


# Chapter 7

## Navigating Academia: An Autoethnographic Reflection on the Intersectionality of Gender, Race, and Motherhood in Academia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Post-feminist discourse often promotes the idea that women have unlimited opportunities, yet systemic obstacles continue to persist in academia. Scholars such as Pomerantz et al. argue that while progress has been made, gendered academic structures often disadvantage women. In this chapter, the author reflects on the author's experiences as a minority Iranian-Canadian immigrant woman navigating the challenges of motherhood and academia. Using an autoethnographic approach, the author explores the intersectionality of my identity as a woman, mother, daughter of immigrants, and academic. The author discusses how these overlapping identities shape the author's academic journey, particularly the unique struggles the author has faced in balancing academic aspirations with family life. Societal and institutional biases have created additional barriers, particularly the underrepresentation of minority women in leadership roles and the lack of mentorship, which has compounded the difficulty of navigating these spaces.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Post-feminist discourse often promotes the notion that women can achieve anything, with boundless opportunities available to them. However, scholars such as Avolio et al. (2024) and Pomerantz et al. (2013) argue that systemic barriers continue to hinder women's progress. Research shows that men and women experience academia differently (Müller, 2023), as academic structures are often designed in ways that disadvantage women (Bracken et al., 2023; Halpern, 2008). Historically, academia has been considered a male-dominated domain, underpinned by the belief that knowledge is inherently masculine. In contrast, home life has traditionally been viewed as a female-centric space, perpetuated by societal stereotypes that a "good" mother should prioritize caregiving over her professional aspirations (Tsouroufli, 2018; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2015). Even when women navigate these barriers and attain leadership positions, the demands of such roles can clash with their other responsibilities, particularly motherhood. Despite the prevailing narrative of equality, societal expectations continue to create significant challenges, especially when balancing professional and familial roles.

In this chapter, I reflect on my experiences as a minority Iranian-Canadian immigrant woman navigating the challenges of motherhood and academia. Using an autoethnographic approach (Ellis, 1999; 2009), I explore the intersectionality of my identity as a woman, mother, daughter of immigrants, and academic. I discuss how these overlapping identities shape my academic journey, particularly the unique struggles I have faced in balancing academic aspirations with family life. Societal and institutional biases have created additional barriers, particularly the underrepresentation of minority women in leadership roles and the lack of mentorship, which has compounded the difficulty of navigating these spaces. The lack of mentors who understand the intersectional challenges of being both an immigrant and a woman of color has further hindered my professional growth. Furthermore, academic leadership positions often require a high level of commitment, which can conflict with caregiving responsibilities. This chapter underscores the need for academic institutions to foster more inclusive, supportive environments for minority women, especially mothers, to enable their success in leadership positions and reduce the barriers that prevent their advancement.

The underrepresentation of women in academic leadership roles highlights broader societal gender inequalities. Despite progress in education and career opportunities, academia remains largely male-dominated, with leadership positions disproportionately held by men (Clavero & Galligan, 2021). This disparity stems from gender biases, societal expectations, and structural barriers within academia that hinder women's advancement into senior roles. Additionally, women often struggle with work-life balance, particularly in managing career demands alongside

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