CHAPTER 9:

REFLECTIONS ON MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

"*There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning.*" (Successfx Publications, 2010)

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this last chapter, I reflect on my research voyage in conducting this study. Part of my research voyage was to ensure the trustworthiness of the current study.

In this chapter, I share my cultural and religious background, as well as my experience in management as an Indian female. I found that, as others who have used a life story approach have noted (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler, 2005), one cannot engage others about their life stories without reflecting on one's own. In addition, because these women's stories have not previously been told, I felt a tremendous responsibility to make sure that I, as the researcher, represent their lives authentically and respectfully.

9.2 REFLEXIVITY

Face-to-face interviews remain the most widely used method of gathering data in qualitative research (Platt, 2002). Researchers' epistemology, subjectivity within the research process and the meaning they attach to what participants say is referred to as reflexivity (Riach, 2009). Hardy, Phillips and Clegg (2001) posit that reflexivity deals with thinking through how research is conducted and comprehending how the process of undertaking research shapes its result. There are various elements that have an impact on the research process, which leads to interpreting the results in a certain manner, and therefore one needs to use a reflexive stance to identify and comprehend the effects of these factors (Nadin & Cassell, 2006).

Reflexivity is a vital part of qualitative research, as it is an important concept in discussions on subjectivity, objectivity and social science knowledge and research

(Hsiung, 2008). One of the most important aspects of reflexivity is that it highlights possible researcher bias in qualitative research (Pillow, 2003; Pullen, 2006) which researchers should be constantly aware of (Hammersley, 2008). Nadin and Cassell (2006, p. 208-209) explain that the benefits of reflexivity are that "one is made more aware of the role and impact of the researcher; it increases the trustworthiness of the data and integrity of the research process". Who I am, how I perceive the world, what I feel, what I know – these are all vital elements in the research process, and a researcher not only has to take account of his or her own view point, but also that of the interviewees (Rose, 1997). The researcher has to be aware at all times how a person's race, gender, class and ethnicity influence the various phases of the research process (Callaway, 1992; Madge 1993). Since researchers are unable to divorce themselves from their own subjective metatheoretical focus, this focus should be examined through reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990).

The aim of reflexivity is to produce authentic analysis. This can only be generated when a researcher continuously questions his or her understanding of each phase of the study itself (Hertz, 1997), from formulating questions through to writing about the subject matter (Olson, 2008), to the role the researcher plays in the research process and ethical issues relating to the study (Letiche, 2009).

Researchers conducting studies in organisations have faced difficulties in conducting and writing about reflexive research (Cunliffe, 2003). Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 262) argue that "[a]lthough reflexivity is a familiar concept in the qualitative tradition…it has not previously been seen as an ethical notion". Collins and Wray-Bliss (2005, p. 801) coined the term "ethical reflexivity", arguing that participants should have a chance to respond to the researched texts, and that researchers should question their own statements. Hammersley (2008) also suggests that ethical reflexivity deals with a researcher choosing to ask certain questions, collecting certain data, interpreting the findings, deciding which findings to emphasise and also taking into account the practical implications of the research.

One difficulty I encountered in the current study was deciding on how I should conduct reflexivity, as there is no fixed method to do so. Mauthner and Doucet

(2003, p. 413) lament that "whilst the importance of being reflexive is acknowledged within social science research, the difficulties, practicalities and methods of doing it are rarely addressed". I therefore decided to share my reflections on initiating the research, the contents of my reflective journal, and the tensions around analysing and reporting what I found.

I begin with my own life story, because it perhaps reveals what motivated me to embark on my research topic, as well as some of the feelings and emotions I have experienced over the last three years. I then discuss some of the incidents in the research, illustrating my comments with some extracts from my research journal. These extracts are highlighted by being placed in italics and in text boxes, to distinguish these extracts clearly from the transcripts of the participants' comments.

9.3 MY STORY

I was raised in a small segregated Indian township called Primindia in Brits during the apartheid era, where I attended an Indian school in the mornings and religious classes in the afternoons. Most of my childhood was spent studying, and during the holidays we would assist my mother in spring cleaning the house. Sometimes, during the summer holidays, my parents would send us to my grandparents' home in Laudium, which is an Indian township in Pretoria which was also segregated during the apartheid era.

