

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

My PhD evolved from a question that had plagued me for some time. At that point in my life, I was in a managerial position, and I began to wonder whether other South African Indian women were facing challenges and barriers similar to the ones I had experienced on my journey toward a top management position. It was this topic that became the initial focus of my thesis. However, when I had interviewed the Indian women managers who participated in the pilot study and had analysed their interviews, I realised that the picture that emerged was much more complex than a mere chronicle of the challenges they encountered on their journeys. After hearing their life stories, I found myself asking a series of additional questions that were very different to those that were the focus of my initial inquiry. How do Indian women managers reconcile and negotiate their multifaceted personal and social identities in the workplace on their journey toward top management positions? How do they reconcile the demands for a professional identity as women in positions of power with those emanating from Indian culture's views on what it means to be a woman? What is the identity struggle associated with these two opposing elements in the lives of Indian women managers and how do they manage their hybrid identities? These became the additional questions that drove my interrogation and the writing of the thesis.

The study of identity has been researched widely since Erikson (1950) documented the subject in his book *Childhood and Society* (also cited by Schwartz & Pantin, 2006). Erikson's pioneering work was silent on gender and racio-ethnic identities. Since that time, the question of identity has become a significant topic in psychology and organisational behaviour, as well as organisation studies. Subsequently, conceptual formulation has also become increasingly complex. For example, Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas

(2008) argue that identity theorists need to recognise that individuals in organisations do not have only detached social identities, but personal identities as well. They also allude to the need to pay attention to racio-ethnic identity. The concept of identity becomes complicated when multiple identities such as gender, race, class and ethnicity intersect to form interdependent, dynamic and interlocking systems, resulting in a classification called intersectionality (Byrd, 2008). Thus, any study of Indian women managers in South Africa has to recognise that these women not only have professional identities within the organisational setting, but simultaneously have to negotiate the complex intersectionalities created by their gender identities and their racio-ethnic identities.

Alvesson et al. (2008) argue that individuals are also always in a state of tension within organisations as they attempt to reconcile their personal identities with those of the organisation. There is a risk however, that complete compliance with organisational social identity at the expense of personal identity can lead to a lack of creativity and innovation (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Research has also demonstrated that members of racio-ethnic minorities and women in particular, also experience an additional struggle to reconcile their cultural identities with the pressure they face to fit into a dominant organisational culture (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Slay & Smith, 2011). This sometimes leads them to employ strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1987), which results in the formation of hybrid identities, where racio-ethnic minorities use essentialized notions of the self and display their cultural identities, while at the same time adopting elements of prescribed professional identities (relating to what it means to be an effective leader in the workplace).

It is this kind of identity work, comprised of negotiating multiple identities embedded within historical and socio-cultural external pressures, as well as white male organisational cultures, that is at the centre of this study of Indian women managers in corporate South Africa. In this study, it is contended that race, ethnicity, class and gender cannot be analysed separately, but have to be studied in the context of their intersecting effects relating to power and

subjugation in the home and in the workplace (Yuval-Davis, 2006), as well as of how women negotiate their multiple identities.

It is against this background that the problem statement addressed in the current study is formulated.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Scholarship on women in management has proliferated globally (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Calás & Smircich, 2006; Davidson & Burke, 2004; Mathur-Helm, 2005; Wirth, 2001). However, the literature on women in management in South Africa is not yet comprehensive, and thus far, there has been little research on the status, corporate experiences or identity work of Indian women in management.

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue most of the research conducted on identity work takes a static approach toward the organisation and the individual manager. Their study on identity work by managers is one of the few that focuses on the dynamic aspects of identity work, which include various elements that have an impact on a manager's identity. The present study goes beyond Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) approach by adopting a holistic framework that traces the participating women's identity work throughout their lives, from early childhood to their experiences as managers. This approach acknowledges that the answers to the questions "Who am I?" and "How should I act?" did not originate when the women entered the corporate world in South Africa, but from their early lives as young children and women. Furthermore, such an approach allows for an interrogation of the choices these women made in deciding what elements of a professional identity to accept and which ones to resist. It is for this reason that my study uses a historical, cultural and organisational lens to understand the identity work of the women who fall into the first cohort of Indian women managers to enter the corporate world in South Africa during the late apartheid period.

