

## Gendered and classed performances of 'good' mother and academic in Greece

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Title: *'Gendered and classed performances of 'good' mother and academic in Greece'*

## **Abstract**

The enduring significance of gender and how it intersects with class in the organisation of parenting, domestic, and professional work has been obscured in contemporary neo-liberal contexts. This paper examines how Greek academic women conceptualize and enact motherhood and the classed and gendered strategies they adopt to reconcile 'good' motherhood with notions of the 'good' academic professional. It draws on semi-structured interviews about the career narratives of 15 women in Greek Medical Schools at the aftermath of the Greek recession. The analysis presented in this paper is informed by a feminist post-structuralist paradigm and an emic approach to intersectionality. Motherhood emerged in the data as a dynamic concept, and a network of practices both constrained and enabled by gendered and classed family and work cultures. Drawing on neo-liberal 'DIY' and 'having it all' discourse Greek mothers claimed that they could achieve almost anything professionally, if they organised their private lives sensibly. They drew on idealised discourses of motherhood, but they also contradicted these notions by doing non-traditional forms of motherhood, such as remote or transnational motherhood, afforded by their privileged social positioning and academic careers. Further research is required to investigate configurations of classed motherhood in less prestigious professions.

Key words: Gender, class, motherhood, academic, feminist post-structuralist paradigm, intersectionality

## **Introduction**

Feminist scholarship has raised consciousness about the material conditions associated with motherhood and the male-dominated ideology in shaping the social construction of motherhood (Oakley, 1974; Delphy and Leonard, 1992). Theories of late modernity on the other hand have emphasized liberation from structures and institutions in post-industrial and post-traditional societies which allow for reflexively creative subjects with endless possibilities and choices (Giddens, 1998). Third wave feminism heavily critiqued essentialist notions and fixed categories of motherhood as well as the universal category of women. However, third wave's problematic celebration of women's 'choices' - including reproductive choices and consumerist approaches to performances of motherhood - has led to the masking of classed and raced -based privileges implicated in the legitimization of 'good' mothers (Mann and Huffman, 2005; Thompson, 2006). The enduring significance of gender and how it intersects with class in the organisation of parenting, domestic, and professional work has been obscured in contemporary post-feminist and neo-liberal contexts (Skeggs, 1997; Baker, 2009). A fourth wave revived some of the concerns of the second wave through online feminist activism. Despite relative limited literature, fourth wave feminism (Aitken, 2017) challenges misogynist and sexist practices and is concerned with the political under-representation of women, conservative economic and ideological strategy and the implications for women's welfare.

This article explores the gendered discourses and classed resources Greek women draw on to produce 'good' maternal and academic subjectivities. It examines and raises understanding about institutional and socio-cultural contexts that underpin current discourses of gendered motherhood and academic success in Greece academia.

### **Mothers in the Gendered University**

There is a growing body of work concerned with the gendered nature of academia (Anderson and Williams, 2001) and how gender permeates the entire organisation in ways that subordinate women (Acker, 1980).

*'The notion of a gendered university culture covers all the taken-for-granted, unquestioned attitudes, behaviour, values and basic assumptions about the nature and role of the institution and the role of women within it. It includes the wealth of practices which render*

*women academics' participation undervalued, unrecognised and marginalized, leading to an overwhelming feeling of otherness'* (Thomas, 1998: p. 90).

Within the gendered university the “ideal worker” is one who, in essence, is ““married” to his work and does not procreate (Williams, 2000). The clockwork of the academic career is also distinctly male, assuming freedom from caring and parenting, which generally affect women more than men (Ward and Bensimon, 2003). ‘Greedy institutions’ (Coser, 1974) and indeed greedy motherhood (Wendel and Ward, 2006) both demand unconditional loyalty and dedication and operate in ways that can penalise women for their professional and personal gendered choices.

