a man I would have tried to be a factory general manager. I wouldn’t be thinking of the likelihood of being the only female factory GM in Sri Lanka

**Ok last question I was wondering whether you networked often?**

You mean networked with other cooperates? Yes, I have been trying to network recently since I have been trying to get into consultancy – if I meet anyone in consultancy I tell them about my interest to get into consultancy and exchange contact details.
Have you experienced any challenges in networking?

Somewhat – I am not even a manager yet so it’s a bit intimidating to go up to a really senior person and say that I am interested in consultancy. So I get my father to introduce me to people I want to know. He knows lots of people since he has worked for so many companies in Sri Lanka. But right now he’s in Australia helping my sister out with her twins.

Thanks for this information and your time. Is there anything you want to add?

Well please disguise my name and the name of my company – and please use this information for your PhD only.

You have my word on this – didn’t you see the confidentiality assurance when you signed the consent form

Yeah but I wanted to tell you this anyway.
Appendix 5: Sample interview transcript 2

Biographic Information

Occupational career – Zoologist

Current job designation – senior professor of Zoology, University of Dandeniya

Age – 61 years, Born in 1948 (Sri Lanka)

- Sinhalese - Buddhist
- Married - husband retired professor of Chemistry. Son – student at Loughborough university
- Currently residing in Dandeniya
- Father (expired – Government advisor), Mother (expired – homemaker)
- Attended a leading government school in Kandy

What influenced your choice of career?

I had an interest in Zoology since I was a little girl. I had many pets not the usual cats and dogs - I had turtles, fish, rabbits and I bred fauna. I always pestered my father to take us on wild-life or nature expeditions – my brothers and sisters had enough of going to sinharaja during school holidays. My father’s brother was a zoologist – he did a lot of work with fresh water fauna – I can say that he inspired me to be a zoologist.

Okay so when did you enter university?

1963 it was called the University of Ceylon then

And what did you read for?

The BSc hons degree – I majored in Zoology taking chemistry as a subsidiary
How did your parents feel about you going to university and majoring in Zoology?
My parents were very keen on us getting a university education – all my brothers and sisters entered university – from the time my father came home from work he used to sit us on the table and do homework. And my mother used to wake us up at 4.30 in the morning to study. All the trips we went during school holidays were educational trips – they took us all around the country – we were thorough with history, nature and wildlife in Sri Lanka.

So were they happy with your decision to major in Zoology?
They always knew that I would study Zoology – they didn’t interfere with what we decided to study – my brother for instance studied eastern music – he is professor of fine arts in Kelaniya now. But they wanted us to go right to the top in whatever we did.

So what was university like in 1963?
I don’t see much difference to now – it was very political back then as well.

What do mean political?
Students were interested in country politics; they actively supported the political parties.

And were there many women?
There weren’t as many as now but there were certainly a lot of women. In our country education for women was always important – it is not a recent trend. All Sri Lankan parents however rich or poor they are, want to educate their children to the highest level.

So what happened after your graduation?
I was offered a lectureship in our department.
Why were you offered a place to lecture?
I passed out with the highest aggregate from the batch

So I presume you took the offer?
Yes

Why?
The university was the only place to do zoology research at that time – I wasn’t particularly interested in teaching but I wanted to pursue my research interests

So did you have opportunities to research when you joined the university?
I didn’t have access to research grants – but some colleagues were doing work on river water which I got involved in. This work inspired my PhD – which was on fresh water ecology.

Oh I see. Were there many women in the department when you joined?
When I joined there were altogether four women – now we have more women than men

What were gender relations like in the department when you joined?
Gender relations were always cordial in the department

Did you ever feel that you were stereotyped or discriminated due to your gender?
I have never felt this throughout my 25 years of service

Okay so how long did you work as a lecturer for?
2 years
What happened then?
I got a PhD scholarship to Lancaster University so I took leave and went to Lancaster

Oh I studied in Lancaster – when did you study?
I was there from 1971 - 74

The university was found in 1964 wasn’t it?
Yes it was a new university when I went. They offered PhD scholarships to 13 Sri Lankan students in 1971. Lancaster was a beautiful place – the people were very polite. They had some good ecology researchers even then. Lancaster is in the Lake District – so a lot of research on river water was going on. I spent a lot of time at the lakes – testing water. It was just a beautiful place – I was very sad to leave.