Most prior studies in organisations relating to minorities do not focus on hybrid identity work. For example, in psychology, Helms (1993) delineates processes of racial identity for racial minorities in such a way that his work suggests that all racial minorities have a singular identity. However, the notion of hybridity and the position that people have multiple identities raises questions as to how these different identities are negotiated and how people deal with them. Cieslik and Verkuyten (2006) posit that people tend to retain their cultural values and adopt new ones in their interactions with others. Multiple identities can be reconciled, but they can also cause conflict and tension which need to be reconciled and accommodated. Since there is a dearth of studies on identity negotiation relating to hybrid identity formation in minority women managers, this gap is filled by the current study. I also focus on the dynamic aspects of the identity work of minority women managers by underscoring the importance of their racio-ethnic, gender and professional identities in constituting their hybrid identities.

If research focuses only on managers' identity negotiations in organisations and does not take into account social influences and the external lives people lead outside the workplace, it results in a narrow view of the identity work engaged in by leaders (Watson, 2009). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) provide a formal definition of the term "identity work", but Watson (2008) cautions that the term has been used in an informal manner in organisational and management studies, and points out that most of the studies on identity work among managers focuses on the internal elements of identity. In his opinion, when an individual engages in identity work, external and internal work is conducted simultaneously. The current study fills the gap in the literature by focusing on both internal and external elements of identity work.

1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of the current study is threefold. First, it seeks to delineate the barriers and challenges that Indian women managers, face in their career advancement. Second, the study examines the forces that the participating Indian women managers' identified in their early lives and adulthood. Lastly, it

focuses on understanding how Indian women managers may negotiate and reconcile their gender, racio-ethnic and professional identities in the South African workplace.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: What barriers and challenges do Indian women managers encounter in the workplace?

Research Question 2: How did the Indian women managers who participated in the study negotiate the intersection between their racio-ethnic and gender identities during the early years of their lives?

Research Question 3: How did these women negotiate the intersections between their racio-ethnic and gender identities in the Indian family and community?

Research Question 4: How did these women negotiate the intersections of their racio-ethnic, gender and professional identities in the workplace?

In the next section I provide some background to the research, including its historical context and the status of Indian women in management in South Africa. I also briefly discuss the literature on intersectionality, identity work and hybrid identities to clarify the significance of the study.

1.5 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Historically, across most of the world, workplaces have been gendered, particularly in the sense that in higher managerial positions the concentration of white males was higher, while females tended to be restricted to the lower echelons in organisations. In recent years, women have begun making inroads into the managerial level, but, although class boundaries are

becoming more blurred, attitudes toward women remain largely gendered and stereotyped (Acker, 2006).

The phenomenon of women's entry into management positions has also been noted in post-apartheid South Africa. Historically disadvantaged groups in South Africa, including Indian women, are increasingly aspiring to higher managerial positions, which had previously been dominated by white males. In view of increasing diversity in the managerial ranks in post-apartheid South Africa, organisations now have to operate with a labour force with diverse values, needs and expectations. In the case of Indian women, for example, such employees enter the workforce with specific cultural and religious values and norms, but then have to function in workplaces with entrenched organisational cultures largely shaped by the white men who have hitherto dominated the South African management sphere.

Many Indian women managers who enter the South African corporate arena with multifaceted identities shaped by issues such as racio-ethnicity and gender must face pressure to adopt professional identities that are congruent with the expectations of a white male-dominated organisational culture that may be very different from these women's own racio-ethnic and gender identities. Research indicates that such an encounter requires a substantial amount of identity work to reconcile effectively the tensions arising from differences between an individual's gender and racio-ethnic identities on the one hand, and the dominant culture, for example, in an organisation, on the other (North-Samardzic & Taksa, 2011). Given that organisational cultures tend to be dominated by white males, all women in managerial positions engage in identity work as they strive to reconcile their gender identities with the demands of gendered formulations of the ideal manager (Schein, 2001). However, for women who belong to an ethnic minority, identity work is especially complex because of the intersection of gender and racio-ethnicity.

Minority groups such as Indian females face the challenge of reconciling multifaceted identities with the expectations of the organisational cultures that they find themselves in. Differences in historical, political and social contexts

across countries influence the nature of the identity work that women engage in as they enter male-dominated organisations. Below, I outline prior studies on identity work, the historical context of Indian women's lives, reforms in legislation and current statistics, indicating the low representation of Indian women at the management level in South African organisations as important elements in understanding the position and status these women currently occupy in corporate South Africa.