It is well established in the literature that motherhood brings penalties for women’s careers which tend to lag behind those of childfree women and fathers (Budig and England, 2001; Portanti and Whitworth, 2009). Combined with age-old academic values and new institutional priorities, heterosexual families continue to shape women’s subjectivities and employment strategies, and diminish their rank and salaries. Women academics in the US are more likely than comparable men and other women professionals to remain childless, while academic men are more likely than other male professionals to become fathers (Bassett, 2005; Hewlett & Vite-Leon, 2002). Tenure-stream university jobs in the US are over-represented with childfree women while part-time or contractual work attracts more married mothers (Harper et al., 2001). Probert’s research (2005) in Australia has demonstrated that mothers are less likely than fathers or childless women to reach the senior ranks of academia. Academic women in the US tend to accept more responsibility than men for housework even when they work full-time (O’Laughlin and Bischoff, 2005). Academic mothers with full-time tenure-track positions clearly face challenges but they also may have found more family support or better childcare services than women employed part-time. Munroe et al’s (2008) research with women from the University of California showed that women who combine full-time academic work with motherhood continue to face significant challenges in terms of working hours, stress levels and work/family conflict, especially when they become sole mothers.

The literature predominantly from English speaking countries (UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) suggests important gender differences in the personal and professional lives of academics (Baker, 2012). The dearth of research about the lives and academic

subjectivities of mothers and non-mothers across European countries and particularly in the Mediterranean women is alarming. Nevertheless, there has been limited research and no policy about the participation and promotion of academic women in STEMM disciplines in Greece despite female under-representation in tertiary and secondary STEMM subjects (Kordaki and Berdousis, 2017; Berdousis and Kordaki, 2018). Greece- unlike Belgium, Ireland, France and the UK- does not have targets for participation and attainment of specific groups (e.g. women or ethnic minority students) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

This article aims to understand Greek female doctors' maternal and academic subjectivities and their entanglements with wider socio-cultural discourses and practices of gender, class, heteronormative motherhood and patriarchy. In my earlier work I have discussed how challenges for academic mothers (and non-mothers) are exacerbated by the neo-liberal logic and performativity culture of Universities and their emphasis on raising research productivity and promoting international reputation and collaboration (Author, 2016). The market ethos of universities in Europe and their male norms of success and academic conduct have had profound implications for women's careers and the reproduction of inequalities (Morley and Crossouard, 2015). Moreover the gendered divisions of labour, class ideologies and structures of universities have gradually been overshadowed by seductive discourses of neo-liberal possibilities, choices and self-improvement (Morley, 2015). There is, however, evidence of Greek female academics' resistance to neo-liberal practices through celebratory reification of pedagogical identities, while simultaneously engaging with research intensification, productivity and all hours work (Author, 2016). In this article I discuss how Greek women attempt to manage successfully academic work and family life and I bring to the fore gender and class resources, privileges and inequalities they face in their motherhood and professional projects.

Until recently much of the feminist literature on women and the academy had ignored mothers (Raddon, 2001). Although there is now more attention to this issue, much of focus of the UK and USA literature tends to be on how motherhood and mothering outside the academy impacts on the latter, and not on how mothers manage home and work and the forms of maternal discrimination they are likely to experience in the workplace (Williams and Segal, 2003). O'Reilly's qualitative research (2011) about the lived experiences of parenting and professing in Canadian Universities has raised understanding about what

enables academic women to combine academic work and motherhood and achieve professional success. Herman et al.'s (2013) research with women scientists and engineers in Italy, France and the Netherlands threw light on some of the strategies mothers employed for career success including assimilation, 'cul de sac' (women accepting the existing cultures in their organizations and stalling their careers and no longer seeking to advance); 'laying low', meaning slowing down, putting their careers on the back burner, to be retrieved later.

### **Classed and Idealised notions of Motherhood**

Constructions of good motherhood depend on context, culture and class (Lareau, 2003) and yet we know very little about what constitutes good motherhood in non-anglophone contexts and the gender, class, and cultural specificities of motherhood configurations across and within European countries. Gillies points out in *Marginalised Mothers* (2006) that poor and working-class mothering practices are commonly denigrated as bad mothering and associated with poor outcomes for children.

