Chapter 6

Discussion

(This chapter discusses the structure - agency engagement of women executives and the reflexive process involved in their self-construal. It applies select concepts from Layder’s Adaptive theory, Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field; and Lois McNay’s performative Agency. The relevant research questions addressed and the discussion are presented in this section.)

The aim of studying work life issues and organizational gender bias of women executives is to understand how exactly Indian executive women exercise agency in their given structures. Their performative action is located in a context which is influenced by social, economic factors, gender, and culture. Their actions are influenced by existing structures, and are in turn influencing the structure. To understand this dynamics, Layder’s theory is used to establish the context, the setting and the situated activity in which the executive woman defines herself. The discussion is based on Mc Nay’s theory of performative agency which draws heavily from Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field. A description of the process of defining oneself, taking into account the impact of the larger field, and it’s implications for performative agency of Indian women executives, in terms of coping with work life conflicts and subtle gender bias, follows. The research questions which are addressed in this section are first recollected here and then the model of analysis based on the integrated epistemology presented in the 3rd Chapter on Research methodology is explained.
6.1 Research Questions

The following research questions, under the two main areas of work life balance and gender bias, are addressed in this section.

Work life Balance
- What does their agency imply in terms of their self?
- What are the implications of such agency on their society?

Gender Bias
- How do they perceive subtle barriers at their workplace?
- How do they cope with subtle biases at workplace? (agency)
- How does it affect their self-construal?

6.2 Model Based on McNay and Bourdieu’s Theories

The analysis of agency poses a difficulty, chiefly because it is so varied, stems from causes which are opaque (even to the actor), is influenced by multiple factors, and accessible through the subjective narrative of the actors who reflexively consider their own praxis. The theories of McNay and Bourdieu provide the means to understand this complex process. The choice of this epistemological pluralistic model has already been explained in the 3rd chapter on Research Methodology. Bourdieu (1977) speaks of a constructivist structuralism wherein the actors are dynamic and construct their social world, which is usually in friction with existing structures. He also defines ‘habitus’ as the mental structure through, which people understand and deal with the world. The ‘field’ refers to a set of interactions, which are semi-autonomous and powerful. Habitus generates and is generated by the field (Bourdieu, 1977). The economic, social, cultural definitions of an Indian woman in terms of her role and behaviour form the field. These factors affect and inform her individual actions. She may marginally or fundamentally challenge the structure when she redefines her role (habitus) but an alteration of structure requires a critical mass before it becomes an enduring
change. The activation of agency is a result of the reflexive deliberations, which occur in the pursuit of defining one’s goals and identity, ie. The self construal process. This occurs in between the field and habitus and elaborates the causal structure eventually. The agency of women executives reflects both-the transformative power of agency and the reproduction of structure. This process is different in collective cultures where interdependence and social values define personal identity in a more pronounced way as compared to individualist cultures. A diagram summing the main elements of this complex process, follows. (See Figure 6.1)\(^1\).

\(^1\)The structure consisting of the field and the Doxa (unquestioned collective assumptions) is reproduced through the habitus of the individual. The individual makes a selective investment in the field and so he/she absorbs only particular aspects of the doxa, which are in line with his/her beliefs and aspirations. This indeterminacy of the habitus allows for modification of the habitus. It affects the individual’s perception of the world. However, certain habitus, like gender are too deeply entrenched. They are embodied and are often unconscious. Embodiment is expressed in the body in terms of stance, gesture appearance, etc. called as hexis. When confronted with conflicting situations, the individuals modify their actions so as to meet the objective requirement of the present which is reflexively mediated with the habitus. Thus action reflects regulated liberties. This dynamic of stasis and change is responsible for the uneven and asynchronous nature of gender role changes in society (Bourdieu, 1977; McNay, 2000).
6.3 Field

Field is one of the core concepts used by French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu. A field is a setting in which agents and their social positions are located. It is a system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relationships (Bourdieu, 1977). In this study we look at two settings – macro and micro. The macro setting includes the society in which women executives live. This macro field is influenced by macro forces of globalization, education and employment which impact the other micro fields, of which the women executive is a member. Globalization and increased opportunities for women do have some detraditionalizing influences which complicate the self-construal processes and change equations between members of a society (Giddens, 1984; Lash, 1993). Lois McNay believes that this creates a potentially emancipatory situation for the restructurings of gender relations. She says “The concept of field also suggests a revised understanding of the reflexive dimension of agency as a form of distantiation, for example, the increasing movement of women into social fields which have previously been confined to men, is crucial to an understanding of the decline of traditional gender norms (McNay, 2000)[pp.26]. In India, the emphasis on tertiary education and the increase in employment of women after the structural changes in the economy have created opportunities of equal access in the formal sector (Bhaumik, 2008). Besides education itself opens doors and helps women to set higher sights (M. B. M. Gupta Sarita; Shah, 1982). Different fields can be either autonomous or interrelated and complex societies become more differentiated. They are societies that have more fields (Bourdieu, 1977). Women executives belong to multiple fields and consequently have to handle multiple roles. In the family (immediate and extended) they have to play the roles of wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law etc.; in the organizations their roles encompass boss, subordinate, colleague/peer; in the social setting they have roles to play in their communities and localities. The proliferation of these roles creates confusions, especially if the power statuses of these roles are different. An executive wife has to defer to her family and spouse at home but assert
and lead others at work. Role multiplicity can create stress and insecurity. The
dissonance between roles creates the tension, which Bourdieu calls the ‘lucidity
of the excluded’. The unquestioned roles of the habitus come to the forefront for
questioning when the stress or insecurity increases. Women executives echo this
‘lucidity’ in their narrative. The unequal distribution of work at home becomes
an issue because working women play multiple roles and consequently the stress
increases. (99- “I am the master of the home, I will not do petty daily chores –
kind of attitudes do exist, but it depends on the nature of each man. If he doesn’t
mind making your morning coffee or if he doesn’t mind clearing the dining table
the next day morning, it just gets easier for you. I know of women who have
to handle such situations - like daily chores at home; along with having to deal
with the typical male mindset. It becomes very challenging”.)

(42- “I think it is a pressure built from the husband side as well. If they
(women) are dropping out it could be so because after sometime you might feel
that your job is not as important as that of your husband, that is how, most of
them feel. There are only a small percentage of men with the mental attitude
that women are equal to them.”)

(35- “At the managerial level, you need to be available most of the time for
official responsibilities, and then it just multiplies. In between, you also have to
do what it takes to manage your domestic front, your responsibilities at home,
so probably your own personal aspirations would become a casualty.”)

(47- “The point that we should not miss out is that it is the woman who is
required to take the brunt of the whole responsibility. We think that there is
a support system and that it will enable us to make the best of both worlds.
However the truth is that it is not merely physical exertion, but it is mental
and emotional exertion and it is a fact that most of the time our brain is over
working, that stress will take a toll on our health.”)

Though fields interact with each other, they are hierarchical. And many of
the fields are mapped within bigger fields like gender, caste, ethnicity etc. So
a gender role identity would dominate over a career role identity in most cases.
Some of the interviewees expressed a strong identity with their gender roles. (57-
“I strongly feel that you need not do a job in an organization to prove yourself as a woman. It could be done very well at home and in a much better way. I have seen that we do lose balance of the family when we come to work. You can replace another working woman but you can’t replace a mother; a mother’s role is something special, which cannot be substituted. If you are not economically in need of money or a job, it is always better to be at home.”

A field is constituted by the relational differences in position of social agents, and the boundaries of a field are demarcated by where its effects end (Bourdieu, 1977). However fields also create meta-narratives and culturally sanctioned behaviours which constrain members and resist change. Challenging boundaries can have other social costs, which may not be affordable by women. (17- “What happens to working women and independent women is they can’t get good people to marry. Many people are facing that problem, you can’t get good people to marry because you are overtly seen as too aggressive, too ambitious, so it is difficult and in India this whole thing of arranged marriage still is a very heavy load. After you are married, then people put pressures saying that you should not continue in your job, ‘leave your job and look after children’, they say and you have to do it.”)

The position of each particular agent in the field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, agent’s habitus and agent’s capital (social, economic and cultural) (Bourdieu, 1989). People maneuver and struggle in pursuit of desirable resources in the field. These desirable resources or capital being whatever is taken as significant for social agents. While women executives speak of personal gains of satisfaction while working they also say that the monetary rewards (economic capital) is useful for better lifestyle and comfort (social capital) for their families. (21- “I have seen my own son, he is 11 years, when he was younger, he would be upset and say, ‘mom come and pick me up from school’, because he saw other mothers pick their children up from playschool. Today it is about my mom is a big person in ********, my mom does this, that evolution has happened. First of all, it is the pride associated with the mother being a career person, and who the mother is, the second is what career
brings to the child, or the perks of a career mother—financial freedom which means better holidays, better travel overseas, better quality of life."