1.5.1 Prior research on Indian women in organisations

Most organisational studies relating to identity have focused on gender identity, ignoring the intersection between the many identities that women possess (Settles, 2006). This has often led to overly simplistic analyses of women managers' lives, ignoring the complex web of intersecting identities that form part of their self-concepts (Acker, 2006; Kenny & Briner, 2007). In the last decade, some attention has finally been paid to women's multiple identities in the workplace and to how these identities intersect to form unique experiences for women who are different from each other (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Much of this research has been done on women managers and professionals in the United States (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Byrd, 2008; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Holvino, 2010; Settles, 2006). Some studies have also been conducted in the United Kingdom (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Atewologun & Singh, 2010; Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006; Healy, Bradley, & Forson, 2011; Leathwood, 2005; Priola, 2004).

Most of the work in respect of Indian women as a minority group in organisations and focusing on the intersectionality of identities has been conducted on Asian Indian immigrant minority women in the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Mehrotra & Calasanti, 2010; Syed & Murray, 2009). For example, Mahalingham, Balan, and Haritatos (2008) have studied the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in shaping the identities of Indian immigrant women in the United States of America. Pio (2005) focused on Indian immigrant women in New Zealand negotiating their identities in their workplaces. Mahalingham and Leu (2005) have examined gender and the

intersection of race, class and ethnicity and hybrid identities of immigrant Asian Indian and Filipino women. Healy et al. (2011) have looked at the intersectional inequalities experienced by Bangaldeshi, Caribbean and Pakistani women working in the public sector in the United Kingdom. Most of this prior research was thus interested mainly in the ethnic, cultural and gender identities of Asian Indian women immigrants and in how they adapted to their host countries as adults (Dion & Dion, 2004; Kallivayalil, 2004). By contrast, my study focuses on the intersectionality between the gender and racio-ethnic identities of women managers in their youth and in their professional lives.

Most studies in organisations conducted on managers' identity explore their identity negotiation relating to daily struggles in the workplace – most of which are associated with relational and situational challenges (Andersson, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2001). Very little research has focused on the identity work that minority women engage in as they strive to reach top management positions in organisations. Also, research on identity negotiation and hybrid identity work by minorities in organisations is also sparse. Studies by Luk-Fong (2010), Malhi, Boon, and Rogers (2009), McKinley (2008), and Van Laer and Janssens (2008) are a few of the exceptions. Most of the research related to this area has focused on minority youth (see, for example, the studies by Butcher, 2004; Mir, 2009; Mishra & Shirazi, 2010; Noble, Poynting, & Tabar, 1999). In general, there is a dearth of such studies relating to minority women managers on the African continent (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009).

1.5.2 Historical context

Most of the research on women in management in South Africa focuses on the barriers that white and black female managers experience in reaching top managerial positions, with Indian females included as a sub-category of black women (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Leonard & Grobler, 2006; Mathur-Helm, 2005). Very little research has hitherto been conducted specifically on Indian women managers in South Africa.

Apartheid was the dominant culture in South Africa until the first fully democratic elections in 1994. Apartheid was a system founded on racial classification, where people were separated by being divided into four different races, whites, black Africans, Asians and coloureds, where “whites” included Afrikaans- and English-speaking whites. This separation dominated all aspects of people’s lives, from education to employment (Moosa, 1996) and the separation was enacted by political, economic and social boundaries enforced through legislation (Ramsay, 2007).

During the period of colonialism which preceded the apartheid era, and the apartheid era itself (from 1948), patriarchy and sexism reigned in the South African macro-environment and within homes and communities. Women of all races were relegated to secondary status, compared to men, and were regarded as legal minors. In the private domain, women had no power, as they were not allowed to make decisions and lead (National Gender Policy Framework, 2008). Such patriarchal relationships spilled over to the workplace, where women of all races faced inequity, but black women were even more discriminated against than white women. In the workplace, white males dominated, and organisational cultures were based on traditional, hierarchical structures that operated on bureaucratic principles, and a command and control style of management (Mathur-Helm, 2004). In addition, until the early 1980s, legislation in apartheid South Africa restricted women from participating on an equal footing in the workplace (Mathur-Helm, 2004). Historically, apartheid, combined with patriarchal customs and norms, resulted in the fact that few Indian women entered the workforce, which in turn meant that the number of economically active members in the Indian community was much lower than that in the white and coloured communities (Hiralal, 2010). The few Indian women who did manage to enter the labour market were concentrated at lower levels in organisations, often conducting menial tasks (Naidoo & Kongolo, 2004).