Feminist theorists, drawing on Foucauldian perspectives, have argued that neo-liberalism has masked the traditional ties of class, gender, and race by creating mythological notions of unlimited freedom, choice, and responsibility for success or failure which operate as self-regulatory mechanisms of the self (Rose, 1996). Walby (1996) and Mc Robbie (2004) have drawn attention to the new divides among women and the feminisation and racialisation of class divisions since women's full participation in the workforce and the rise of individualisation. Skeggs' work (1997) has been concerned with the role of middle class women in the reproduction of class society in Britain and also the denigration and marginalisation of working-class women through practices of respectability. My own work has been concerned with academic women's practices of respectability in Greece (Author, 2018). Contemporary female individualisation is bringing into existence new social divisions and formations of classed femininity and motherhood (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008), produced through engagements with neo-liberal discourses of capacity, attainment, success and self-perfection.

The ideology of the 'good mother' as selfless is supported by the media, the state, religious doctrine and psychological discourses concerned with the importance of mother-child relationships. However, the 'best of both worlds' mother — the superwoman who manages home and work — is supported by the dominant state model of the family which has shifted

towards a dual earner/marketized carer model (Woodward, 2003). Motherhood has been constructed as a calling or devotion, and although the traditional responsibilities that go along with being a mother are often sources of pride, women may struggle with internalized shame when they either want or need to work outside the home (Heather et al. 2012).

Second-wave feminist work exposed the socially constructed nature of the ideology of motherhood and its focus on sacrifice (Rich, 1977, Delphy and Leonard, 1992). Constructions of caring as a natural role for women have meant that they are subjected to a higher standard of morality than men, with attitudes to mothers often characterized by the extremes of veneration and denigration. The feminist critique also argued that the idealization of motherhood serves to obstruct women from opportunities to understand not only the benefits but also the hazards that motherhood may pose to their identities and lifestyles (Baker, 2009)

In Greece, heteronormative family is considered a sacred institution and motherhood is highly valued within a country that interestingly has the lowest birth rate and the highest number of abortions in Europe (Davaki, 2013). The ‘demographic’ problem, as it is has been called in Greek media, has created a platform for perpetuating the gendered and nationalist politics of reproduction and constructing Greek women as morally responsible for the forthcoming extinction of the Greek nation (Halkias, 2003).

Greek literature is replete with heroic, selfless mothers who have suffered silently to protect their honour and children and their wealth. Greece is of course not alone in validating strong women in its history and the idea of the mother-nation is well known in Europe. As Paxson (2004) remarks, motherhood in Greece, with its iconic representation in the Panayia, or Holy Mary, Mother of God, is an indisputable, absolute good. However, recent research on mothers in the island of Crete in Greece shows that women’s maternal identities within the changing social milieu of Greece vie with these ‘iconic’ representations, as women face ambivalence and challenges (Triliva and Brusten, 2011).

Also fathers in Greece face ambivalences and challenges. Research evidence suggests that they are struggling with self-identifications of fatherhood, autonomy building, and independence from their own traditional families of origin (Dragona, 2012). Educated middle-class men’s participation- and of those men living in urban areas in Greece- in family activities, including household responsibilities, child-care activities and emotional

expressiveness towards children, has increased, but is still reported as an act of good will towards their spouses (Maridaki-Kassotaki, 2000; Maridaki-Kassotaki et al, 2017).

Transformations in the Greek socio-cultural context and parenthood policy have caused asymmetries between cultural ideals of parenthood and the actual enactments of fatherhood and motherhood.

Parental leave is offered in Greece in the public and private sector. However, the parental leave actually taken by both mothers and fathers in the public sector is longer. The majority of parental leave is still taken by women in both the public and the private sector, which might reflect the traditional expectations from Greek women. However, the actual parental leave periods of Greek mothers are lower compared with the UK, Sweden, Germany, Austria, France, Lithuania and Hungary (Van Belle, 2016)

Gender equality was explicitly recognised by the 1975 Constitution for the first time in the Greek constitutional history. Since Greece became a full member state of the European community and with a socialist government in power in 1981, a number of significant legal changes took place, including in 1982 the abolition of all regulatory provisions allowing for unequal treatment of women. Positive action was introduced by Greek Parliament since 1998, with a view to tackle the under-representation of women in the public and politic spheres and to achieve substantive gender equality (Kapotas, 2012). Greece still falls far behind in gender equality in terms of economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment and health and well-being despite national gender mainstreaming at all policy levels launched in Greece in 2010 through the National Programme for Substantive Gender Equality (EIGE, 2010).