I learned to cook at the age of ten, as my mother believed that having a career should be secondary to taking care of the home. By contrast, my father was more ambitious on my behalf, and encouraged me to study, as he wanted me to be financially independent and not to be totally dependent on a man. My father did not encourage me to marry after I completed my schooling. He always encouraged me to do well at school. I was glad when he did not force me to marry, as I wanted to pursue a career before I settled down in life. In my early life, I encountered many women who were abused by husbands who controlled the finances in the home and I did not want to be a mere statistic. My father was also aware of these situations, and he therefore wanted to safeguard me against such abuse by allowing me to

study so that I could be financially independent. My father was also aware that without a good education I would end up working in a shoe store or a supermarket, where I would be paid a pittance and would be abused and disrespected, like many of the Indian women working as cashiers and salespersons often were (and still are). I would always be financially in need, as these women earned a minimal wage. I understood my father's reasoning, as I did not want to have the same fate as these women.

My father allowed me to choose my own career. In fact, until recently, he was not even aware of what my career as an Industrial Psychologist entailed, as he operates his own business and did not have the opportunity to work in corporate South Africa, due to apartheid. My father, however, ensured that he completed his schooling through correspondence. He enrolled at a technical college and completed a diploma in electronics.

My mother has assisted my father in his business since they were married, but she did not complete her schooling. The reasons for her not completing her schooling are threefold. Firstly, she attended a girls-only Indian school where the pupils were taught "feminine" subjects. In order to complete her schooling, she would have had to attend a boys' high school and, since she had a traditional father, this option was out of the question. Secondly, she mentioned that when she was growing up, Indian parents aimed to marry their daughters at an early age and did not pay heed to educating their daughters. Thirdly, the apartheid government made the school syllabus difficult and the transition for my mother from feminine to masculine subjects would have been too difficult. My mother therefore did not complete her last two years of schooling. Although my mother was involved in my father's business, she ensured that she prepared elaborate meals for her family. She somehow balanced her work and home life and taking care of five children (my parents have six children, and my youngest brother was born when the oldest five were already at university).

Although my father encouraged our studies, he was also quite traditional. He did not allow me to have boyfriends, and I was also not allowed to attend parties and go to night clubs. I was, however, allowed to go shopping with female friends,

uncharoned. When I attended university, I lived with my grandparents, and used to travel by bus from Pretoria to Johannesburg. Although I was allowed freedom at university, my father sent me to study on condition that I would not date. I honoured my father's request and successfully completed my studies.

When my father announced to extended family and members of the community that I was going to study, there were many objections, as people felt girls should not be allowed to study and the honour of the family and community would be compromised if I had, for example, dated boys or gone clubbing. My father did not heed the advice of the extended family or community, and still sent me to university. I asked my father not too long along ago if he regrets sending me to study. He said that in retrospect, he had made a wise choice, as he noticed that my female cousins (who had married straight after completing school) are finding it difficult to get well paid jobs.

After completing a Masters in Commerce (MCom) in Human Resource Management, I decided to pursue a doctoral degree. After the MCom degree, the last qualification on the academic ladder was the PhD. My main reason for pursuing a doctoral degree was that I had successfully completed all the necessary qualifications on the ladder and I only had one rung to climb to achieve the highest qualification in the human resource management field, and that would be the PhD. I always believe in completing what I start with, even if it takes me time to do it. I started off at the bottom of the academic ladder and I wanted to complete the circle by achieving the PhD.

Besides a doctoral degree, I always wanted to pursue an MBA, as I felt that would boost my career opportunities in the management field, and also to complete the Executive Leadership Programme once I had attained a senior management position. In between, I was also pursuing short courses that would enhance my skills and broaden my horizons.

After completing my Honours degree, I hunted for a job in the human resource field for three years before being employed as a call centre agent in mid-2000. Although I

started job hunting in the post-apartheid era, I was still told by personnel agencies that human resources jobs were reserved for whites only and that I would never be employed in the human resources department of any organisation. I worked for four and half years in the call centre before I was recruited as a human resource officer in the recruitment and selection department of my organisation. After working as a human resource officer for 18 months, I was promoted to a middle management level as a human resource generalist. After I had worked in management for 18 months, I was head-hunted by lecturers in the Human Resource academic department. They had also incidentally been my lecturers in the Master's programme. I started working at the university in April 2008 and my current position is that of a lecturer. I am still living with my parents, as Indian women are not allowed to live on their own. For me, this cultural norm is a blessing, as I would have been very lonely living away from my family. In the absence of a spouse, my nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters fill my life.