Fields are constructed according to underlying nomos, fundamental principles of ‘vision and division’ (like the division between male and female), or organizing ‘laws’ of experience that govern practices and experiences within a field. Agents subscribe to a particular field not explicitly, but by their practical acknowledgement of the stakes. It is the interests in the stake that make them observe the particular laws that govern the field. A interviewee explains why career breaks and flexi timings is not practical. Yet another interviewee reflexively accepts that women cannot have the same opportunities as men. There is a degree of acceptance to these factors because of their investment in being career women. A interviewee quotes the nature of business today, (05- “When you are in a cut throat business vertical you can’t do part-time…. you can’t deliver…. you can’t do all these flexi timings, part-timings, because comeback skills are difficult to get…. you know things change so fast, look at the way the world is changing in 2 years…”). Yet another speaks of her situation and her acceptance of the constraints. (82- “I am a single mother and I have dependencies, so tomorrow if I want to pick up skills, maybe, I just want to go back to school or if I just want to take a break I might not be able to do it. I will have that pressure and if I have to relocate I have to think about thousand things—will I have a support system in the place where I go and all that. So maybe, at times it could be a little disappointing that you cannot really do everything that you want but I think that is what makes us realize that we can never be equal to men because of these factors.”

(82-“I know a friend of mine who did a reentry very beautifully. She got married then her support fell apart so she had to take a break for 5 years, but then when she returned after the break, I think she was totally open to it. She also had her expectations absolutely set right and she said ok if somebody is going to treat me like a fresher I am totally prepared for it because this is IT industry and I have had a 5 years gap, so I understand that I am going to be behind my peers.”)
What is interesting is the underlying theme which propels this acceptance of the nomos. The women executives neither question their domestic roles nor do they demand recognition for it. Instead the doxa of familial role operates, making the pursuit of a career, an individual luxury which preempts a passive acceptance of the limitations of the field.

6.3.1 Family, an Important Field in Collectivist Cultures

In the micro setting, the family and the organization are the fields in which agents and their social positions are located. The family determines social practice because it is the primary socializing unit and colours perception. Lois McNay says “The family is understood as a ‘collective principle of construction of collective reality that is a constitutive element within the habitus. It is both an objective and subjective social category which plays a fundamental role in the ordering of social practice and the perception of experience”(p.62). An interviewee, whose career break cost her promotion, does not perceive it as a loss because she feels the contributory role as a mother is greater. Family values are a strong part of the habitus in collective cultures and so the perception of situations like this are perceived differently. (101-“I don’t subscribe to the 3 month maternity leave. It is too less a time when you want to bring a child into the world. I took a conscious decision of taking a 4 year period off from work. It did affect my career but it didn’t bother me because my priorities are different. I don’t even construe my decision as wrong inspite of the fact that it affected my career. I took the call and it was a conscious choice. If there was a flexible option available at that time it would have been good but when you take 4 years off, others have moved ahead and so they deserve to be ahead of you. A woman should not view it adversely. A woman has a larger role to play and men are missing out on the greatest years of their children. You cannot measure everything in terms of a career. You are getting a great deal on certain aspect of life, while the man is deprived of the same. Somewhere it does get balanced. I feel very strongly about it.”)
Yet another way of negotiating the habitus is by treating the workplace as a larger family. In ‘Feminine quest for success’ (Bancroft, 1995), this relational approach is celebrated as the feminine style of management. (39- “I always feel that the family is the one, which actually make you the best at work, you really work with all the constraints of budget and schedule at home too. You also know who is good at what and assign work accordingly. So I always have thought that the basic project management fundamentals- collaboration, team work, are all brought up at home. Work is a larger family with a common goal. I always say that if you really know the stakeholder expectation from both (home and work) and manage it properly we should be able to manage...”)

Families define the scope of duties for each member and set expectations. Women become reflexively aware of the dissonance involved in their familial roles and work roles vis-a-vis men, when their stress increases. McNay (2000) observes, “Women entering the workforce after child rearing may experience difficulties because their expectations and predispositions constituted largely through the exigencies of the domestic field sit uneasily with the objective requirements of the work place. At the same time, this dissonance may lead to greater awareness. The ‘lucidity of the excluded’- of the shortcomings of the system of employment based on gender discrimination. Thus reflexivity is born due to the tensions inherent in the concrete negotiations of increasing conflictual roles.”(p. 69)

Since familial identity in collectivist cultures is stronger than in individualist cultures, the dissonance and the reflexivity is more likely to be perceived on the home front as compared to work as the interviewees’ musings reveal- (16- “We are conditioned to accept that our father will not be at home, he can miss birthdays of various family members, he can miss lot of things because he is at work. For our generation our mothers were at home always for us, so we often feel guilty that we are not there for our children. If our children have friends whose mothers are not working then it compounds. It is acceptable that Papa is not present but for them ‘Mama is not there’ becomes a big issue!... so that weighs on the woman. I know my mother used to be at home, so I do feel bad that
I am not there for my children and I have heard of my friends whose children say that other people’s mothers are there why are you not there? My daughter too says – ‘Why are you going to office? Why don’t you stay at office?’ But I seldom see her asking my husband that question, even though she is equally close to him because she thinks fathers ought to go for work. Maybe that is the way we are all brought up in our society, and that is our collective conditioning, it does not have anything to do with what we tell them.”

Another reason why women executives’ rate family higher than other roles is because the love and solidarity provided by the family is a valuable asset hence ranked higher than other capitals. “The family feeling, love and solidarity is especially important as it runs against potentially disintegrative effects of struggle over other power relations both within and beyond the field of the family” (McNay, 2000, p.63). An interviewee who sacrificed her career and chose to forego a promotion chance cites family reasons for her decision. (16- “Being a woman there are ample milestones pertaining to your personal life, even when you don’t intend to take up challenges on the work front. So when I got married and when I was adjusting to a new family and responsibility, I did not want to have challenges at work. So I wanted to be in a place where I was familiar with. Then when I had my first kid, my mother was very unwell, she had cancer so I needed to spend time with her. So I did not again want to take up something which was new, where I had to prove myself from scratch.”), (04- “You have to take a call. There will be some people, who might be capable of doing it but they don’t go that extra mile because they will feel that this will affect their health, family and it is not worth it.”)

In comparison with other capitals, the family need (social capital) will be rated higher. “Bourdieu suggests that affectual motivations have an ambivalent relation with the material and instrumental interests of actors, sometimes reinforcing them, sometimes running counter to them. Thus, though the family is one of the primary sites where the individuals are accommodated into the social system, the bonds that it generates are always in excess of any socializing function”. (McNay, 2000, p.66). The need to satisfy a career ambition is
sacrificed before the need to meet family needs. (93- “Do not think of dropping your baby in the creche, first have the baby, understand how you feel, park all these ambitions, you can always find jobs. I am a woman who never pursued a career, otherwise I would have been 3 notches higher, but I am quite happy where I am.”) (10- “You don’t want to have a successful job and then have a messed up home life, so I kept a tab on that.”)

The quantitative findings too highlight the relative importance given to gender roles and family vis-a-vis career. Marriage and motherhood are not sacrificed for a career. The demographic profile reveals that 75.56% of 90 women who answered the questionnaire and 82.86% of the interviewed women were married. Only 16% of the survey sample and 14% of the interview were single and this number included those women who were of marriageable age and conveyed intentions of marrying eventually. Majority of women executives in the survey sample have children (66.67%) and (33.33%) have no children. This includes women who are single too. Among the executive women in the interview sample, (80.95%) have children and only 14.29% do not have children. The sample without children includes younger executives who may eventually marry and have children. This finding is in consonance with Bourdieu and McNay’s concept of the primacy of the influence of family and family values above other fields.

Detraditionalizing may have thrown certain aspects of gender relations – the gender division of labour, marriage – up for renegotiation. At the same time, however, men and women have deep seated, often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped (McNay, 2000, p.41). An interviewee speaks of the deep rooted attitudes, which create the structural constraints faced by women. She concludes saying that without adequate support, it is difficult to step out of these constraints. (86- “It is possible because you are really a function of your upbringing, it is very much possible because as a girl you could have encountered instances wherein you wanted to do something and people held you back. Yes in small town versus metro it could happen to boys too, then if you are from a very humble service class
and if your parents hold you back from taking an unconventional decision... so I think it does affect you. More than a boy, a girl in our society probably will have to live with those sorts of decision. A man may actually move out of home in similar circumstances. If I have to talk about myself I think that is not a problem, but it could also be because of other factors, you can take risk if your husband is supportive, you can take risk if your family circumstances are conducive, so I don’t think confidence and risk taking ability will develop so easily without adequate support.”