Austerity has led to a backlash in gender equality and the reconciliation of work and family in Greece and across debt stricken European countries. Austerity policies have systematically targeted public sector employment (i.e. affecting predominantly women's employment) and have stripped benefits, thus generating work/family balance challenges predominantly for women as mothers and carers (Davaki, 2013).

Care of children, infirm, and the elderly has always been considered women's work in the Greek context and provided mainly informally in the domestic sphere. The traditional divisions of labour within the home have not essentially changed, even when women have entered the labour market in large proportions (Mousourou, 2003). Although traditional

caring expectations cross class and cultural boundaries (Merrill, 1999) middle-class women had better access to private services before the Greek recession. Development of personal social services has historically been slow with child and elderly care provided increasingly by migrant women before the crisis. In 2010 68.6% of total female population had care responsibilities, compared to 28.3% for the EU-27 (European Commission, 2012). This constitutes a backlash after the progressive legislation passed since 1983 onwards, including Law 4075/2012 which established the right to parental leave by introducing the right of each parent to participate in the upbringing of the child until the age of 6, and has reinforced the stereotype of traditional housewife (noikokira), who has to undertake all the unpaid care work due to the lack of public and private resources (Davaki, 2013). My research was conducted within this context of austerity and backlash of gender equality.

### **Methods/Methodology/Epistemology**

This article draws on semi-structured interviews about the career narratives of 15 women in Greek Medical Schools. The study employed a narrative approach with a diverse sample of academic women to explore how professional identity and academic professionalism are negotiated in academic medicine. The analysis presented here is informed by an emic approach to intersectionality (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012) and embedded within a feminist post-structuralist paradigm (Weedon, 1997). The study was not designed to focus on pre-established notions of motherhood, and the experience of motherhood emerged as the most prevalent identity for Greek academic women, sustained successfully through class and heteronormative privileges within a context of gender inequalities in the home and the academic realm. In my analysis I draw attention to contradictory positions of subjects within discourses of motherhood and the performative nature of their identities (Baxter, 2008). I also pay attention to the diversity and multiplicity of subjects' identities (class, age, sexual orientation) and highlight in the analysis ways in which one discourse is often inflected with other discourses (for example, good mother with good heterosexual woman/wife).

Female academics from 6 medical schools in Greece were invited by email to participate. I employed a purposive as well as a snowballing approach in order to get diversity of perspectives and experiences. Only 2 of the research participants had responded to my initial email and the majority were actually recruited through personal connections in 3 out of the 6 medical schools that I approached. The medical schools were different in terms of size, geographical location, and curriculum (traditional/problem-based). However, only academics

from 3 medical schools took part, due to the researcher's established professional relations. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted by skype, telephone, or face-to-face.

Women were asked to discuss their background and reasons for choosing medicine and later an academic career, their experiences of studying and working in their particular speciality and academic medicine, their relationships with students and colleagues, their experiences and views on teaching, research, assessment and gender inclusion/exclusion. Women were also asked to talk about barriers in their career advancement and to specifically discuss notions of academic professionalism and identities.

The researcher informed the participants of her background and multiple identities (Greek born British academic, non-mother), her commitment to gender and feminist research and her track record of research in medicine and medical education. There were opportunities in the interview when the researcher shared her own professional experiences as a sociologist in Medical Schools and also a Greek middle-class woman/academic in an attempt to connect with the participants and make sense of her storied self and the storied selves of the participants.

The participants were from different clinical disciplines (Pathology, Surgery, General Practice, Internal Medicine, Renal Medicine, Endocrinology, and Paediatrics) and of different academic grade (Emeritus Professor, Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Research Fellow). They all worked full-time as academics and clinicians. Women's ages varied with the youngest one being 36 years old and the oldest one being 74 (Emeritus). All except three out of the 15 participants were in heterosexual marriages and had children. Only one of the married women had no children. Participants were not asked about their sexual orientation. However, discussions of their relationships clearly showed that they were all heterosexual. All research participants were white. There were no ethnic minority and migrant female (and male) academics in the Medical Schools that were invited to participate in my study – unsurprising, given that Greek academia is profoundly white. Research participants were not asked to label themselves as middle-class or high class but they were invited to discuss their socio-economic background and parental education as well as their cultural, social and symbolic capital. Only 2 women came from medical families and most had at least one parent in the teaching profession or a professional job (e.g. engineering). It is