So how did your parents feel about you going to Lancaster?
They were over the moon about the PhD scholarship – I can still remember my father’s face brimming with pride. His only wish was to live until my PhD graduation – he came to England for the graduation and passed away 3 months afterwards.

Wow – were you married then?
I got married after I came back from Lancaster

Was it a proposal or did you meet your husband?
A proposal
And were your parents agreeable to sending you to the UK without being married?

Late marriages were not common then – a girl would be married by the age of 24 latest. My brothers were not very pleased about sending me to Lancaster – they were concerned that I may not be married at all. They were not interested in all this education they wanted to see me well married and settled. And my brother wanted to get married to his own girlfriend as soon as possible and he couldn’t get married until I was married. But my father wanted me to pursue my education to the highest level and my horoscope stated that I have a late but a very good marriage which comforted him.

If I could interrupt you a bit – why couldn’t your brother get married before you?

Those days boys in the family didn’t usually get married before the girls especially if they had older sisters – an unmarried older sister was considered as a liability by society those days – educated or not educated. This view is still prevalent in Sri Lanka - to a much lesser extent.

So being ‘settled’ for a woman was associated with being married?

Yes – you may be surprised that it still is

Well I am not exactly surprised – in 2001 my mother’s brothers were afraid to send to LSE for my masters because I may never get married or get married to someone from here – my mother had to stand up to all of them.

(Laugh) society doesn’t change overnight. I have a son – I don’t know how I would have been if I had a daughter.
You said that your father was comforted by your horoscope stating that you had a late marriage – to what extent did he believe in horoscopes?

My parents were great believers in horoscopes

Did you believe in horoscopes?

I wasn’t thinking about my horoscope or marriage at that time – I was thinking only about my PhD. But I suppose I also believed that I would be married after I returned back.

So did you go to the UK alone?

My father escorted me to Lancaster – one of our family friends in London drove us all the way to Lancaster.

So how was your time at Lancaster?

Excellent – I have only very happy memories.

Did you work part time? Or as a tutor?

No

Were you happy with your supervisors?

Very much

How often did you come to Sri Lanka?

Every summer
And you were on leave from Dandeniya during your three years?
Yes

So what happened when you came back from Lancaster?
I recommenced work as senior lecturer grade 11

It is a promotion from lecturer isn’t it?
Yes – after 6 years of academic experience you get promoted to senior lecturer grade 11

So the time spent doing a PhD is also counted?
Yes – a PhD is counted as research experience

You said that your father passed away three months after your graduation didn’t you?
Yes that was a very difficult period for me – I was devastated altogether and my entire family was concentrating on getting me married. My brothers wanted to do their duty to me since my father was no more. Anyway one of the proposals they brought turned out to be a fellow colleague of mine. We had met on several occasions before – we instantly liked each other the first day they visited our house and we got married a few months later.

Wow so that was quite a significant year of your life
It certainly was

So what did you do as a senior lecturer grade 2?
I taught a few modules and I developed my PhD research on fresh water ecology – I did a lot of work on Diyaluma falls and the maheweli.
You would have had to do a bit of travelling on your research expeditions – I mean Diyaluma is quite a distance from Kandy?

Yes in zoology we have to spend days at research sights

And where do you stay when you go on these research expeditions?

Researchers usually stayed at guest houses – all these hotels weren’t there those days.

Did you stay at guest houses?

I stayed at a relative’s house – both my parents came from very big families and then my sisters and brothers also married to very big families so I had places to stay all around the country – I stayed at my sister-in-laws birth home in Bandarawela when I went to diyaluma.

If you didn’t have a place to stay would you have stayed at a guest house?

(Laugh) Right now yes – I am an old woman. But I would stay in a hotel not a guest house. Guest houses are not very safe – nobody will know even if you are murdered. My niece travels to New York on business and she stays overnight at Hilton – we know that she will be safe.

Well would you have stayed in a hotel back then?