6.3.2 Organization as a Field

Yet another field in which women executives are actively involved is the organization. The organizational culture and power equations are usually reflective of socio cultural power relations prevalent in society. Patriarchal cultures create masculine cultures, which form a culture of advantage to the dominant groups and disadvantage to the non-dominant group. These doxic properties in the field impact women executives as subtle biases in the organization. Gender biases are complex because they are created by many factors like social and cultural attitudes, organizational culture, leadership values, and individual reactions to gender issues (Rosen & Jerdee, 1974; G. E. Miller, 2004; Castilla & Benard, 2010). Organizational biases include heroic masculine culture, tokenism, ‘think manager- think male’ and homophilly. Stereotyping in the larger society leads to the double bind and a tendency to attribute sex as a reason for success, when women succeed. The organizational level wise analysis of responses reveals that higher levels (very top include VPs, MDs, Country Heads, Global Heads, Directors, CFOs and CEOs) and top (General managers, Associate Directors, and AVPs) feel that heroic masculinity exists, more than upper middle levels (Managers, Administrative executives and Senior managers. This could be because at higher levels the pressure of delivering performance increases and nurturing activities may be relegated. As expressed by the women executives, the impact of competition, market realities and growing recession promotes the masculine
Organizations also have their stories narrated to actively create a desired culture. If these stories are based on a masculine culture, the subtle marginalization is inevitable. Speaking of symbolic nature of experience, McNay (2000), drawing from Ricoeur’s Narrative theory says “Ideology operating through the medium clearly has a distorting function evident in the simplification, schematization, stereotyping and ritualisation of its forms.”[p.96]. Ideology therefore has integrative and dominating impact, as it reinforces individual and collective social identity. The overarching masculine culture can lead to a variety of responses between two radically opposite response poles; one is internalizing the masculine culture; and the other is establishing the submerged identity. An interviewee argues that the masculine culture is inevitable in organizations. She says that cut throat competition, the need for high performance and the need to survive through recession, demand focus on results to the exclusion of everything else. She feels that the predominance of masculine values is necessary. (31- “Times are changing now. What I saw, some 15 years back, was different. Now everybody is bottom line oriented, reduce staff, and reduce cost…. If you are working for companies which are kind of listed in public eye, there are various stake holders to satisfy and there is constant evaluation, then the pressure to deliver is much more. Then the culture automatically changes to a masculine orientation.”)

Another nuance discernible is in the way women internalize the culture. They believe that the masculine culture in the organization affords them an opportunity to balance their own personality. (27-“ I feel the masculine culture is useful. You need to be a little more aggressive to get there, to be accepted in a man’s world and that brings out a certain side or facet of your personality which you thought never existed! So in that sense it is very fulfilling because you are more balanced and you also get the respect that you deserve, people look up to you”).

The other extreme response is that of establishing the submerged identity. Women executives use feminine wiles and assert typically feminine (stereotyped)
behaviour; this is another response to a dominant masculine culture. McNay (2000) argues that “identification with conventional images of femininity is in fact motivated by a more active attempt by women to work through the disappointments and tensions arising from their attempts to negotiate the competing feminine roles of mother, wife and worker” (p.55). (72- “It is used for two purposes: one is to act helpless and the other is you know that because you are a woman you will get that advantage get your job done by being feminine. In certain things they (men) don’t allow us to compete so they are at an advantage, so why not use what is there! And the management also uses this. They send a woman to get the work done.”)

(77- “I was with ***** and I was in marketing of the Eastern region that is in Calcutta, and I had to tour. I had a 6 month old baby. My colleague(since I was getting a lot of attention) said “why should I always tour and you be in Calcutta? You should also tour.,So what happened later is in one of the functions, the annual day, I took my 6-month-old baby with me and I walked with the baby in my arms around throughout the evening. The General Manager and everybody saw it and said “you got a small baby - how can you be touring” and they promptly put me into the branch which is the most coveted position, so I could say that I played it to my advantage and it worked. I didn’t have to tell people that I want to be out of my touring job.”)

What is to be noted is that “women’s entry into work force has not freed women demonstrably from the burden of emotional responsibilities. Rather it has made the process of female individualization more complex in that the notion of ‘living one’s own life’ is in a conflictual relation with the conventional expectation of ‘being there for others’ (Beck and Beck- Gernsheim,1995 quoted by McNay (2000) [p. 41]).Consequently, women executives experience guilt and insecurity. (24- “The challenge around a work life balance is that, you are not being able to spend time with your family; you are not being able to be there when your children need you, so you start having guilt feeling and then you are trying to kill yourself doing everything.”) (83- “Yes, huge guilt factor, I think every working mother lives with it. Everybody talks poorly about me as a mother and
in my case; I think my mother gave me a tougher time than even in-laws.

“It is definitely coming with a price . . . . and women are emotionally involved, so they do end up compromising. So it (the struggle to achieve work life balance) is much larger than just that woman herself.”

Another popular belief is that the increase in the number of women at workplace will create structural changes and enhance the status of women. While this is true to an extent and is endorsed by many studies, and by interviewees in this study, McNay says that change will be asynchronous and uneven. This is because gender is an entrenched structure and operates in unconscious and pre-reflexive states. 

“I think there are certain popular perceptions which are being carried in organizations, about women because of the traditional gender roles. The perception is that women lack confidence and they lack the experience and women need not be compensated as much as men, they need a lot of guidance and mentoring, it is better to put them in support roles, it is better to put them in staff positions. I think these are again perceptions which have been around women and they have been there for a very long time. They have been cracked. I think what women bring to the table today is [I am speaking for myself] power of motivation, power of good communication, and high quality work. I think in terms of strategic planning and analysis women are equal or maybe even better than men. So those myths are still there but a few women have cracked that myth and those are the women who have gone up because of their own self effort. I don’t think the environment has supported the women so much. It is self-belief that has helped her to move up, so this concept of glass ceiling all these are myths. We have just punctured the glass ceiling. Those 10-15 or 1%-2% of women who have come on top are absolutely on their own, they have done it on their own. I think that is the only way for more and more women to come up in the field, which will be an influencing factor for many more in posterity.”

An interviewee quotes the stereotypical attitudes she encountered when she first began her career as a junior manager. 

“When I got this job I walked into the office I had somebody there mumble and grumble about me snatching a breadwinner’s job! The breadwinner is a male not female; females are meant to
be at home, cooking. So you know at the beginning to gain acceptance I had to work harder at my job whereas a male colleague coming in would not have had such a problem, because I was overcoming the whole thing about being a woman to start with and then taking on my managerial role.”)

(21- “As you enter the organization, the first perception is that of stereotypes. One of the stereotypes for example is that if you want to succeed in the organization you can’t have children and you can’t have a family life, you need to be wedded to the organization. I am against that stereotype because I have a family. I think stereotypes of all hues exist - you could then say this person is from the south and that person is from the north; that is a regional stereotype. So stereotypes exist everywhere.”)

Cultural biases are deep rooted in the social psyche and are not easily dislodged. They are however eroded over a period of time. “This tension between the assertion of a universal, gendered habitus and the historical specificity of relations within a given field remains unresolved and leads to the reproduction of gender relations” (McNay, 2000, p.54). Yet the very conflict provides a fertile ground for bringing the unconscious mapping of gender roles into conscious patterns of thinking. “Societal detraditionalisation, triggered by globalization of capitalist structures has resulted in attenuation of conventional gender norms leading to increased levels of personal insecurity” [p. 22]. This insecurity triggers reflexivity and negotiation. The bias is expressed in the form of intolerance to powerful, firm and vocal women. They are often put down by labeling them as emotional or aggressive or unfeminine. An interviewee speaks of the insecurity that having women in the workplace can trigger- (52- “I went to Chicago for a project and the manager was asking my colleagues if I can cook, in what way it is that relevant to my job? I always used to think that it is a biased male who wants to see a woman in the kitchen. The fact that she is able to stand shoulder to shoulder with him is bothering him at some level”.)

(100- “You also have a lot of people who are very supportive of women but if anyone of them were to actually have a woman boss they probably can’t handle it.”). (52- “They don’t see that as a manager, are you capable of taking tough stand when it is
called for and when you stand up for what you believe in. Many times in this organization itself I have been called aggressive but I don’t think I am aggressive. I have invariably been called aggressive by men never by women.”)