well documented that high status academic departments in Greece, such as medicine and law are dominated by students from middle-class backgrounds (Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides 2011). However, the fact that some of my participants came from poor, agricultural families might reflect the belief and, indeed reality, at least for the first post-war decades, that participation in higher education could lead to intergenerational mobility (Frangoudaki, 1985; Kyridis, 2003). The fact that higher education has been free and state funded, might have also made participation more attractive and indeed possible for working-class students.

Field-notes and a reflective diary was also kept throughout data collection, analysis and writing up. Interview data was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Excerpts from interviews have been translated to English by the author, including information about participants' academic grade, age and number of children, are used in this paper to illustrate the different challenges mothers and non-mothers might have experienced in their personal and professional lives at different junctures in their academic careers. In an attempt to protect the anonymity of Greek academics I carefully chose excerpts and demographics, from which the participants may not be identifiable.

The analysis presented in this paper aims to explore how women perform the 'good' mother and the 'good' academic in a highly competitive and masculinized academic discipline. In what follows I discuss gendered and idealised constructions of Greek motherhood as well as non- traditional configurations of Greek motherhood as narrated by the research participants.

### **Gendered notions of Greek Motherhood**

Motherhood was discussed as an almost natural role for Greek women entailing excessive caring responsibilities impinging on Greek women's academic role in terms of time, productivity and career progression. This gendered motherhood ideology appeared to also affect and have consequences for non-mothers within the Greek academy as the following quote illustrates (Ramsay and Letherby, 2006).

*'Women have a more important role with children. If women give more time to work then the children will not develop normally. If I had had a family it would have been difficult to spend so much time at work, talks etc.'* (Assistant Professor, no children, early 40s)

*'Women academics have more responsibilities than men because of children'* (Research Fellow, mother of one young child, early 40s)

*'When you become a mother everyone has expectations from you. Everything changes including the relationship with your husband'... I have no support for my mother and now there is no time for writing. My husband is a neuro-surgeon and he supported me a lot with my PhD. Now though he panics and he cannot stay alone with three children'. (Research Fellow, mother of 3 very young children, late 30s)*

Gendered motherhood seemed like a 'biological disruption'(Bury, 1982) or a 'critical situation' (Giddens, 1979) in a Greek woman's identity, permeating and affecting all relations in her life, bringing losses, joy, and compromises, and leading to a re-invention of their gender and professional identities (Author, 2012). The mother of 3 young children in the extract above discussed how her relationship with her husband changed when she became a mother. Another research fellow and mother of one child in her early forties discussed the criticism of her own mother for travelling too often for conferences and not spending enough time with her child. Interestingly, all women in my study had been encouraged by their families to do doctorates and most were also assisted in the upbringing of their children by their mothers. However, the normative expectation from Greek families and society was that motherhood would override highly demanding career dreams and confine women to their gendered roles. Baker's research (2012) also showed that women from middle-class families in the 70s were encouraged to do doctorates and engaged in practices that contravened gendered practices. This was more seen like a safety net by their parents in case they did not get married and there was no expectation that women would enter into male dominated professions.

### **Gendered and classed choices of the neo-liberal maternal Greek subject**

Responding intelligently and dynamically to the gendered normative expectations of Greek society and becoming a 'good' academic and 'good' mother, meant planning well ahead, making the right career decisions and drawing on the family's gendered and classed resources. In the following extract a retired academic discussed why she gave up her dream clinical speciality for paediatrics, a more women friendly speciality in terms of work hours and medical/academic culture. She was happy and proud of her decisions and achievements.

*'I wanted to do neo-natal intensive medicine. With a Greek husband no way. Like all Greek husbands they expect care, the house to be clean ...It would not have been possible to have a child and be a good professional...this was a difficult decision, the first one that I had to make. I do not regret it, I have two wonderful children, and grandchildren. My difficulties*

*were from inside the classic Greek family. It is the fate of a Greek woman who has a high position... However, by the age of 39 I was Assistant Professor and then at 40 the youngest woman Head of Medical Department (Retired, 60s, 2 children)*

The female academic in the following extract had chosen a clinical speciality with no on calls (pathology) so she could combine effectively her academic career with motherhood. She wanted to be able to care for her babies while doing her doctorate and mentioned that she would swing her baby's cot with her foot while at the same time writing up her thesis.