Entering academia was somewhat of a demotion for me, having been in a position of authority as a manager, and having to adapt to being treated like a junior employee as an academic. When I entered academia, I was placed in a lecturer's position. I took a drop in salary and at the same time a drop in status as well. For two years, the senior lecturers in the Human Resource Department had tried to convince me to join academia, but I had refused due to the low salary I was offered. I eventually gave in when one of my fellow students who was also an academic convinced me to come on board, as he advised me that I would be able to determine my own career progress. This idea appealed to me, as I was already aware that in the organisation I worked in I would not be promoted unless I was friendly with the men in top management.

I was thus always setting milestones for myself. Where I could find time, I would pursue short courses that ran for a day or two. These would give me a breather from the office and would boost my career, as I would take new skills back to the office to implement. In this way, I was constantly in touch with new techniques and ways of doing things as well and always in the habit of studying. I did this because I needed

to stimulate my mind constantly with new ideas, and one way of doing so was to be a student all my life.

My research interest was driven by my own career as a manager. In my quest for a topic, I focused on the challenges I faced as an Indian female manager in corporate South Africa. I was fairly quickly promoted into a managerial position once I entered the Human Resource Department of a municipality in Pretoria. I also realized my upward mobility would be slow from this point forward. Although I was well acquainted with most of the senior and top managers, I was not part of the inner circle. I was the only Indian female. There was only one white female and two African females at a senior management level. The rest of the senior and top management structure consisted of African and white males. As an Indian woman, I found it uncomfortable to be part of an all-male group because I had been raised in a family and community that practiced sex segregation at social gatherings. Also, the males in my organisation were friends, and did not invite me for any of their social outings. I always wondered whether other Indian women managers were part of the male social clubs at their respective organisations.

The question that was constantly on my mind was whether other Indian women managers in South African organisations also faced challenges in terms of their upward mobility. There were a number of expectations of me as an Indian female and daughter in the Indian community and family respectively. I was very aware that Indian men shy away from marrying professional Indian women, and I wondered if I would ever marry. I also worried that my career might be stifled because I would not be able to relocate due to family pressures and expectations. Thus, I was very curious to find out about the role of the Indian community and family in the lives of other Indian women managers and how this influenced their upward mobility. This topic then became the focus of my doctorate. I was excited about choosing this topic, as I was curious to find out what other Indian women managers experienced on their journeys into top managerial positions, and whether their experiences were anything like mine. I was also curious and excited to learn about the strategies they used in reaching top managerial positions and how they achieved a balanced life.

9.4 MY REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

It is believed journal keeping was first used by the Greeks and Romans (Janesick, 1998). Nowadays, journal keeping is used in therapy. Progoff (1975), a therapist, referred in his works to an intensive journal. Progoff (1975) suggests that journal writing results in a person's developing a deeper understanding of him- or herself as the writer explores multifaceted aspects of his or her life. A journal allows an individual to document personal growth as it occurs and leads to self-understanding.

Since the researcher is the research instrument in qualitative studies, keeping a detailed journal is vital in keeping track of the research journey. In my case, the journey brought me joy, frustration and tears. My research journey was also filled with episodes of tragedy, although these were not due to the study itself. The joy it brought me was due to discovering that I was not the only Indian woman in management experiencing barriers and challenges to my self-concept, and negotiating my identity. There were other Indian women like me who went through similar experiences to the ones I had had in reaching a management position. I also had hope of reaching a top managerial position after I listened to the life stories of my participants and realized that, although the process is slow and painful, it is well worth it when one finally reaches the top.