6.3.3 Agency and Field

The conflicts between fields itself creates an emancipatory condition. In the conflict between home and work, when a woman chooses home as a greater priority, it resignifies the cultural habitus, on the contrary if she chooses to pursue a career despite the social costs involved, she conflicts with the field that gives importance to family, and if she straddles both, it allows a regulated liberty. Thus the agency of women executives is varied and nuanced. It is based on the tradeoff they make. In the words of Lois McNay, “The idea of the field potentiality yields a differentiated and dynamic model of power relations where each field has its own histrocity and logic which may reinforce or conflict with those of other fields. It produces a more nuanced and more cautious assessment of political agency and the changes that can be wrought through resignificatory processes.”(p. 57) The quantitative analysis of the survey also confirms this. The factor analysis of the survey responses reveals that there is a variation in the way women executives approach the issue of work life balance. The seven beliefs distilled are ‘Pro Family belief’, ‘Optimizing belief’, ‘Quality time belief’, ‘Pro Career belief’, ‘Hired help dependency’, ‘Egalitarian belief’ and ‘Balancing belief.’ This finding is in consonance with McNay’s view that the negotiations made by the women executives will vary depending on the degree of embeddedness of the field into their habitus.

6.3.4 Gender and Field

Gender is one of the basic structures of society and therefore is deeply entrenched. Gender also as a primary symbolic distinction is used to play out
other social tensions (McNay, 2000, p.43). Since the “psychosexual dimensions of gender identity are connected to a range of social and economic imperatives” [p.15], the impact of this is that the women have to bear heavy costs. Executive women however do not have the same situation as a vast majority of women in India have to contend with. Most women executives have had the privilege of higher education and attainment. This increases the indeterminacy of their habitus, allowing a greater degree of performative agency.

6.3.5 Doxa

Bourdieu uses the term “doxa” to denote what is taken for granted in any particular society. The doxa, in his view, is the experience by which “the natural and social world appears as self-evident”. It encompasses what falls within the limits of the thinkable and the sayable (“the universe of possible discourse”), that which “goes without saying because it comes without saying”. Doxa sets the limits on a social mobility within the social space through limits imposed on the characteristic consumption of each social individual. Doxa helps to petrify social limits, and defines the ‘sense of one’s place’, the true sense of belonging. Thus, individuals become voluntary subjects of those incorporated mental structures, which deprive them from more deliberate consumption and lifestyles. Doxadenotes a society’s taken-for-granted, non-questioned truths. They are resignified by the habitus of individuals (Bourdieu, 1977). Patriarchy, stereotyping, the role of a woman at home, the importance of marriage and motherhood are doxa which are absorbed by the habitus of individuals. (11-)

“Yes, I would always think of my family first. I would never take a decision which will go against my family. My husband won’t even ask me. For example, today if I know that my husband has a holiday, and he is at home, I would love to take a break and not come to work, but if he knows I have a holiday and he has work, he will never wait for me, he will go to office, it doesn’t matter to him. I will do my stuff and that is the way I have seen my mother doing things. If you are trained from your childhood that you are a woman and you have to
6.4 Habitus

Habitus is the part of an individual, through which the doxic beliefs of the field are adopted in the individual’s perception. Bourdieu defines it as “a set of assumptions, habits, taken-for-granted ideas and ways of being that are the vehicles through which agents engage with, understand and move on through the world” (Bourdieu, 1977). The habitus influences the actor’s perception of the external world and informs his/her action. So it is “a system of durable, transposable dispositions that mediate the actions of an individual and the external conditions of production” (McNay, 2000, p.36). This explains the variance in the perceptions of women executives, despite being in similar fields. Habitus is also evolving and permeable in nature. Bourdieu says that the habitus, which “at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences” is “modified by new experiences... [to] bring about a unique integration” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.60). The habitus also exhibit a resistance to change. Early experiences, however, have particular weight because the habitus “tends to ensure its own constancy and its defense against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 60). Therefore the upbringing creates a lens of perception, which is difficult to change. An interviewee who perceives that her upbringing made her self-identity different from others, says- “I was brought up mostly by my father than my mother, because I lost her at an early age. I was rarely told that I must behave in ladylike manner, except by my grandfather, who used to caution me when I would do something very boyish- like jumping over the fence. Overall, I was always treated as a person, and so I never became self-conscious that I am a woman. I think the early childhood upbringing does have an im-
Figure 6.2: The MindMap of field and doxa
6.4. HABITUS

Thus, habitus has a profound impact on our way of thinking. I think it is also important to transcend gender to be a person.”). Therefore dispositions are “the products of opportunities and constraints framing the individual’s earlier life experiences. They are durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions, inscribed in the objective conditions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.54).

Habitus becomes embodied in the individual’s perceptions and actions and therefore their identity. An interviewee says (71- “I am a working woman and a mother who lives because of her children.”) Because the habitus feels natural and self evident, and is accepted without question, it augments social structures and reproduces itself through everyday interactions. The narrative of the interviewees shows the reproduction of cultural beliefs in marriage and motherhood. (33- “Whatever sacrifices my mother-in-law is now making in life while she is looking after my baby, I foresee that situation when my son gets a baby, and I will have to do the same for him. They (the next generation) are going to be very hard pressed in life. They will be much more stressed as compared to us. I will obviously take a cue from my family. When there is a call from your family you have to be there.”)

While belief in family and motherhood are complementary for the continuance of society, there are some cultural beliefs which can also be deeply entrenched in the social mindset. An interviewee reacts as she recollects an encounter with a traditional belief in India that the birth of a boy is preferable to that of a girl. This shows that education and employment exposure may not alter some ingrained beliefs of culture. (99- “In fact, it was the same guy (a colleague) who said this. He had 2 daughters the 3rd he announced, if it is a boy he would take us to a 5 star hotel for dinner, whereas if it was a girl there was nothing! And I seriously objected to that. I said what nonsense is this, a baby is a baby, why not celebrate the birth of another girl? What is wrong with a girl?”)

When women passively absorb social assumptions, it furthers the masculine hegemony. “This process of corporeal inculcation is an instance of what Bour-
dieu calls symbolic violence or a form of domination which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity. (Bourdieu 1992, [p.167] quoted in McNay (2000) [p. 36]). However the habitus is not merely deterministic or repetitive. It has a generative facet to it.

6.4.1 Generative Principle

Though habitus is determined by the class, ethnicity and gender of the agent, it has some biographical and individual characteristics, which make it amenable to change. It is a generative principle resulting from living conditions, which are homogenized and from practices, which are homologized. The generative element of habitus was called 'protension' by Bourdieu. In his own words, "Habitus is not merely repetitive, but active and interpretive. This futuristic anticipatory dimension is called protension 'an objective potentiality. . . . endowed with doxic modality of the present'.” (Bourdieu, 1977) [p 109]. He also describes habitus as a structuring and structured principle Invalid source specified.. This concept of structuring, or doing emphasizes the role of the agent. It means that the agent can resist, he/she can question the structure and perhaps change it. The practical element (agency) of the habitus comes from the fact that the agent has to deal with practical situations. The objective adaptation to the situation calls for action. Though, the situation itself may be determined by structural constraints. This indeterminacy is the focal point of agency. (Bourdieu, 1977) says “The habitus gives practice a relative autonomy with respect to the external determinations of the immediate present but, at the same time, ensures that it is objectively adapted to its outcomes” (McNay, 2000) [p.55].

The pursuit of desired goals determines the degree of relative autonomy exercised. In such a situation the structural constraints will be overcome. Some women executives escape from the gendered habitus to a greater extent than others. An executive in an Investment banking company says- (16- “We have group sessions and training sessions where they evaluate your character. We found to our utter surprise that everyone from Investing Banking had a very
similar profile that we were all overtly ambitious, we wanted recognition from our clients, from the workplace and achievement was very high. The family was always consciously or subconsciously put as the secondary thing, where the family was supposed to adjust to our work life. There is an overwhelming love for the work that gives people a high. It is the nature of the people and only if you are that type you will survive. Because you love your work so much, the family has to work around you, so that is our basic nature. There are different kinds of people, there are some people who enjoy wanting to be in family so the point is that this is not a career for them, they should look at some career option.

The relationship between the field and habitus is also important. The reproduction of the field is ensured when the resources and values of the field are perceived to be important by the actors. In their endorsement and investment, the field continues. “Habitus endows the field with meaning, with ‘sense and value’ in which it is worth investing one’s energy.” (Bourdieu, 1977) [p.127].