In both extracts academic success is constructed as an individualist, assertive, meritocratic life project offering opportunities for self-monitoring and self-improvement. The neo-liberal academic/maternal subject is discursively constructed as rational rather than selfless and self-sacrificing. She does modern motherhood and womanhood by using her class privileges and gendered resources to benefit from private child care, cleaner, grandmother's support and thus compensate for her lack of time/availability for performing the traditional gender roles in the home. This post-feminist representation of modern motherhood (McRobbie, 2004) is aspirational and seductive but also dangerous as it is 'fully incorporated into the language of self-perfectibility' (McRobbie, 2006: p. 23) and represented as attainable for all despite the classed impossibilities of this conceptualization of motherhood as the following extract illustrates.

*'I have not experienced gender inequalities. I think it is all about women's choices. If a woman wants to do something, she will do it. Some women have not made it because they have not organised their family as they should. If you are mother, you have that role too, you are raising your children you must make them independent. I had support from my mother. My husband works in (city) and I raised my children alone... You buy services... We are not entitled to state child care because of our income'* (Associate Professor, mother of 2 teenagers, late 40s)

*'We have always had a cleaner'* (Professor, married 2 children, 50 years of age)

Moreover the dominant 'best of both worlds', (Raddon, 2002) of 'having it all' (Hughes, 2002) discourse of Greek academics/mothers is both empowering and self-limiting as it reproduces gendered and heteronormative notions of the maternal subject as the primary carer of children and the household. 'Good' Greek academic/mothers are expected to ensure that their academic careers do not encroach on their gender responsibilities and jeopardise the

morality and respectability of the Greek family so intricately linked to the development of children's self-identity, good education, a clean household and content Greek husband (Skeggs, 1997; Lawler, 2000). The 'having it all' or 'best of both worlds' was contingent on the neo-liberal discourse of 'Do It Yourself' (DIY) (Author, 2016) and in essence meant having a part-time husband who was entitled to choose the prestigious clinical speciality of his choice (usually surgery) and enjoy a linear, uninterrupted career, and in most cases away from his wife and family.

One of the strategies academic mothers employed in order to maintain their status as 'good' mothers and academic professionals was to temporally regulate their decisions to become mothers (Lahad and Hvidtfeldt -Madsen, 2016). The ideal maternal age for Greek academic women was late twenties/early thirties when usually clinical training would have been completed and they could use their maternity leave to combine thesis writing up with staying at home to look after their newly born babies. Strategies for reiterating good academic subjectivities aimed to ensure that motherhood would not be seen by colleagues as corroding academic women's respectability. The most common one was 'laying low', meaning slowing down, putting their careers on the back burner, to be retrieved later or stalling their careers until children grew up (Herman et al. 2013; Author, 2018). In the following extract the participant discussed her reasons for not applying for promotion after returning from maternity leave.

*'I did not think it would be fair to my colleagues. I was away for a year so I waited.'*

(Associate Professor, mother of 2 teenagers, late 40s)

### **Non-traditional forms of Greek motherhood**

Greek women contradicted idealised notions of motherhood by performing non-traditional forms of motherhood, afforded by their privileged social positioning, gendered family support networks and academic careers. '*Mothering from afar or transnational motherhood*' (Millman, 2013) was an unconventional configuration of motherhood which entailed extensive travelling abroad for conferences and professional development including sometimes completing a doctorate abroad. It could materialise due to the substantial involvement of grandparents in the caring of the children of academic women and the financial support of their husbands who earned more in prestigious clinical specialities (e.g. surgery). Greek women used the counter narrative of '*remote parenting and raising*

*independent children*’ to perform the ‘good’ mother and compensate for perceived maternal neglect by their families and potential loss of gendered respectability in the Greek society. Transnational motherhood and also motherhood afar from their husbands allowed Greek women to expand gender roles and increased their feelings of empowerment and independence. Interestingly even when women were actually in the country or their homes they were always too busy to perform motherhood in the idealised and gendered ways described in their narratives. However, they did not express a lack of control or feelings of lack in themselves as the professional mothers expressed in Hewlett’s (1987) and later in Oakley’s (1992) research.