1.5.3 Reforms in legislation

Since 1994, when the new democratic government was elected, leading to the demise of apartheid, a major transformation began in the social, political and economic environment.

Section 1 (b) of the Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, which is founded on the values of non-racism and non-sexism, paves the way for the formation of non-discriminatory legislation relating to women and other marginalised groups (South Africa, 1996b). The Bill of Rights (Chapter 2) section 9 of the Constitution deals with the principles of equality, and outlines the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination against women (South Africa, 1996b). The State has given high priority to and is committed to addressing the question of women's oppression and subjugation. This has led the South African government to take part in global events and support interventions and programmes enhancing women's equity and empowerment.

According to Ertürk (2004), some of the policies implemented and interventions supported by the South African government relating to gender equity include

- the signing of a number of UN conventions on women,
- the Women's Charter for Effective Equality (1993),
- the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994),
- South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment (1995),
- the National Report of the Status of Women in South Africa prepared for the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995,
- the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1995)
- the South African Women on the Road to Development, Equality and Peace – Beijing Conference Plan of Action of 1995 (see also Mathur-Helm, 2005), and

- the Commission on Gender Equality Act, No 39 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996a).

The Commission for Gender Equality has introduced a five-year strategic plan (2008-2013) to promote women's empowerment and gender equality and to ensure that the National Gender Policy is effectively implemented in South African society (Commission for Gender Equality, 2008).

Focusing specifically on corporate South Africa, legislation dealing with the implementation of equal opportunity and affirmative action to redress the imbalances of the past relating to previously disadvantaged and discriminated groups such as women has been enforced by the State (Mathur-Helm, 2004).

Two pivotal pieces of legislation namely, the Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998 (South Africa, 1998a), and the Skills Development Act, No 97 of 1998 (South Africa, 1998b) were introduced to redress previous disadvantages, disempowerment and employment imbalances through accelerated development, training and education programmes (Department of Labour, 2010). In accordance with the South African Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998, most South African organisations have set targets to increase the representation of individuals who are classified as being from the "designated groups", one of which is Indian women, across all occupational levels in their organisations (BHP Billiton, 2004; Department of Labour, 2010).

Given these changes in the political climate, a larger number of Indian women have entered the South African workforce in the post-apartheid era than in the past, when they were isolated and restricted by customs and taboos (Shepherd, 2008). With better educational facilities and easier access to tertiary institutions, more Indian females are becoming academically and technically qualified for responsible, interesting and rewarding work (Dias & Posel, 2007).

1.5.4 Statistics on Indian women in management

Before discussing the statistics on women in managerial positions, I present an outline of the South African population broken down by race and gender (see Table 1.1) to indicate the broader South African context.

Table 1.1: Profile of the national population and the national economically active population by race and gender

Population Group	National population distribution			Economically active		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
African	37.7%	41.3%	79.0%	39.2%	34.2%	73.5%
Coloured	4.3%	4.6%	8.9%	6.1%	5.2%	11.3%
Indian	1.2%	1.3%	2.5%	1.9%	1.1%	3.0%
White	4.6%	5.0%	9.6%	6.7%	5.5%	12.2%
Total	47.8%	52.2%	100.0%	54.0%	46.0%	100.0%

Source: Department of Labour (2010, p. 6)

According to the national demographics, men constitute 47.8 per cent of the population, while women comprise 52.2 per cent of the population in South Africa (Department of Labour, 2010). The Department of Labour's (2010) Commission for Employment Equity Report also indicates that men constituted 54 per cent of the economically active population for the period under review, while women comprised 46 per cent. Indian women constituted only 1.3 per cent of the population and 1.1 per cent of the economically active population. Although the majority of the economically active population (84.8 per cent) is black, the current occupational representation of race and gender groups in the labour force is still similar to that which existed under apartheid (Department of Labour, 2010).

Although women in South Africa have made some gains in entering managerial positions, research reveals that white men, who constitute 6.7 per

cent of the economically active population, still dominate senior and top managerial positions, followed by white females, who constitute 5.5 per cent of the economically active population (Department of Labour, 2010). Research indicates women are discriminated against on the basis of race and gender in South African organisations (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Denton & Vloeberghs, 2003; Littrell & Nkomo, 2005; Mathur-Helm, 2005; Zonde, 2007) and these discriminatory practices are experienced differently by women of different races (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010).