6.4.2 Embodiment

Bourdieu was concerned with how gendered norms, and particularly gender inequality, becomes embodied. The concept of habitus is central here. Gendered habitus broadly refers to the “social construction of masculinity and femininity that shapes the body, defines how the body is perceived, forms the body’s habits and possibilities for expression, and thus determines the individuals identity—via the body—as masculine or feminine” (Krais, 2006, [p. 121], cited in Thorpe 2009). The incorporation of the gendered role is of significance because it prepares the individual for the gender role, biologically prescribed. While this does have sociological value, it works against a woman when she attempts to play masculine roles. “The inscription of the mothering role on the female body (maternal instinct) is fundamental in the inculcation of emotional and physical predispositions that maintain gender inequality in child rearing” (McNay, 2000) [p.42]. Bourdieu too believes that gender is an “absolutely fundamental dimension of the habitus that, like the sharps and clefs in music, modifies all the
social qualities that are connected to the fundamental social factors” (Bourdieu 1997 [p. 128], cited in Thorpe 2009). Therefore the prominence of a gender role, in collectivist culture is expected. But the modifiable element still exists. McNay says this is because the reproduction of the cultural habitus is possible only through in the actor’s performance, which in itself indicates the element of choice to do so or not to do so. “The cultural necessity for a performative reiteration of these symbolic norms highlights the extent to which they are not natural or inevitable and are therefore potentially open to change through processes of resignification.” (McNay, 2000) [p.34]. The gendered identity is changeable but it will encounter resistance. And it is precisely in this tension that the permormative agency of women executives expresses itself and modifies the role. “A fluid relation to gendered identity is implied where gender norms are entrenched but not unsurpassable boundaries. Embodiment expresses a moment of indeterminacy whereby the embodied subject is constituted through dominant norms but is not reducible to them”(McNay, 2000) [p.33]. Embodiment thus refers to the enactment of the habitus in the body or conversely, the role the body plays in shaping the mind. Embodied cognition is an important facet of gender and was called as hexis by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977).

6.4.3 Hexis

Bourdieu generally uses the term hexis when referring to the embodied nature of the habitus. Hexis signifies “deportment, the manner and style in which actors ‘carry themselves’: stance, gait, gesture, etc” (Jenkins, 2002, [p. 75], as cited in Thorpe 2009). The feminine caring, hosting, planning the food arrangements comes naturally to women and is often used by women executives. (75- “I think we end up using different styles depending on the situation and the circumstance, with subordinates it is always asserting yourself, with seniors sometimes, if it is not a formal meeting, where you are discussing plans and targets in which case you have to be very formal, but then sometimes at informal gatherings I think one slips into that feminine style. For example if we are going out and then we
are all sitting at a table then I would automatically maybe pour the tea which is actually a very feminine gesture which a guy would not do, or like recently when I was travelling with my boss and he is a diabetic, so the air hostess came and she gave us some chocolates and I saw him having one and instinctively my mind is ‘oh God! he should not be eating a chocolate’ so when he went to open the second one I just restrained him, which a man would not have done!” The women executives also speak of appearance and graceful manner of doing things. An interviewee says- (13- “Women who are good looking at the workplace and are also equipped with good skills, they tend to probably make an impact more than the male colleague, in the same situation. I will definitely say it is there, but to say that is the only thing, no!”). (23- “Sometimes it is just cajoling or being excessively persuasive rather than being firm, I have seen women use that very effectively with men.”) (70- “Yes, it happens, men will come to help when they see helplessness and they will say we will do it for you.”)

Thus gender is more insidious in the habitus and this is relatively unconscious in both men and women. “Hierarchical gender relations are embedded in bodily Hexis (the naturalized form of gender identity). The living through of bodily hexis leads to doxic forms of perception which permit the engenderisation of all perceived social differences” (McNay, 2000) [p. 36]

6.4.4 Gender and Habitus

Gender is better conceived, not as a field by itself, but as a constituent of every field. This is because it is complex, layered and shifts in importance in each field. Habitus too is context specific. It introduces a temporal dimension to an understanding of the body that is “missing in many accounts of gender” (McNay, 2000)[p. 102]. So gender is subtly entrenched in habitus over time, it becomes pre-reflexive in its embodiment. In the sense, it escapes conscious awareness. “Habitus is pre reflexive and so the acquisition of gender does not pass through consciousness; it is not memorized but enacted at a pre-reflexive level. At the same time bodily dispositions are not simply inscribed or me-
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

chanically learnt but lived in (McNay, 2000) [p.39]. Thus, internalization of structure varies from person to person and it reflects in their actions. However, internalization is not as simple or straightforward. It is influenced by many personal and social factors. Bourdieu’s concepts explain the complexity of ‘internalized structure’. The concepts of habitus, embodiment and hexis allow a deeper understanding, of the ways in which the doxa gets embodied in the actors; it explains why social reproduction is inevitable, especially for gender roles; and how performative agency happens within these constraints.

The following diagram summarizes these concepts. (See Figure 6.3)

6.4.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it can be seen as a circular relationship between cause and effect. “A reflexive relationship is bidirectional with both the cause and the effect affecting one another in a situation that does not render both functions causes and effects”. Secondly (in sociology) reflexivity comes to mean “an act of self-reference where examination or action reexamines itself. A simpler definition is “the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa.” (Archer, 2010)

As a circular relationship it refers to the relationship between habitus and agency. “Reflexivity is understood as a variable effect dependent on a particular configuration of power relations. Therefore changes in gender identity are uneven and discontinuous”. It is in the way that “cultural practices involve consciousness and commentary on themselves” (McNay, 2000) [p.66]. Since a gendered habitus is even more deeply entrenched in the social psyche, reflexivity would be lesser. Bourdieu tended to see it more in terms of power equations and said that reflexivity is quasi autonomous, since the habitus preempts any attempt of reflexive thinking. The minute we start questioning unconscious fundamental concepts, they are neither fundamental nor are they unconscious (Archer, 2010).
Figure 6.3: The MindMap of habitus
Bourdieu believed that a crisis situation, when the habitus breaks down, creates the ‘lucidity of the subjugated’, McNay moderated this generalization saying that the degree of reflexivity depends on the degree of embeddedness and power relation. “Reflexivity is understood as emerging from the distantiination provoked by conflict and tension of social forces across specific fields. It is not an evenly generalized capacity of subjects living in a detraditionalized era, but arises unevenly from their embeddedness within differing sets of power relations” (McNay, 2000) [p.68]. Power relations in terms of caste, religion and gender do affect a large majority of women in India and their reflexivity is varied and limited by the degree of embeddedness of tradition. But the subjects of this study, who have greater access to capitals of different types, who live in a detraditionalized, global setting have greater degree of reflexivity, precisely because of lesser embeddedness of tradition in their habitus.

So the second definition of reflexivity which presupposes greater level of individualization and individualization seems more applicable. (McNay 2000)concedes that “Reflexivity in the sense of self conscious shaping of identity would presumably involve a greater degree of cognitive expectation”. Archer (2010) gives importance to the context and concerns of the individual while defining reflexivity. She says “reflexive internal conversation mediated between the objectivestructural and cultural shaping of the contexts confronting agents. Archer (2010), who activated their properties, as inter alia constraints and enablements, by the particular projects they deliberatively sought to pursue in order to realize their personal concerns”. The concept given by Archer presupposes more than cognitive expectation, it presumes a sufficiently developed personal identity that can define the concerns to be realized and evaluate it in the light of its context, to know its chances of success. It presupposes an active, conscious definition of what is important for the agent.

The narrative of the interviewees does show a high degree of clarity and reflexivity. Executive women also report a high degree of confidence in their own self.

(100- “I sat down and mentally aligned myself to the situation and understood
6.5. AGENCY

that I need to be clear where I want to be, what is non-negotiable for me regarding my family, and what is it that I am going to compromise on. Then it is a question of juggling all the jobs, but I am very clear that I am doing it because I want this and I have no regrets.”

(45- “Do you have a pocket of time, which is your time and, which helps you think and reflect on questions like- what did I do well? What is bothering me today? What can I do about it? I think ever since that pocket happened in my calendar there has been a huge difference. I think for a woman, it is important to be connected with her own self.”)