The main frustration of the study dealt with the interviews. Sometimes I was frustrated by the women's scheduling our interviews so far apart and sometimes cancelling an interview at the last minute. I remember that I once drove to Johannesburg from Pretoria for a follow -up interview with one of the participants. Her secretary phoned me two hours before the interview to inform me that the venue of the interview had changed and that I should drive to their office in another area in Johannesburg. However, the directions supplied to me by the secretary were poor. A typical half hour journey from Pretoria to Johannesburg took me one hour. I drove around for half an hour looking for the place, and finally got to the alternate venue five minutes before the interview, only to be told by the secretary that the manager was delayed and unable to see me. After I had waited for another half an hour, the

secretary informed me that the manager could not see me at all and we had to reschedule the interview for another day. I noted the following in my journal:

07 April 2009:

I am so frustrated with some participants who don't even consider I have to take a day's leave in order to interview them. I wish they would understand and let me know at least a day beforehand if they are unable to make it. I wish I could tell her I'm no longer interested in interviewing her. Unfortunately I'm at her mercy, as the other Indian women managers are giving me a hard time and are not willing to be interviewed. I guess beggars can't be choosers. I will hang in there. There's nothing I can do about her postponing the interview.

The tears I cried conducting the study were related to the literature review. Some of the literature I read relating to the treatment of women in India broke my heart. I remember reading about the oppressive dowry system that Hindu women are subjected to. One story I read made me feel depressed for days. A Hindu father once received a proposal for his 18-year old daughter. Since he was poor and unable to pay the dowry, his daughter's future family-in-law would not allow their son to marry his daughter. Seeing the humiliation and pain their father had to endure, the daughter and her two younger sisters all committed suicide, as they could not bear the pain and humiliation their parents had to endure due to their poverty and the demands of future families-in-law. This story made me feel how lucky I was to be born and raised in a country where the Indian community did not adhere strictly to these customs, as Hindu girls in South Africa had never been subjected to a need to commit suicide because their parents could not afford to pay dowry. The following entry in my journal reflects on this reading:

20 September 2009:

I'm so glad I was not born in India. I would probably have been tortured by the community for not following unjust customs like the three girls who had committed suicide because their father could not pay dowry. I feel so sorry for the parents. Because of stupid people in the community, they lost their precious daughters. Such stupid customs should be abolished completely, because they only feed people's greed.

Tragedy does not relate to my research, but I encountered it on my research journey. Although it did not completely distract me from my studies, when tragedy did strike, it affected my life negatively, and for a few days I would be distracted and would not be able to focus on my research. Tragedy struck my family two years ago, just when I was preparing to conduct my first set of interviews. Between January 2009 and August 2010 I lost four close family members. This was a period of distress for my family. I tried to be strong during these tragic times, and suppressed my emotions, so that I could focus on my PhD, as my greatest fear was that my grief would make me lose my focus on my goal. I took very little time out to grieve the loss of my family members, and so I realize that I still need to find closure, since my focus on my research detracted me from internalizing their deaths. While the rest of my family has come to terms with these deaths, I still have not internalized what has transpired in my life in the last two years. Instead, I opted to bury myself in my work.

28 August 2010:

I can't believe so many of my close family members have passed on. It hurts so much, but I know if my grief swallows me now I will not get through my PhD. I will grieve for them later, but I have to get the PhD out of the way first.

In the last three years, I had been intensely focused on my studies to such an extent that I spent all my free time on my research and have missed outings with family and

friends due to focusing on my PhD. My social and personal life has come to a standstill, as I have spent minimal time with family and friends. As I am nearing the end of my PhD, I feel that I need time to rebalance my personal and professional life. The following entry was in my journal:

10 April 2011:

I have allowed the PhD to rule my life for so long. I have lost out on life and now I feel it is time to complete my studies. The loneliness in my life is overwhelming these days, as I have been engrossed in my studies and work with no time for family or friends. I really can't wait to be a part of my family again. My parents miss me so much. Life is too short to miss out on spending time with family.