Statistics obtained from an annual report by the Business Women's Association of South Africa (BWASA) entitled *South African Women in Corporate Leadership* (BWASA, 2011) provides an excellent overview of the comparative status of South African women in corporate South Africa. However, data on women in management from different race groups in corporate South Africa is only available from 2005. Making it difficult to show how the composition of Indian women at managerial levels prior to 2005 has changed. BWASA's census collected data from companies listed on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange, as well as from State-owned enterprises (BWASA, 2011). These statistics are set out in Tables 1.2 to 1.4, below.

Table 1.2: Percentage of women directors

	2009	2010	2011
Black	54.4	46.9	46.7
Coloured	6.3	9.2	8.3
Indian	5.1	6.3	8.3
White	34.2	37.3	36.6

Source: BWASA (2011, p. 50)

Table 1.2 indicates that there has been a steady increase in the number of Indian women directors from 2009 to 2011, but the figures are still lower than those of white and African women.

Table 1.3: Women executive managers by race

	2009	2010	2011
Black	22.6	14.9	14.4
Coloured	4.9	9.7	7.4
Indian	5.9	7.0	6.9
White	66.2	67.6	70.6

Source: BWASA (2011, p. 32)

Table 1.3 indicates that there has been an increase in the number of women executive managers from 2009 to 2011 but the figures are still lower than those for women from other race groups.

Table 1.4: Women in top management by race

2011 percentages		
	Executive managers	Directors
Black	14.4	46.7
Coloured	7.4	8.3
Indian	6.9	8.3
White	70.6	36.6
Other*	0.7	0.1
Total	100	100

Source: BWASA (2011, p. 32)

*Foreign nationals

Table 1.4 indicates that compared to women from other race groups Indian women have the lowest representation at the level of director – only 8.3 percent, compared to 46.7 percent black African and 36.6 percent white women – although the percentage of Indian women in these positions have increased from the 2009 figures (BWASA, 2011). White women out number

all race groups at executive manager levels, although they constitute only 5.5 per cent of the economically active population, in comparison to women from other race groups.

The statistics for 2011 in Table 1.4 indicate that the representation of white women executive far outnumbers that of other race groups. The number of white female directors is also very high when one considers that they constitute only 5.5 per cent of the economically active population. The representation of Indian female executive managers (6.9 percent) is low compared to that of the other race groups – black African, white and coloured females account for 14.4, 70.6 and 7.4 percent respectively (BWASA, 2011). Table 1.4 also indicates that Indian women have the lowest representation (8.3 percent) at the level of director, compared to that of black African and white women. Table 1.4 thus indicates that Indian women have the lowest representation both at executive and director management levels. The above statistics make obvious the poor representation of Indian women in corporate South Africa in senior and top managerial positions.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

The type of research design and the methodology employed in a study influence the results that are obtained. Researchers therefore choose research designs and approaches according to the aims of the study and their epistemological assumptions (Creswell, 2003; Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992). I decided on an interpretivist paradigm relating to the study. The basic premise of an interpretivist paradigm is that the researcher should gain an in-depth understanding of the whole phenomenon in question. Consequently, important aspects of a phenomenon are not overlooked in the process (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). With quantitative research, generalisability to the general population is easier, but it is more difficult to generalise with qualitative research. However, a researcher is able to gain an in-depth understanding of research participants' feelings, perspectives and experiences of the subject matter in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kvale, 1996). This study therefore used an interpretivist, qualitative approach

to gain an understanding of the life and career experiences of Indian women managers with a particular focus on how they negotiated identities that were acceptable both to their self-concepts and to others in their social environments.

Using an interpretivist, qualitative outlook allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the identity negotiation of the women who participated in the study. Specifically, I used the life story approach to understand how these women managers negotiated their gender and racio-ethnic identities in their youth and their gender, racio-ethnic and professional identities in adulthood. According to proponents of the life story approach, the answers to the question “Who am I?” are often organised in the form of life stories (Bruner, 1986). Shamir and Eilam (2005) argue that life stories express the storytellers’ identities, which are the product of the relationship between the life experiences and the organised stories of these experiences. Scholars of life story methodology argue that it is the stories we tell of ourselves and others that reveal our identities (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 70).

A grounded theory approach was used in this study. Grounded theory uses a logical and consistent set of data collection and analytical methods to generate theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory also allows a researcher to construct knowledge grounded in the everyday experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory allowed me to focus on the identity negotiation of Indian women managers in an inductive manner: themes were generated from the data themselves. From the themes I had generated, I extracted the core theme, namely identity work, and all other themes centred round this theme. The grounded theory approach allowed me to go below the surface and reveal how the women reconcile and enact their multiple identities.