The diagram given here summarizes the concepts discussed. (See Figure 6.4)

6.5 Agency

Society innovates, evolves and yet maintains some core concepts through time. These twin processes involve both, social reproduction and new behaviours. The dynamic nature of social order is what provides the basis for the concept of agency. In this context, McNay says “Agency is configured as a capacity to institute new or unanticipated modes of behaviour, the ontological grounds of which lie in the originary capacity for figuration but which are not reducible to it because of the dynamic nature of the social order” (McNay, 2000) [p.21]. Agency also is impacted by the past, which mediates and informs it. In this sense “Agency is a sediment effect of reiterated or ritualized practices”. (McNay, 2000) [p.34]. Agency is defined in the context of time and power. “Bourdieu develops atemporalised account of agency in the context of the special dimensions of power, that is, through the ideas of corporeal dispositions (habitus) and social structure (field).” (McNay, 2000) [p.23]. But, unlike Bourdieu who gave greater emphasis to the deterministic element in his theory, McNay emphasizes the performative agency of the agent. She says “The agent actively participates in the world of contested meanings rather than being the passive bearer of seemingly exogenous and inexorable norms” (McNay, 2000) [p. 29].

Indian women executives too express a sense of agency. The undertone of
Figure 6.4: The MindMap of reflexivity
the interviews is that Indian women executives feel that the onus to prove themselves and overcome constraints is theirs. This sense of agency is reflected in their narrative. An interviewee says- (49- “Today we women are not moving ahead, it is because of our own insecurities, our own fears, our own anxieties, we keep reaffirming the stereotypes that are projected on us. Even if an opportunity is given, there is a lot of disbelief in ourselves whether we will be able to do it or not.”)

(49- “I think the women psyche also needs to change. You cannot keep looking at the environment and blame the environment or the events or the people around you and say I cannot progress because of these hindering factors around me. There is something within you that should say that I have internal stability, with which I can break it (barriers) myself, I don’t need any help from anybody, and that internal belief in oneself is missing.”)

(22- “You have to be very strong and you have to stay with your belief and your vision and your goal and I mean it is not like even we have gone through it, we have got male managers. In fact the last male boss I worked with, when I was handling a hotel launch in Bangalore, he didn’t want to work with me. He knew that I would deliver, but he had this thought at the back of his mind ‘lets see how much she can do’. I have to ensure that I stayed with my beliefs and I didn’t get affected by his feedback all stuff. I know that his perception about me changed completely after that. But I had to stay with it.”)

This sense of agency is not merely in terms of an attitudinal change but reflects specific actions that they think helps in overcoming the constraints. Their coping actions reflect mental attitudes of clarity, prioritization, mental endurance and specific actions that help in handling physical constraints. Women executives feel they must exercise choices which will enable them to pursue their career goals. (93- “You must be very clear when you marry. Marry the man who will allow you to pursue what you want to pursue.”)(21- “Firstly prioritize your life, just be aware that you can’t do them all, secondly decide what you want to do and be very clear and, the third is self-discipline and an indifference to the external reactions.”) Deviating from the stereotypical image of the good
housewife who does all the household chores herself they encourage the use of external help for routine tasks. (81- “Whatever help you can get -like a cook or a maid, you should definitely get that because you need to make sure that you have time to spend with your kids. Prioritize and delegate other things.”) (63- “Hire somebody trustworthy. For that you need a network through which you can find reliable help.”) There seems to be a reflexive awareness of their shortcomings which they seek to overcome. For example they acknowledge the tendency of not communicating their needs and not negotiating with others. (53- “Sometimes, home issues do have an overriding priority over work issues or vice versa. If you can negotiate with your boss saying this time I need to go for a doctor’s visit for my family or I need to take care of the examinations or whatever- ask for it. Don’t feel guilty about negotiating.”), (82- “I guess you just need to draw lines, from the work point of view. You probably should know at what level you should stop and when you should delegate, so that you will have time for yourself. You have to do that letting go.”)

To handle work-life conflicts, the women executives speak of objective approaches. This is contrary to the stereotype of women being emotional and less logical in their approach. They seem to clearly recognize the stakes involved. (05- “I am saying if you want to compete in the professional arena, once you come into the office you have to forget your home. Once you go home you should try and forget the office. You should be able to shift. Many people don’t manage to do this and find themselves in a big struggle. One of two things happens then, either they remain where they are or they ultimately quit.”) The mental shift is difficult to achieve. Mood spillovers can ruin relationships at work or at home. To work effectively this ability to turn off the worries and anxieties is necessary, according to them. (91- “More than the physical stamina, it is the mental coping that is difficult. So a degree of prioritization is necessary. Mental balance is necessary in order to approach work of any type in a sane way. Carryovers create ripple effects and can ruin the day of others too. This attitude does not come easily and needs practice. You need to switch off before you start the next work”.)
Their narrative reveals that they actively seek mental and physical strategies to overcome their constraints. However, their narrative focuses more on individual effort and less on the demand for external, structural changes. Their agency also reflects their self-construal process, an analysis of which is necessary, before I consider the different way in which women executives in India negotiate their investments.

### 6.6 Self-Construal and Personal Identity

The self-construal process is the basis of self-definition. The self is defined independently or interdependently with others. There is also a third categorization of the self-construal called as relational self-construal, “it represents the ways that people may define themselves in terms of close, dyadic relationships”. Cultural backgrounds influence the extent of these definitions in terms of the strength and elaboration. Thus the self-construal can be more interdependent, relational and less independent or vice versa. “Westerners are thought to have an independent self-construal, which is characterized by separateness from others, by attention to one’s abilities, traits, preferences, and wishes, and by the primacy of one’s individual goals over those of in-groups. East Asians are thought to have an interdependent self-construal, which is characterized by a sense of fundamental connectedness with others, by attention to one’s role in in-groups, and by the primacy of group goals over one’s individual goals” (Markus, 1991). The cultural differences in self definition were confirmed in a study on self-construal based on national origin and gender. It was found that Americans scored higher on independent scales than Indians, and women scored higher than men on relational self-construal measures. Also Indian rural population showed greater independence and Indian urban population showed greater collective self-construal (Kanithi, 2007).

Collectivist cultures create cultural meta narratives which emphasize the importance and the primacy of the group over the individual. This creates a high need of social approval and sanction and changes the way women execu-
tives will exhibit their agency. Women executives invest in certain narratives\(^2\), which enhance the probability of that particular (related) meta narrative being incorporated in the self-construal process, with the changes that the individual incorporates. McNay says “Although the lives of individuals are shaped within the parameters suggested by culturally sanctioned meta-narratives, individual identity does not simply bear the imprint of these forces. The coherence and durability of patterns of gendered behaviour are not just imposed from without but also emerge from investments made by the individuals in certain narratives”[p. 93]. Women executives in India make a great amount of investment in the role of a mother. The gendered meta narrative of marriage and motherhood, familial love and gender role of nurturance is of importance to them. In the survey, the belief worded “For an Indian woman family is first and career is the second priority” received a high average of (3.91), and in the interviews, women executives reiterate this when they say (71- “I am a working woman, and a mother who lives for her children.”, “I have seen that we do lose balance of the family when we come to work, you can replace another working woman but you can’t replace a mother, a mother’s role is something, which cannot be dispensed off”).

The gendered identity in collectivist cultures will be deeply ingrained. The Kano Model used to find underlying motivations showed that women executives opinion that their role is devalued in society and that gender bias does exist in terms of the respect given to women, are driven covertly by their belief in the roles given by Indian epics and the fear that they appear selfish in the eyes of others. The dependence on social approval exists in an unsaid manner. While radical deviance from collective, meta narrative is not done, but with marginal changes, a nuanced agency emerges. “The active role played by the subject in the construction of a coherent identity allows a more nuanced concept of agency

\(^2\)A narrative about human persons tells of both the connections that unify multiple actions over a span of time performed, in most cases, by a multiplicity of persons and the connections that link multiple viewpoints on and assessments of those actions. “The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (Dauenhauer, 1992)
to emerge. A dynamic account of the process of self-formation also mediates the antinomy of stasis and change.” (McNay, 2000) [p.73]. The changes in society come due to these regulated liberties that individuals make to cope with their social situations. Women executives in India want family life, for that role definition is important and they also want a career to fulfill their personal sense of self-worth. In the process of doing this they challenge conventional views of motherhood.

A respondent justifies (20- “I don’t agree with the concept that you don’t have time for your children if you are a working mother because I have seen women who are not working, but they have no time for their children because they are either going to the beauty parlors or they are going for their kitty parties or for their card parties, so their children also are latch key kids. So if you want to look after your children you can be a working mother or a nonworking mother that doesn’t make such a huge difference”).

The active involvement in the situations hinges on a concept of self, which evolves and directs the actions of the individual. This concept of self-identity also determines the investments which they (women executives) make. “The issue of personal or self-identity is the process through which individuals are routinely and actively involved in the meaningful interpretation of the self in social interactions (McNay, 2000) [p.75]. Though in an apparent sense the traditional role is still maintained, there are subtle changes in the women, as they change the way in which they define relationships. Lois McNay says “Narrative coherence does not emerge from an unchanging core within the self, but rather emerges from the attempt on the part of individuals and societies, to make sense of the temporality of existence” (p.115-116).