I kept a reflective journal during my study and recorded all my thoughts relating to the women's life stories, my observations of the physical location and appearance of the interview site, my personal feelings relating to the women's stories, as well as the women's appearances. Reviewing what I recorded in my journal has allowed me to see how it has informed my interpretations in the study. The journal entries captured the rapport I immediately established with the women in the very first interviews. I immediately sensed their desire to share their pain, their sorrows and their challenges in dealing with cultural restrictions when they were growing up, as well as in their respective organisations. I felt that I had a heavy responsibility to capture their stories as accurately as possible, and to present them factually, without distorting facts. The following journal abstract offers insight into the rapport I established with the women:

21 July 2009:

I have already conducted the first round of interviews with the participants. I felt so comfortable talking to them. It felt like I was talking to my sisters during one of our "family-female get-togethers". The women spoke openly about their experiences. I feel like we are already friends after our first meeting.

Talking to me allowed them to share their stories and allowed a burden to be lifted off their shoulders. The women were also eager to share their stories with me as they could identify with me as an Indian woman who had been a manager as well. I believe they felt I would understand their life stories better than someone who was not in a managerial position. During the interviews, when they mentioned a point in their childhood or experiences I could identify with, I would also agree with them and tell them I had also experienced such events in my life. For example, when the women mentioned they did not discuss family problems at work, I agreed with them. I tried to keep my side of the story very brief, as I did not want it to overshadow or influence the stories they shared. This also created rapport between us and I found that after my revelations, they would be willing to share even more information relating to their lives. The burden that was shifted to me was to write up their stories as accurately as possible and to let the world know the trials and tribulations they had encountered, as well as how they had negotiated their identities and their ultimate triumphs in their journeys toward top managerial positions. The following extract from the journal illustrates the eagerness the women expressed in talking to me:

> *15 April 2009:*
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> *I was surprised Saira mentioned to me before the interview commenced when I explained to her about my topic she felt this is something she wants to contribute towards. Bipasha also mentioned to me when I first contacted her that she was looking forward to be involved in my research as she has not read about such a topic being explored in the South African context. These women's enthusiasm relating to my topic is encouraging to me as a researcher.*

I felt immediately comfortable with each woman I interviewed. I felt a bond and sisterhood. I felt like I was one of them and this is illustrated by the following note I made in my journal. This was also the time when I was busy with my last few follow-up interviews:

> *10 September 2009:*
>
> *Each woman said something that touched a part of me and an aspect of my life – something in my past, my present and my experiences – where I could identify with them.*

I must admit that although I had bonded with all the other women in the study, one of the participants with whom I had conducted an interview in the first phase of interviews and who was in a top managerial position made me feel extremely uncomfortable. Although we had arranged the time and date for the interview, she ignored my calls the day before the scheduled interview to finalize the meeting. I contacted her an hour before the scheduled meeting to confirm the venue, but she ignored my calls. I arrived ten minutes before the meeting at her office and was told to wait for her, as she had scheduled another meeting for the time we had to meet. I waited about half an hour for her before I was ushered into the boardroom where she was waiting for me. Since she had another appointment afterwards, she finished the interview ahead of the agreed-upon allocated time. She was also the only participant who refused to conduct a follow-up interview with me. Fortunately for me, data saturation was reached and I did not have a need to conduct another interview with her, as many of the points she made had already been mentioned by most of the other participants. She was one of the first participants I interviewed. I made the following note in my diary:

23 May 2009:

I feel so hurt by being treated like a nuisance by Shabana. She did not even smile with me when I met her, but seemed upset for some reason. Her first remark to me when we met in her boardroom was that she was wondering who was keep on calling her on her cell phone as she did not recognize the number. I told her I had called her to confirm our appointment, as I had to drive from Pretoria to Johannesburg and I wanted to confirm if she was still available, otherwise we could have rescheduled. She said nothing, but her tone was aggressive throughout the interview. We were also disturbed a few times by her staff asking her about sending out mail by courier and bringing documents for her to sign off during the course of the interview. She made it difficult for me to build rapport between us. I attempted a few times to make comments about similar experiences, but she cut me off in a middle of a sentence and continued with another story. It was as if she was not paying attention to me and was on her own mission. I really did not feel a connection with her. The other managers I had interviewed would instruct staff not to disturb us and would also pay attention to my comments during the interview and this enabled a much smoother rapport between us. My ego was deflated after the interview and I felt like a beggar she wanted to get rid of quickly. She scrutinized my attire and I felt uncomfortable, like I was placed under a microscope. Even when I asked her for a follow-up interview, she told me not to call her she would call me when she wanted to be interviewed. To this day she has not called.