The study was divided into two parts. The first part focused on the pilot study, which informed the rest of the study. Researchers have long pointed out the usefulness of conducting a pilot study before commencing with the main study

– pilot studies are used to enhance and pre-test research instruments such as questionnaires and interviews (Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, & Graham, 2001). Pilot studies are also used in generating research problems and questions and in underscoring gaps and wastefulness in data collection (Sampson, 2004). A pilot study also allows a researcher to understand the meaning of concepts held by the participants from their perspective (Maxwell, 2005). I interviewed seven Indian women in middle management positions for the pilot study. The pilot study was initially focused on Indian women's work experiences and their upward mobility in the workplace. The aim was to ascertain whether there were differences between the barriers faced by women in middle management and those faced by women in senior and top managerial positions in their upward mobility.

In the course of the pilot study, however, the women alluded extensively to their cultural backgrounds. This allowed me to generate questions relating to the cultural background of Indian women in senior and top managerial positions. The pilot study also allowed me to gain an understanding of the importance of Indian culture in the lives of Indian women managers and also suggested that the era in which women grew up might have had an important influence on their identities.

In the second part of the study, life story interviews were therefore conducted with 13 women managers. The interview approach allowed the women to tell their life stories, beginning with their childhoods and covering events until the present.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study represents one of the first studies to illuminate the life and career journeys and identity work of Indian women in management in South Africa. Much of the research on women in management has focused on the upward mobility of women managers in general, but my focus is how a group of racio-ethnic women, specifically Indian women managers in South Africa, engaged in identity work to form a coherent self-concept and how they adopted hybrid

identities in their desire to reach top managerial positions in South African corporations. This study therefore addresses the paucity of research focusing on the intersection between multiple social identities, identity work and the formation of the hybrid identities of racio-ethnic minority women managers.

There is a need to fill the gap in the identity work literature, because so much of this literature focuses on the construction of professional identities or on reconciling personal identities with organisational identities (see, for example, Alvesson & Robertson, 2006; ledema, Degeling, Braithwaite, & White, 2004; Pratt, Rockman, & Kaufmann, 2006). Very little research has systematically examined the identity work that has to be done in terms of a person's racio-ethnicity, gender and professional identity. Indeed, one can argue that most of the prior research on identity work has been inwardly focused, with little attention being paid to the external contextual factors that influence the nature of identity work. This study illuminates the hybrid identities that ethnic minority women may adopt to reconcile the demands of a professional identity with other elements of their multiple identities. The study aims to sensitise human resources practitioners and managers to the unique identity challenges which Indian women managers in South Africa encounter in traditionally white male organisations.

1.8 LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

One of the limitations of a study such as this is its limited generalisability (Cline, 2008) – the findings of the present study cannot be generalised to Indian females in other Western countries, as the experiences of these women is specific to the South African context. Nor can the findings be generalised to all women in management in general. Instead, the focus is on a specific group of women. The goal of the study was not generalisability, but providing a thick description of the life stories and journeys of the participating women into corporate management within a particular historical and social context.

Moreover, the findings cannot be generalised to Indian women who were raised in post-apartheid South Africa, because the context for such younger women's identity work would be different. The goal of this study was to examine a special population of women, namely, the first cohort of South African Indian women managers who grew up under apartheid and who subsequently had an opportunity to enter corporate South Africa after the demise of apartheid.

Financial constraints meant that only participants who lived and worked in the Gauteng region of South Africa were chosen, with one exception. This one participant came from the Cape Province, but visited Gauteng on business. It is possible that women in other regions of South Africa may have had different experiences from women in Gauteng and the participant from the Cape Province.

The life story approach used in the study risks being subjective where multiple interpretations of events are possible. Some elements may be chosen and told in a certain manner. It is also not possible to tell a life story in exactly the same way more than once. However, in expressing their subjectivities, the women also provided an answer to the question "Who am I?", as posited by Torres and Antikainen (2003). I directed the women's conversations through semi-structured interview questions as to which parts of their life stories they should elaborate upon. Most of the answers the women provided from their childhood and adult experiences in organisations overlapped, but there were also differences between their stories. The subjectivity within the women's stories gave them a sense of their own identity (their "I") relating to their unique experiences.