Women executives have a defined sense of self. When asked to rate themselves in terms of their traits and beliefs, they say that their job gives them a high sense of self-worth. They also think that being a woman makes them a better executive. They also say that their motivation to work is to supplement family income, (however they rate self-worth higher than income). Working women rate self-images of ‘traditional wife’ and ‘appearance of success’ lower
than the other beliefs. The image of mother first and boss next’ also received a high score. A respondent says (48- “Don’t think you are in a career because of selfish interest. A woman in a career helps the entire family and generation, not just her self.”)

They feel it is important to feel self worth and take pride in ones own achievements. (54- “Take pride in saying that I am a successful woman.”) However this change is not limited to women alone. Women executives also accept that there are changes in the attitudes of men too. (02- “I feel the change, which is happening today because of modernization in the attitudes of men also, many of whom are helping, which was not there earlier, it was entirely a woman’s job before, which is not there now. This is a good sign and that is how maybe a lot of women are now working and continuing even after having babies.”)

The self-construal process involves integration of a gendered habitus with a sense of agency in order to negotiate with investments made. This was called ‘regulated liberties’ by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977).

6.7 Negotiations and Investments

The gendered habitus is embodied in a woman’s psyche and is not easily dislodged. Yet in each generation of women the habitus does not absorb all the aspects of the doxa. This gives the leeway to define their gender roles in a different manner than the past. “Habitus expresses the idea that bodily identity is not natural but involves the inscription of dominant social norms or the ‘cultural arbitrary’ upon the body. Habitus is defined not as a determining principle but as a generative structure which expresses itself also on the moment of praxis. The temporalisation of the idea of habitus introduces a praxeological element into the idea of embodiment such that the dialectic of freedom and constraint in subjectification permits the emergence of a concept of agency understood through the idea of ‘regulated liberties’. (McNay, 2000) [p 26].

The generative nature of the habitus, adapts to new circumstance by modifying itself in praxis. Thus regulated liberties allow the agent to adhere to
reinterpret old values in new circumstances. Bourdieu refers to regulated liberties as a “complex process of investment and negotiation.” Women executives negotiate their roles by changing a few elements. They extensively use hired help to negotiate their roles, they ask their mother or in-laws to live with them so that they can ensure that there is no lapse in the upbringing of the child in inculcating family values. (58- “Honestly I am a firm believer of well not joint families but at least a form of it-like for example my mom lives with me and I think that makes a huge difference. If I was in a nuclear family with a maid, she will physically take care of my child but the emotional well being, the sense of belonging...is what the family alone can provide. I know that my friends’ kids who don’t have their parents living with them can do, my daughter can never think of doing those things because my mother is there, simple stuff like what television is she watching, she knows the grandmother is there, and mom said not to watch this., I keep telling these young girls in my office –‘be nice to your in-laws they are the only ones who will take emotional care of your child if you want to work. The amount you will get in return in terms of the cheer, emotional well being of your children... I don’t think it can be compared to anything else’. And it doesn’t matter whether it is parent or in-laws, it is the same thing.”)

The tendency to have your extended family live with you is increasing as mothers and mother-in-law step in to take care of children as daughters and daughters in law, pursue careers. This move allows women to retain their jobs and yet ensure care for their children. Their narrative reveals that while traditional role definitions are important to them, they are not exclusively followed. They are accommodated with their careers. A respondent says (44- “Your child is born to you, and being a good parent is a duty you cannot delegate. Similarly, if there are elders at home, for instance, I have a mother-in-law and I spend time with her, for at least 3-4 hours a day. I am in-charge and I need to take care of her, so that is the priority. The important thing is the time that you spend either at office or at home has to be dedicated.”) Women executives speak of quality versus quantity of time spent with the family. A respondent justifies
saying (51- “Just to tell you one aspect of how I have looked at it - in the earlier days people used to have 6 or 7 kids, so just calculate the amount of personal attention that each kid would get. What is the big deal of being at home; it is the same kind of personal attention that we give today.”)

However there are some traditional beliefs which are rejected. The survey reveals that some traditional beliefs are totally dismissed by women executives and this shows that there is a definite change in the perception of social beliefs. The traditional beliefs, which are rejected, include the belief that a woman’s place is at home while a man’s duty is to earn. A wife must have lower status than her husband and must earn lesser than him. Also the belief that increase in the number of women at work place will disrupt families in the long run. Bourdieu claims that practices often hailed as resistant may have an impact only on the relatively superficial ‘effective’ relations of a field rather than deep structural relations (Bourdieu, 1977) [p. 113]. Yet the traditional format of role definition endures and women executives believe that their responsibility in child rearing and family is higher than that of men. It also should be remembered that the “the fact that individuals do not straight forwardly reproduce their social system is not a guarantee of the inherently resistant nature of their actions” (McNay, 2000) [p. 62]. Radical divergence too destabilizes, creating a different kind of angst as the gendered habitus is deeply internalized. This is evident in their narrative. A respondent talks about how egalitarian attitudes of equality is important but, end of the day the role in the family is important. (56- “I think that while we are studying and are young... we always say men are equivalent to women, we sit for competitive exams and we have done quite as well so why should we not be considered equals? The thought process is always there at the back of one’s mind, especially in the earlier stages, but I would still stay back, take time for family. End of the day, bonding happens only with the person who is taking care of the family... ”)

While the investment in family and jobs make the lives of women executives complex, she finds ways of negotiating with family to overcome the odds. Clarity of purpose for which their actions are undertaken precedes their praxis. An
interviewee explains (44- “Understand your family and what they expect from you, because ultimately you are making money or whatever only to be happy and share your joy with your family, with your friends, and with your community. If you are clear in your mind as to what that expectation is and you can meet it in a fair way. . . . of course there are unfair expectations from families too, which on the personal front one has to decide what to do, but largely the expectations are fair.”) They also believe that right expectations from different groups have to be set. Communicating with one’s family helps to set expectations. (75- “I told my mother-in-law very clearly ‘Mother, I cannot do this! I can do one thing perfectly and right now I am doing my career perfectly, so yes my house might be little untidy, I cannot be perfect like how you are in your house, I am like this and you have to accept me with all my faults.’ She also thought about it, and we now have an agreement on that.”) Women executives feel their expectations from others too have to be given up to an extent if they choose to fulfill themselves by focusing on their own needs. (93- “If your own need for attention is high, and you are married . . . you go home expecting that your husband will understand a bad day at work, and you expect him to give you a hug. . . . the typical Indian husband is the last man to give you that. Let us accept it. This is because he is not even aware that you need that hug!”)

As women step out of homes, there is certainly change in their attitudes, expectations and self-awareness but the habitus still forms the broad framework within which they explore new and comfortable ways of praxis. Not all parts of their self are held to scrutiny in the self-construal process. “Self-monitoring overlooks certain more enduring, reactive aspects of identity or the habitus continues to work long after the objective conditions of its emergence have been dislodged” (McNay, 2000) [p.42]. An interviewee speaks of the negotiation she made, when she says (52- “Your compromise should favor your family rather than your work. Let the people around you, let your children get the feeling that you are available and that for you the family is the most important thing. Make one or two very obvious sacrifices, which the entire family and relatives know about. I did that, I resigned my job in stockholding and came here. That was
a big thing because I left a very senior position. So people know that you have
done it for them and something in them is satisfied. It is very, Networking is
very, very important to take your family with you in the initial stages and make
them comfortable. Take your time because you are not in a hurry... you have
got 26 years of career and a lot can be done in that."