I also realized that being an Indian woman who had been a manager as well as having been raised in an Indian township during apartheid gave me an insider view of the participants' lives.

9.5 INSIDER VIEW

In conducting the interviews with my participants, I ensured that I remained as objective as possible, although I realized during the interviews that our lives mirrored each other in the majority of instances. Although I understood the context (for

example, Indian culture) that the women were making certain claims about, I would ask them to explain the context in greater detail. I tried to conduct the interviews as an "outsider" who did not understand the context, and in this way I was able to gather rich data from the women. This was not easy, because I could immediately understand what they were talking about. However, I also did not lead the women during the interviews, but instead probed for more detail in the stories they told me.

I realized that the life stories of the women managers I interviewed were complex. To allow the reader to understand the complexities in my participants' lives, I decided to use a caged bird metaphor as an analogy. The caged bird metaphor is apt, as it succinctly captures the essence of the Indian women managers' struggles against the barriers in their lives. However, I was initially reluctant to portray the women as passive and subservient. I felt that portraying Indian women in South Africa as passive and subservient reflects on me as an Indian woman as well, since I am also an Indian woman. At the same time I knew I had to be true to the data as well and any distortions would not capture the life stories of the women in the study.

Before writing up my analysis chapter, I had a discussion of my findings with the students in the human resource management honours class one evening. The class consisted of three Indian women and when they listened to the idea of my wanting to portray the women in my study as passive and subservient, they started protesting vehemently. Their argument was that they are not passive and docile. I asked them to describe their mothers to me and asked questions relating to their mother's status in the home and community. I also enquired about their mother's ages. Without the students' realizing it, many of the descriptions relating to their mothers consisted of elements of passivity and subservience which these young students did not subscribe to. I also pointed out to them that the women in my study were part of their mothers' generation, where Indian women's voices were subdued, although there were exceptions to the rule – for example, some famous South African women of an earlier generation were Fatima Meer (b.1928, d. 2010) and Maniben Sita (b.1926), who were political activists and voiced their opinions. There were many less well-known Indian women who also fought against the injustices of the apartheid system and were not subservient. These women were, however, the exception rather than

the rule of the general Indian female population in South Africa, who were silenced by male patriarchal beliefs. So, I was initially uncomfortable portraying the women as subservient and docile, but I had to show that part of their personalities in order to reveal how they resisted the cultural socialization of passivity imposed on them by engaging in identity work and at the same time strategizing to escape the cages that held them captive.

9.6   REFLECTIONS ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES

In my study, I had used both the life story approach, where I extracted themes relating to the Indian women managers' lives and grounded theory, in which theory surrounding their identities emerged and was grounded in the data. I realized that the women were successful in their respective careers and that they had obtained their managerial positions through determination and hard work. The women were open in sharing their personal lives with me, and I listened with empathy. I also realized that there were instances where their professional and personal lives reflected my own, but at other times I found myself learning from their experiences. The following journal entry reflects my thoughts:

26 July 2009:

Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing an image of myself in these women. I can't believe they are so much like me. But the interviews had also made me realize although we are all Indian women born and raised in South Africa we are also different. Shamila made me realize all Muslim women do not practice Islam the same way. She showed me the books she learned from are different to the way I practise Islam. She also does not believe in saying her five time daily prayers, which I have been taught is the second most important pillar of Islam. She also mentioned to me the Muslim group she follows educates women before men. This is interesting and news to me. Had I not conducted an interview with her, I would never have known this.

In the analysis of the women's childhood I was surprised that most fathers did not allow their daughters to go out with friends and they were either housebound or only allowed to go shopping with older women in their families who acted as chaperones. I was raised in a small town, and my father allowed me to go shopping with my friends. I never went to the movies with friends, however, as we only had one cinema in town, which was for whites only. I have the following journal entry:

11 April 2009:

I wished I could interview some of the women's fathers and ask them why they did not allow their daughters to go out unchaperoned. It will be interesting to find out

In discussing the participants' managerial roles, the one element that surprised me was that many of the women reported their loss of a sense of empathy toward lower level employees and said they became task and deadline-driven due to their work pressures, which was one aspect of their lives that had changed and which they did not approve of. I made this journal entry upon reflecting on what they said:

08 April 2009:

I'm glad I'm not in some of the women's positions. I think it's a sad thing when you enter a profession and lose empathy for clients. I guess it goes with the territory when you are understaffed and overworked. I guess these women feel this way because they are suffering from burnout.

