Study after study finds that the number of female graduates in Nigerian universities have dramatically increased, yet women academics remain severely under-represented, particularly at higher levels. Where they exist in large numbers, they tend to be saturated at lower levels of the academic career hierarchy. This doctoral study explores Nigerian women’s experiences of becoming and being academic. The study draws on the lesson of the socialist and intersectional feminist theory to explore and articulate the complexities associated with building and advancing women’s academic careers in Nigerian higher education. Studies on gender, work and education in Nigeria (Dennis, 1995; Mama, 2003; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003; Egbo, 2005;) as well as key studies on academic women in Africa (Ojejide, 2003; Morley, 2004) and the West (Baker, 2012; Bagihole, 2013; Morley, 2014;) guided the interviews with 24 women and 8 men academics at four Nigerian Universities.

Research findings reveal that women’s academic identities are not often constructed in line with the model of a typical male career trajectory which assumes a linear path from graduate school to professorship. Many of the women in this study report meandering academic career paths, giving priority to their traditional roles as wives, mothers and primary care givers. Given that the male career mystique is still the taken for granted model which is used to gauge the performance of both male and female academics, women’s progression in academia is consequently stalled. This study contributes to the scarce literature on academic career development in Nigeria and Africa. Also by adopting a critical feminist methodology, it attempts to raise the consciousness of women academics to taken for granted social arrangements which reinforces gender inequality in academia.