I don’t know –it was not common for girl to stay overnight at the guest house alone. I don’t think it is that common even right now. Our work takes weeks – it is too long to be staying alone.

So was your husband okay with you going on expeditions for weeks?

Being a scientist himself he was very understanding about my work.
Where did you live after marriage?
We brought our house in the University Park

Did you both live alone?
In the beginning – yes

How did you manage your household?
I managed on my own – we have a very big garden. My husband and I are gardening fanatics we grow everything – vegetables, herbs and flowers. We have never had a Gardner come in.

And who did the cooking?
I did it

When you went on expeditions who took care of your household?
My mother stayed at our place whenever I went away – and there were plenty of aunts from both sides who were only too happy to stay over for a couple of days – it was a change for them – and Dandeniya is very scenic.

So when they come – do they cook for your husband?
Yeah they take care of him well – my husband was a favorite among our relations – he is very mild and quiet so everybody was very fond of him.

So how long did you work as a Grade 11 senior lecturer?
6 years – I was promoted to senior lecturer grade 1 after 6 years
And what was this promotion based on?
You are eligible to be a senior lecturer grade 1 once you have 12 years of experience.

Okay and what did you do as a senior lecturer grade 1?
I taught similar modules – this is the time I started to develop my research on otters. My key research area now is Eurasian otters – the kind we find on the highlands.

Well I am clueless about otters – but aren’t they getting extinct?
(Laugh) we have serious concerns about their habitation.

When did you have your son by the way?
In 1989. I was 40 – we were trying for a child almost 10 years. I had an undetected fibroid – at first they said it was unexplained infertility. I took study leave to concentrate on trying to conceive. This wasn’t necessary – I wasn’t at all stressed in my work. But the doctor insisted so I took a year of study leave but nothing happened. Then I took another year of no pay leave to consult another doctor in Colombo – we even went to India to consult doctors – but nobody detected the fibroid. My husband’s parents were very worried – my husband was their only child so they wanted a grandchild – this was the only disappointing period I went through in my entire life. Finally we met a long lost family friend of ours who told us to go to munnesaram – the Iswara kovil – we did pooja for a week. On the 7th day of the pooja – the doctor we were consulting in Colombo called and told us that he thinks that there may be a fibroid. As soon as the fibroid was operated I conceived. Up to today we go to munnesaram every year. Those days it was a very tedious journey – we had to walk about 3 miles to get to the kovil.
I have heard many people say that they conceived after going to munnesaram.
Yes it is very sacred place – Ishwara deviyo is for children

So what happened after conceiving him?
I carried on with work but I did only teaching I was too excited to do any research studies and I was so scared of miscarrying. He was born normally – I was in labour for 13 hours.

13 hours oh my god
Yes – good things don’t come easy. Once he was born I took another year off to stay with him. His father was also working very haphazardly we didn’t even lay him down on the cot – he was always carried - you can see why he is so spoilt now.

(Laugh) But he has been managing okay on his own in Loughborough
Yes he has been managing on his own – it is us who are not able to manage. When he gets on the plane his father and I are don’t leave our shrine room until he has landed safely. Even when we are at work we give him a call every 3 hours – if we don’t, he panics and asks amma why didn’t you call? He knows it is unusual for us not to call often. What are parents there for after all? Now don’t tell him I told you this.

(Laugh) I am sure he wouldn’t want me to know all this. Anyway once you returned back to work, who took care of him?
A distant niece of my husband’s came to Dandeniya to study medicine. We boarded her at home. It was a help to her and to us as well since she could keep an eye on our son. We got a very trustworthy maid to look after him – the lady who looked after my brother’s children. But I was paranoid about leaving him to one person. Our house is walking distance to the
university so my husband and I were always in and out of the house. But I suppose we were very protective – we had him after such a long time.

I can understand. So you and your husband had the flexibility to come in and out as you please?

Yes that is one of the best things about being an academic – you can work according to your own clock.

You know one of respondents who was an ex demonstrator at Dandeniya didn’t think that academic life was so flexible?

At demonstrator level – you can’t really expect to come in and out as you please. None of the demonstrators in my department do so right now and when I was the head of the department I wouldn’t have allowed it because I would expect them to hang around and learn – there is a lot to learn from more experienced colleagues – you have to watch what others do, get involved, ask questions – it is a learning experience. Once you are an experienced academic you have leverage to do as you please.