1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The key terms defined in this section are used throughout this study.

1.9.1 Life story

I used McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, and Bowman's (2001, p. 475) definition of a life story: "[A] life story exists as a psychosocial construction reflecting an individual's narrative understanding of self in culture, an understanding that itself is jointly authored by the individual himself or herself and by the wide variety of cultural influences providing the historical, religious, ethical, economic, and political contexts within which the individual's life is situated."

1.9.2 Identity

Alvesson et al.'s (2008, p. 5) definition of identity is adopted in this study. They state that "identity refers to subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I?' and – by implication – 'how should I act?'"

1.9.3 Identity work

According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165), identity work occurs when individuals are "engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising ...constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness".

1.9.4 Hybrid identity

The term "hybrid identity" refers to ethnic minority employees' assimilation of two or more different and possibly conflicting elements into their self-concept (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

1.9.5 Racio-ethnic identity

Taylor Cox Jr (1990) claims that the term "race" has been used by organisational scholars to depict biological differences between groups, and the term "ethnicity" to indicate cultural differences. Cox further argues that

these terms were used in the past to refer to some groups such as whites and blacks in terms of race, while other groups, such as Asians and Hispanics, have been referred to in terms of ethnicity. Thus, these terms have been incorrectly used to imply that groups were distinct from each other in terms of biology or culture, while in reality they differed in both respects. Cox therefore coined the term “racio-ethnic” to indicate both a biologically and/or culturally distinct group. In the present study, both race and ethnicity are considered to be socially constructed. Because the South African apartheid system was based on a system of racial classification, Indians in South Africa are regarded as both a racial group and as an ethnic group with a distinct culture for the purposes of the study.

1.9.6 Intersectionality

The term “intersectionality” was coined by Crenshaw (1989, 1994) to illustrate how race and gender intersect and may result in the oppression of black women (and by implication women from other minorities, such as Indian women) in the workplace.

1.9.7 Resistance

In the current study, resistance refers to “intentional, and hence conscious, acts of defiance or opposition by a subordinate individual or group of individuals against a superior individual or set of individuals” (Seymour, 2006, p. 305).

1.9.8 Male archetype

Sinclair (1998, p. 31) argues that an “archetype of leadership is not a style, which is a reflection of an individual personality, but a social construction”. The male archetype is posited as competent, ambitious and logical, compared to the female archetype, which is claimed to be dependent and sensitive (Varma, 2007).

1.9.9 Solo status

Individuals acquire solo status when they are the only ones who represent their group in a homogeneous setting (Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2003), for example, an Indian woman manager who is both the only female and the only Indian among a group of white male managers.

1.9.10 The term “Indian”

The term “Indian” refers to South Africans who are descended from Indians (from the Asian subcontinent) who came to South Africa as indentured labourers to work in the sugarcane plantations in what was then Natal, or passenger Indians who came to South Africa to set up businesses or who were professionals (Bramdaw, 1994).

1.10 OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

The structure of the rest of the study is set out below:

- *Chapter 2: The historical and legislative context*

This chapter provides an overview of the historical and legislative context which shaped the lives of the Indian women who participated in the study.

- *Chapter 3: Gender and management in the workplace*

This chapter reviews the prior literature on women in management, as well as on intersectionality and identity.

- *Chapter 4: Research methodology*

This chapter describes the research methodology used in the study and the methodological choices made to pursue the research questions.

- *Chapter 5: Unpacking childhood identity themes*

This chapter presents the results on the identity formation during their childhood of the Indian women managers who participated in the study.

- *Chapter 6: Struggling for identity in the corporate cage*

This chapter presents the results on the identity struggle during the working lives of the Indian women managers who participated in the study.

- *Chapter 7: Discussion of identity work engaged in by Indian women managers*

This chapter discusses the key results of the study in comparison with prior literature on women in management and identity work in organisations.

- *Chapter 8: Summary and conclusions*

This chapter summarises the findings, and discusses the significance and contribution of the current study. It also suggests what the implications of the study may be for future research.

- *Chapter 9: Reflections on my personal journey*

This chapter shares my personal experience of the journey toward compiling this thesis.

1.11 CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter outlined the background to the current study, its purpose, the research questions, the significance of the study, the methodology, as well as the limitations and scope of the study. I also provided definitions of key terms used in subsequent chapters. Finally, I provided an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the historical and legislative context which influenced the lives of the Indian women managers who participated in the study.