

## ABSTRACT

An implicit and hidden gendered construct termed as “respectable femininity” is acting as a powerful barrier which significantly constrains a woman’s career progression. Respectable femininity is a relatively under-researched phenomenon with most of the studies available focus on other invisible barriers that limit women’s career progression to leadership positions such as glass ceiling. Even lesser studies have focused on understanding the individual differences that affect respectable femininity and career progression in terms of role identity commitment and openness to change. Thereby, the aim of this study is to understand how a woman’s role identity commitment to respectable femininity and the degree to which they value openness to change affects their career progression. This study adopted a qualitative approach and multiple cases were used under the case study strategy. The sample of the study included 15 top managerial women and 5 women who stopped working for family commitments which was drawn from a snowball sample technique. Data was collected by conducting one-to-one semi-structured interviews and observations. The data that was gathered was analysed and multivocal arguments were built up using themes identified by carrying out a thematic analysis.

Accordingly the findings implied that it was challenging for a woman to progress in career especially with expectations such as respectable femininity for women at workplaces and even at home. It was further revealed that women who did not confine to a society’s expectation and carried on as long as they were true to themselves as they welcomed all challenges positively were able to progress in career, while women who felt guilty for not abiding by the social norms and women who felt it was important to maintain a character that was validated by outside society ended up forgoing their career halfway through for family commitments. This study contributes to the limited existing knowledge on the area of respectable femininity as it enhances the social role theory by considering individual differences that affects a role undertaken by a woman. The study recommends managers to focus on unnoticed aspects of women that could affect a woman’s career progression in recruitment and promotions procedures.

**Keywords:** Respectable femininity, Role identity commitment, Openness to change, Career progression