Before you had your son you took three years off didn’t you?

Two years – study leave doesn’t count as leave although I took this to go to Colombo to consult doctors.

So was your department completely all-right with you taking all this leave?

I took no pay leave – they knew I wanted to try for a baby – they were very cooperative.
Were you part of any collaborative research projects at the time you took leave?
I was part of a team studying the movements of elephants but I told them a year in advance that I was going on leave. I allowed them plenty of time to plan their work. Even when my son was born I told them that I would be taking more leave than maternity leave.

One of my respondents said that there was a lot of undercutting in academic departments – what do you think about this?
(Laugh) there is undercutting everywhere. If a person doesn’t like another person he tries to undercut. This could happen even at your home or in your family. The thing is to not leave room for this sort of thing to happen at work. I can imagine how unpleasant it is to work in a place where somebody has problems with you.

And how do you think a person could ensure that this sort of thing doesn’t happen in an academic department?
Well you could do your share of work on time. Let others know in advance if you are not able to do your share. People don’t like to be bombarded with others’ work unexpectedly. And if you are facing personal problems it is good to talk about it with your superiors – let them know about what you are going through. In rare cases some people just don’t like each other – in these cases the best you could do is avoid as much as possible. But at demonstrator level – you can’t really expect to come in and out as you please.

Why not?
Because it is a learning experience. If we want people to just deliver lectures we would hire part time teachers – we won’t pay them a full time salary.
What if a demonstrator has a personal problem like a sick child which requires her time at home?
Well she should talk to the head of department about it and try to work out some plan

**Do you have any work-life policies in the department?**

(Laugh) no we haven’t even thought of those things – we just have leave.

**Okay. Anyway how long did you work as a senior lecturer grade 1?**
9 years

**And what did you become after these 9 years?**
Associate professor

**What was this promotion based on?**

Promotion to professor is based on merit – you cannot become a professor because of your years of service only. After my son was born I commenced my work on otters, published widely and secured a research grant from the zoo conservation fund and the IUCN. I did all this work the three years following my son’s birth.

**Talking about grants – does the government give grants for studies?**

They do – but it takes a long time for these to come through. These grants are given to the department so the department assembles a team for the study. I am currently heading the national conservation review project conducted by the Forest Department. If you wait for government grants your research is going to be stalled – I aim for NGO grants.
Do NGO’s give many grants?
The IUCN funds a lot of studies

Do you do consultancy?
I do - I am an Advisor for Environment Lanka (Pvt) Ltd, this is a private consulting firm engaged in environmental and ecological assessments.

What about for the government?
I did some work on elephant conservation – most of the government consultancy work is given to people who have close ties with the ministry. So most male academics do a lot of consultancy for the government.

Oh I see – this is interesting – does the government prefer having men as consultants?
I can’t say that – but it is mainly men who have close ties with the ministry – so they are given consultancy work of the ministry.

I got sidetracked talking about consultancy – I forget where we were; and you are running out of time so I’ll make it quick. You were telling me about you being appointed an associate professor right?
Yes

How long did you work as associated professor?
5 years
And what did you become after that?
I became professor of Zoology for 5 years and right now I am a senior professor of Zoology

And what were these promotions based on?
Academic merit – I published widely and secured many IUCN and World Bank research grants during the last 10 years.

And this consultancy work you told me about when did you exactly do this?
I started working for Environment Lanka in year 2000

So what kind of work do you do in the department now?
We have a masters program in Zoology – I teach a couple of modules here, I have supervised 5 PhD students and then I was the head of department for the last 5 years

Ok, how do you manage your home right now?
I have a servant – but she doesn’t have much to do. It is only two people to cook for and basic cleaning. We send her to a school close to our place and she goes for a sewing class – she is like a family member.

Where is this girl from?
She’s from Kandy – the parents wouldn’t have sent her to work anywhere else. She was sent only to our house – they are very respectable people – three generations of their family have worked for my mother’s family.
So what do you do for leisure?