In reflecting on the first set of interviews, I realized how important the stories that the Indian female managers told me of their lives were for subsequent interviews and for the study as well. An entry in my journal reads as follows:

15 April 2009:

I realize I have to conduct follow-up interviews. Having only one interview leaves so many unanswered questions. I will contact the women for follow-up interviews.

I also used my sister Fatima as a sounding board and discussed Indian culture and the literature I had consulted with her. Our discussions helped me to crystallize insights into the identity formation of women in the Indian culture from the information I had gathered in the interviews. When I was searching for a metaphor, she suggested a metaphor of a butterfly in a cocoon. We debated the use of a cocooned butterfly, but I eventually came up with the caged bird metaphor. The following was the journal entry I made after our discussion:

30 July 2010

Today is my lucky day. I feel like Aristotle and want to shout out Eureka!!!!!! But refuse to run around naked. I have been having nightmares for the past week of how best to analyse the stories of my participants using an apt metaphor. I was not sure how to describe them. I therefore decided today I will bounce the idea off Fatima. She always comes up with ideas I have not thought of. She gets my mind ticking. I gave a general impression of my participants' stories to her without mentioning their names. She asked me to give her time to think through a metaphor. She came to me after an hour and said I should use the metaphor of a butterfly. I told her once a butterfly breaks out of its cocoon, it is free – my participants are still caged in the corporate world and still adhere to their cultural beliefs that chain them. And it was when I used the word "caged" that the caged bird metaphor struck me. I told Fatima – I've got it. They are like caged birds. She agreed with me and said my description of the participants sound like they are in cages trying to break free. We had a discussion of how difficult it is for a caged bird to fly out of its cage and the bars of a cage always confining the movements and freedom of a bird. I was so excited that I concluded our conversation quickly and immediately went to my computer to research the "caged bird" metaphor. I know this is an apt metaphor as it fits in so well with the stories of my participants.

My sister also made me realize that my interviews dealt with the identity negotiations the women were engaged in. The following is an entry in my journal:

02 November 2010:

I had been discussing the concept of identity with Fatima and asked her opinion of it. She pointed out something to me that led me to re-examine my participants' interviews. She told me that every organisation I had entered I carried my cultural and religious beliefs with me. I always tried to get them to cater halaal food for me and reminded them of my fasting month when I could not attend social events where food was served. She pointed out that as Indians we have our culture, but we also try and blend in with others. I agreed with her and realize now after reading through my participants' interviews what she is saying is true – the women were, throughout their lives, engaged in negotiating their identities. I will explore the concept identity work and use it for my study, as I feel it is central to my study.

9.7   CONCLUDING REMARK

I have come to realize that this doctoral thesis is only the first step in my journey as a researcher. During my research journey, I experienced elation and some frustration as well. There were delays along the way, due to unforeseen circumstances, and this taught me to be patient. Conducting research is not a quick process. I would never have been able to complete this study without the mercy and grace of Allah (God) and the support of my family and friends.

I realized that I had taken many aspects of Indian culture and religions for granted because I am a South African Indian woman. I also found it challenging to write down my thoughts, as it was easier for me to express them verbally. As I began to realize that what I took for granted, some of my readers may not be aware of. I then had to document every aspect of the Indian culture related to the current study.

Overall, I enjoyed the journey and I have grown as an individual. I had to do a lot of introspection to discover who I really am during this journey. I had to read literature from many disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, organisation studies, and gender studies, to broaden my knowledge base. I have also enhanced my skills as a researcher by gaining insight into conducting research using the life story approach and grounded theory. I know I am now at a critical juncture on the journey to becoming a scholar. I feel privileged to have been able to interview the first cohort of women to have reached senior and top managerial positions in South Africa. I have gained a number of insights about identity, gender and ethnicity, especially the ways in which they intersect within a broader context to shape the experience of women in management. The challenge for me now is to explore these issues further, along with the unanswered questions emanating from the research.