When asked about negotiations at work place, most women executives do
not report high perception of bias at work place or quote organizational factors
as deterents. One possible reason for this could be that given the gendered
habitus of collectivist culture, the family is perceived as an area of conflict more
than the work place. Women executive's self-construal process currently involves
social approval from family more than approval from work place. Yet another
reason could be that most of the interviewees were from top management and
had proved themselves in their career. And since their role definition is more
with the role of a mother, a career will always be seen as a more selfish pursuit,
even by themselves. This is confirmed by the survey results in which women
executives rated devaluation in terms of their role at home high and the Kano
model of analysis reveals their sensitivity to being judged as selfish people who
pursue a career and their belief about the relevance of epic\textsuperscript{3} (cultural) defined
roles as covert drivers to this feeling of being devalued for their role in society.
A similar high score was given to the question regarding their experience of
gender bias in society in terms of respect given to women. Women executives
feel devalued in terms of the recognition given to their roles in society but do
not feel that their role as a mother or housewife is by itself devaluing. They in
fact speak of a high sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

So though modernization, increased levels of employment and high education
and exposure of women executives has changed their attitudes, their praxis is
equally influenced by the gendered habitus, the cultural heritage, and the social
expectations that form the field of social activity. McNay says “Through a

\textsuperscript{3}Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and the many Puranas, prescribe the role
of the ideal woman in India. Since this cultural heritage is being eroded with western mod-
ernization, a question regarding its (epic defined role) impact on role definition of women
executives was also measured in the questionnaire.
temporalisation of the process of subjectification, the generative model suggests that the self has unity but it is the dynamic unity of progress in time. The identity of the self is maintained only through a ceaseless incorporation of the non-identical understood as temporal flux. This explains the discontinuous nature of change in gender relations in terms of the investments individuals may have in certain self-conceptions that render them resistant to transformation" (p 18-19). Thus the impact of the non-identical (the roles demanded by the modern arrangements in society) is integrated with the habitus.

However gendered habitus is more tenacious as it is deep seated and embodied. Therefore marriage and motherhood form the mainstay of identity. This incorporation is also determined by individual characteristics and situational factors. The experience of women will vary based on their economic strata, family, caste, location etc. And so the transformation, the degree of regulated liberties taken will vary. The “complex logic of gender identity mirrors the expansion and uncertainty of women’s social experience. Thus transformation within gender identity is an uneven and non-synchronous phenomenon” (McNay, 2000) [p. 27].

To conclude in the words of McNay, “as a relational concept, the field yields an understanding of society as a differentiated and open structure, the negotiation of which yields an active and determinate idea of agency, beyond that of generalized notions of reflexivity or the performative” (p.71). The analysis of the field, habitus and gendered habitus provides an insight into the active and differentiated praxis of women executives in terms of work life balance and gender bias faced by them in Indian society.

6.8 A Sum Up

The agency of women executives within given structures is examined in this section using, Bourdieu’s social theory and McNay’s theory of performative agency. The purpose of this section is to understand how agency operates among women executives in India, in terms of work life balance and gender
bias. Also, the purpose is to gauge the probable societal/structural impact, of such agency.

Tertiary education and employment for women has increased and these structural changes are expected to change roles and autonomy of women. Bourdieu uses the concept of the field which refers to the micro and macro factors that influence women executives. It includes globalization, employment, patriarchal culture, home and organizational settings. Fields can be autonomous or interrelated. In complex societies the fields are highly differentiated and this can cause conflicts. Indian women executives, being part of many (differentiated) fields have to negotiate multiple roles. These roles are sometimes at cross purposes. As an executive, the Indian woman has to assert herself but as a wife she needs to defer to her family, spouse. The conflict that this creates brings to question, what was hithertounquestioned. This is called the ‘lucidity of the excluded’.

Fields are also hierarchal and gender roles, which are much more embedded, are given greater importance than other situational roles. In the collectivist cultures, the gender role of wife and mother will tend to dominate the career role. Challenging the boundaries of an established role has definite social costs. Women executives might find it tough to find suitable partners to marry as career women are seen as too independent and aggressive, consequently unsuitable for domestic harmony. Despite costs, the need to seek a career stems from the need to acquire social capital that accrues to members of a society by making investments in certain fields. Jobs provide a sense of self-worth and monetary rewards which ensures a better lifestyle. Every field has underlying principles or nomos which members have to subscribe to in order to avail of the capitals it provides. And so, women executives passively accept the loss of promotions and career advancements, when they take time off for maternity or other familial duties. They do not perceive this as bias.

One more reason for this perception is that the familial role is doxic and unquestioned. Women executives perceive their role as a mother as a primary role and so a career becomes secondary to it. Career as a luxurious role of self-indulgence, in collectivist culture, preempts the perception of bias in orga-
According to Bourdieu, the primacy of family as a field is because of the love and solidarity that it provides. This ensures that other social roles are not of equal importance. The family primacy is also a gendered doxa which is pre reflexively absorbed in the individual habitus, and fundamentally remains unquestioned. The quantitative findings too highlight the relative importance given to gender roles and family vis-a-vis career. Marriage and motherhood is not sacrificed for a career. The demographic profile reveals that 75.56% of 90 women who answered the questionnaire and 82.86% of the interviewed women were married. Only 16% of the survey sample and 14% of the interview were single and this number included those women who were young and had intentions of marrying. Majority of women executives in the survey sample have children (66.67%) and (33.33%) have no children. This includes women who are single too. Among the executive women in the interview sample, (80.95%) have children and only 14.29% do not have children. The sample without children includes younger executives who may eventually marry and have children. Thus detraditionalizing may raise certain aspects of gender relations into question, but it does not radically change it. Careers are abandoned, positions are down traded, and career lines are shifted to accommodate family needs. Thus detraditionalizing cannot radically reshape deep investments.

Another field to examine the agency–structure interaction of women executives is in the organization. The patriarchal culture of Indian society percolates organizations too creating subtle barriers of masculine culture, tokenism, double bind etc. Organizational ideology is used to integrate organizations, can further or diminish these beliefs. Masculine cultures promoting competition, aggression and tangible measures of success can subtly marginalize women. Women will tend to react to this, either by blindly absorbing the culture and exhibiting masculine behaviours or by establishing the submerged identity by using feminine behaviour which fits the existing stereotype to get what they want in organizations. Among the biases reported by women executives, double bind
and Cinderella complex are rated higher, confirming the modification of praxis to cope with the habitus at work.

The entry into work place has not freed women executives from home responsibilities, but has increased the load and the role conflict. The insecurity and guilt generated from the conflict of self (living one’s life) and family (living for others) forces women executives to examine their motives and measure their action. Thus the conflict between fields creates an emancipatory situation in which women take regulated liberties, which alter the structures in incremental stages. However, it must be reiterated that since gendered habitus are deeply embedded in the psyche and are embodied, women will tend to resignify the gender roles in their lives and so gender role changes in society will essentially be asynchronous and uneven. The doxic quality will petrificate limits and prevent women from drastically challenging the role of wife and mother. This is not to say that there will be no agency in the women executives, it only means that the basic framework/field (family structure) will not completely crumble as more women go to work.

According to McNay, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has two elements, the doxic part which is embodied pre reflexively and the generative element which promotes variance from it. Embodied gender reflects in hexis, further engenderizing the structure. The doxic element in the habitus creates dispositions which will influence their agency. While the ‘protension’ of the habitus, brings flexibility when the women executive tries to objectively adapt to her situation through action. Habitus invests meaning into structures and the investments made by women executives vary. This constant exchange between habitus and agency is called reflexivity. It also refers to the conscious commentary on oneself. It arises out of distantation provoked by conflict and tension of roles. Reflexivity has a cognitive expectation. It presupposes a developed personal identity. The narrative of women executives reveals that they have a high degree of clarity, self-confidence and can see their cultural constraints objectively.

Reflexivity leads to agency. McNay says the agent participates actively in the world of contested meanings. The unanticipated mode of behaviour is agency.
Agency is sparked by the investments made by the women executives in the field (organization). Women executives feel the need to realize their self-worth and they take specific actions to achieve this. They use hired help, draw on family help and learn to prioritize, say ‘no’ when they cannot manage. The initiative they exhibit to manage both home and work demands evidences their agency. However, their coping strategies are underlined by the theme of self-empowerment. Their expectation from organizations is lower. This could be because the home centric identity makes the career identity a personal choice and so their expectation from others is low.

The self-construal in collectivist cultures is based on a fundamental connect with others and role in group (family), the group primacy is a part of the doxa. Therefore the dissonance reported by women executives is more on the home front. The meta narrative of the doxa is internalized through the habitus leading to a nuanced agency. Women executives continue to go in for marriage, but may choose partners who will support their careers, they continue with modified versions of the ancient joint-family by locating their extended family close to them to use their support in up-bringing of children. They would also resort to hired help for routine household work and use vacations to spend quality time with family. While some traditional ideas are rejected, the basic values revolving around family roles are not changed. They look for a little more support from their spouses but fundamentally accept a more prominent role in child rearing. In conclusion it can be said that women executive’s agency expresses itself as a proof of self-worth rather than a competition with men. Familial role is the dominant in collectivist cultures and so the dissonance if any is experienced more on the home front than in work organizations. The apprehension that increase in the number of working women will affect families adversely is unfounded as the career remains a supplementary consideration (as compared to family), even among women who have successful and demanding careers.