My work is leisure for me – but apart from that I do gardening. I published a children’s story book on otters – in Sinhala. And we are very involved in our temple and thinking about our boy all time.

What are your future plans?

I will be retiring next year

Why?

Well my boy is graduating next year and he wants to work in Colombo. We have no life apart from him – we managed these two years with the greatest difficulty. So we are thinking of moving to Colombo with him. We have already brought a land in Pelawatte and we are waiting for my son to approve the house plan. He likes these modern house styles – houses which look like offices. My husband says to allow him to decide on whatever he wants – this is all for him anyway. So after he approves the house plan we will start building the house.

So are you going to quit working altogether?

I will always continue my work, but I will be on my own – I have been offered a place at IUCN and the consultancy company I work for wants me to come there. I will have to see what happens.

Do you network?

Yes, networking is very important for academics. I have collaborated on many research projects with colleagues I met in India and Malaysia.
Have you faced any challenges in networking?
I can’t think of any challenges as such

Ok do you network with mainly women or men?
To be completely frank – I network with women

Why is this?
I suppose because I am naturally more comfortable with fellow women – you have much more to talk about.

You know one of my respondents said that she feels uncomfortable to go up to men and exchange business cards because she wasn’t sure of the way she will be perceived by others – what do you think of this?
(Laugh) if I was a young and pretty girl I may have shared her concern. But for an old lady like me being perceived as coming on to men by others is hardly an issue.

Okay how did you feel about networking 20 years ago then?
(Laugh) I wasn’t actively networking 20 years ago. I started to actively network from about 1999.

Okay, so except for social connections what other resources do you think are important for women’s careers?
You are asking about women’s careers in particular – well it will certainly help if they have understanding husbands and trustworthy people to take care of children. You can find a million servants but you can’t trust children to just anyone.
Do you think English is important for women careers?

English is very important for an academic – lack English sets back a lot of clever people. The academic community as a whole speaks English, all the journals are in English - English is very important.

I was just wondering about university faculty – you obviously come from a very privileged background and many academics are from less privileged backgrounds to yours. What are your thoughts on this?

At my time – there were more upper class people in academia than now – there weren’t so many job opportunities in the private sector – working for the government was considered to be very prestigious. During my father’s time Government Agent was a very prestigious post. But after opening the economy and privatisation things have changed. People prefer to work for private companies nowadays. Now it is prestigious to say that you work for NAS or HSBC. My son for instance wouldn’t even consider working for the government sector – the offices are old, you are poorly paid – nobody wants to work in the public sector anymore. But when it comes to academia – working for a traditional university is still more prestigious than working for one of these newfangled franchise university colleges. Traditional universities have a research focus.

But compared to those days fewer upper class people go into academia in Sri Lanka – maybe because there are more career opportunities in Sri Lanka and people are comfortable with migrating. Academia in Sri Lanka right now is dominated by the lower middle class. All the new academics come from lower middle class backgrounds. You will understand it when you go to work – you may not find a single person of your age who comes from a background similar to yours. But you shouldn’t have any problems. Academics are usually
very intelligent people and they come from very educated respectable backgrounds. Most of them are from teacher families, so there isn’t such a big class difference between you and them – although you may have more financial resources than they do.

**Thanks for this. Do you think your career would have been different if you were a man?**

I don’t think so

**Do you consider your career to date to be successful?**

(Laugh) Yes I suppose so

**What does career success mean to you?**

Throughout my career I have been able to do the work I love and I was recognised for my work. I made my parents very happy by getting a PhD. I didn’t make a fortune out of my work – on the contrary my husband and I were very fortunate to be able to depend on our inheritance. But then money is not everything.

**What do you mean you were recognised for your work?**

I meant my publishing – I won some best paper awards, I have been appointed to journal boards, I have served as editor – I consider these as academic recognition.

**Thank you very much for all this. Is there anything you want to add?**

If I had more children – I may have not come so far. I would have not hesitated to give up anything for my children if my circumstances permitted me to do so. Motherhood makes it difficult for women to rise – they have to battle with everything. But the world can’t stop and
wait for them until they finish their battles. However much a woman tries to have a career and family both – it is very hard - you have to have the luck for it to work out.