## **Conclusions**

The strategies that Greek academic women employed to address the double bind of academic profession and motherhood were clearly influenced by gender discourses, heteronormative privileges, class resources and their age. Mothers with young children and limited class resources faced the biggest challenges in their academic career progression. The Greek recession did not appear to seriously affect the Greek women who participated in my study. The research participants were able to continue using the resources afforded by their class capital as, for example, access to paid help, which was indeed an advantage for the careers of Greek academic women. The economic, social and cultural capital of the women who took part in my study allowed them to legitimize their position as good mothers and successful academic professionals (Skeggs, 1997). Most women focused on positive feelings of fulfilment and achievement and performed celebratory maternal and academic subjectivities.

However, the ‘super-motherhood’ and ‘super-womanhood’ performed by the elite group discussed in this paper seems to reinforce the feminization of class divisions through a new regime of sharply polarised class positions within the increasing neo-liberal academic and social Greek context; abject mothers/academics with the mismanaged life or well-groomed, successful mothers/academics (McRobbie 2004). Although Greek academic women were able to reconfigure new and empowering forms and shapes of ‘good’ motherhood, being a ‘good’ mother and successful academic was a laborious project contingent on their class capital and the status acquired through heterosexual marriage in the Greek patriarchal society.

The personal and professional choices of this elite group of professional women were shaped by the patriarchal norms of Greek society. Although they resulted in academic achievements they had little, if any impact on challenging traditional Greek fatherhood and constructions of Greek mothers as primary carers of children and the household. Super-womanhood and super-motherhood were emotionally and materially costly performances that reproduced entanglements of maternal subjectivities with traditional moral rules and competitive neo-liberal values. The women in my study were regulated and produced through meanings of attainment, social mobility, enjoyment and success which replaced any need for a feminist critique of hegemonic masculinities (McRobbie, 2004) and diverted attention from parenting involving both parents, and state support for both motherhood and parenthood.

This article raises important issues; first, about the impact of paid work on all women and the difficulties of women in engaging with the neo-liberal project of success, including those with small volumes of capital; second, the conceptualization and investigation of multiple structural and cultural forms of discrimination (gender, class, age, ethnicity, nationality); and third, the implications for feminist theory.

The women in my study were able to find strategic ways of capitalizing on their financial assets. Also their cultural capital in the form of prestigious educational qualifications, empowered women to counter social expectations for traditional forms of motherhood as demonstrated also in Argyrou's (1996) research in the Mediterranean. Women within different social positions and identities, for example of class, age and sexuality, will have different or limited access to available discourses of femininity and motherhood, as well as possibilities for resistance. Restrictions on access to knowledge, financial resources, and discursive positions have implications for the construction of maternal and professional subjectivities (Skeggs, 1997; Foucault 1988). As women's increased participation in the labour market and neo-liberal policies and practices are shaping new meanings of motherhood and class structures, feminist theory will need to continue challenging assumptions about the declining significance of class and gender as structural constraints in post-structural societies (McDowell, 2008) and paying attention to the intersections of these categories as well as other strands of diversity.

Intersectional analysis from an emic approach (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012) has the potential to enhance our understanding of structural and cultural inequalities as relational processes that

can afford privileges, as well as create disadvantages for working mothers in different professional, socio-cultural and national contexts. Working with pre-established instead of emergent conceptualizations of categories of difference, leaves little room for exploring how macro and micro axes of power might operate and shape work and motherhood experiences in different contexts. Contextualised intersectional analysis can attend to the different levels on which oppression operates, for example institutionally and subjectively, and the different entitlements or lack of, to discourses (Yuval- Davis, 2006) of achievement and capacity. This inquiry has been a pioneering attempt to use an intersectional analysis of the discourses and practices of gender, class, motherhood, and to some extent age, to understand the privileges and challenges facing academic mothers within the Greek post-recession context.

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