

**“WHO AM I?”-
SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN MANAGERS’
STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY:
ESCAPING THE UBIQUITOUS CAGE**

by

NASIMA MOHAMED HOUSEN CARRIM

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY
in the
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
at the
University of Pretoria**

APRIL 2012

Supervisor: Prof. Stella M. Nkomo

DECLARATION

FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

Declaration Regarding Plagiarism

The Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences emphasises integrity and ethical behaviour with regard to the preparation of all written assignments.

Although the lecturer will provide you with information regarding reference techniques, as well as ways to avoid plagiarism, you also have a responsibility to fulfil in this regard. Should you at any time feel unsure about the requirements, you must consult the lecturer concerned before submitting an assignment.

You are guilty of plagiarism when you extract information from a book, article, web page or any other information source without acknowledging the source and pretend that it is your own work. This does not only apply to cases where you quote the source directly, but also when you present someone else's work in a somewhat amended (paraphrased) format or when you use someone else's arguments or ideas without the necessary acknowledgement. You are also guilty of plagiarism if you copy and paste information directly from an electronic source (e.g., a web site, e-mail message, electronic journal article, or CD-ROM) without paraphrasing it or placing it in quotation marks, even if you acknowledge the source.

You are not allowed to submit another student's previous work as your own. You are furthermore not allowed to let anyone copy or use your work with the intention of presenting it as his/her own.

Students who are guilty of plagiarism will forfeit all credits for the work concerned. In addition, the matter will be referred to the Committee for Discipline (Students) for a ruling. Plagiarism is considered a serious violation of the University's regulations and may lead to your suspension from the University. The University's policy regarding plagiarism is available on the Internet at <http://www.library.up.ac.za/plagiarism/index.htm>.

For the period that you are a student in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, the following declaration must accompany all written work that is submitted for evaluation. No written work will be accepted unless the declaration has been completed and is included in the particular assignment.

I (full names & surname):	
Student number:	

Declare the following:

1. I understand what plagiarism entails and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.
2. I declare that this assignment is my own, original work. Where someone else's work was used (whether from a printed source, the Internet or any other source), due acknowledgement was given and reference was made according to departmental requirements.
3. I did not copy and paste any information directly from an electronic source (e.g., a web page, electronic journal article or CD ROM) into this document.
4. I did not make use of another student's previous work and submit it as my own.
5. I did not allow and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of presenting it as his/her own work.

Signature

Date



DEDICATION

**This thesis is dedicated to my parents,
Mohamed Hoosen and Farida Abdul Carrim Cassim Moti,
who have supported, encouraged and challenged me
to gain knowledge throughout my life and
to dedicate my services to society.**



u19524481 fotosearch.com

Source: Fotosearch.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank

Allah

for making it possible for me to complete this thesis.

I am thankful to the following persons who have contributed to the study:

- my supervisor, Prof. Stella Nkomo, for her guidance and support throughout my journey on this path to self-discovery – Stella has opened up a world of research for me that I never knew existed, and I am grateful to her for guiding me along this path;
- Prof. Johan Basson, for his valuable input into my research proposal and dissertation;
- my sister Fatima, for her advice and suggestions on the various chapters;
- my sisters Hawa and Rookshana for their input during interviews;
- the research participants, for making time available and for sharing their thoughts and experiences with me;
- the library staff at the University of Pretoria for their assistance with references; and
- Adnaan Bates, for being a pillar of strength, assisting me and encouraging me to complete the dissertation.



ABSTRACT

This study examines how some Indian women in South Africa who became managers negotiated their identities in their early lives and in their adult working lives on their journeys to becoming successful managers.

Prior studies on identity work and the experience of intersectionality by ethnic minority women have typically focused on professional identities in isolation, separate from early life influences. The current study uses a life story approach to provide a holistic understanding of the journeys of the first significant cohort of Indian women to ascend to management positions in South Africa. I explored the narratives of 13 Indian women managers in senior and top management positions in corporate South Africa using a grounded theory approach to make visible the identity work they have engaged in throughout their lives so far.

The life stories of the participants reveal that throughout their lives they have grappled with negotiating a gender identity shaped by Indian cultural assumptions about the roles of men and women in juxtaposition to or in combination with their personal aspirations for professional success. I used a bird cage metaphor to capture how these multiple factors shaped and constrained their lives and careers. The interplay between their racio-ethnic, gender and professional identities is unpacked, and their strategies for reconciling the tensions among their multiple identities are described. In negotiating their identities, these women have developed a particular type of hybrid identity that allows them to move between the compartments into which their professional identity demands and cultural

expectations have been divided. The women's cultural identities remain pivotal in their lives, and they have strong collectivist identities, as they still live within their communities even after the official end of apartheid.

My findings enrich and extend the identity literature relating to ethnic minority women by focusing on identity negotiation over time, rather than only on discrete moments in time. My findings also contribute to identity literature in general, as they illustrate that an individual's identity is formed not only by personal and social identities, but also by the historical and cultural context beyond the organisation within which the person operates. This context is often not considered in identity research in organisations – most studies relating to identity work focus on the tensions between personal identities and professional identities in the workplace. It also reinforces the idea that identity is never fixed but always in negotiation.

Key words: identity work; intersectionality; hybrid identity; gender identity; racio-ethnic identity; professional identity; Indian women managers; grounded theory; Atlas.ti; bird cage metaphor.



CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT	3
1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT	4
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
1.5 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH	5
1.5.1 Prior research on Indian women in organisations	7
1.5.2 Historical context	8
1.5.3 Reforms in legislation	10
1.5.4 Statistics on Indian women in management	12
1.6 METHODOLOGY	15
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	17
1.8 LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE	18
1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS	19
1.9.1 Life story	20
1.9.2 Identity	20

1.9.3	Identity work.....	20
1.9.4	Hybrid identity	20
1.9.5	Racio-ethnic identity.....	20
1.9.6	Intersectionality	21
1.9.7	Resistance	21
1.9.8	Male archetype.....	21
1.9.9	Solo status	22
1.9.10	The term “Indian”.....	22
1.10	OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY.....	22
1.11	CONCLUSION.....	23
CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORICAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT		24
2.1	INTRODUCTION	24
2.2	HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA	25
2.2.1	Arrival of the Dutch.....	25
2.2.2	The Cape under British rule	25
2.2.3	The Voortrekkers/Boers and British in Natal	26
2.2.4	The Voortrekkers/Boers in the Transvaal.....	27
2.2.5	Diamond mines in South Africa.....	28
2.2.6	Establishment of separate townships.....	29
2.3	ARRIVAL OF INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	29
2.3.1	Indentured labourers	29
2.3.2	Arrival of Indian women.....	30
2.3.3	Passenger Indians	31
2.3.4	Culture, caste, class and language	31
2.3.5	Indians’ position under colonialism.....	33
2.4	STATUS OF INDIANS UNDER APARTHEID	37

2.4.1	Population Registration Act of 1950	39
2.4.2	Mixed Marriages Act of 1949.....	39
2.4.3	Group Areas Act.....	39
2.4.4	Aliens Control Act.....	40
2.4.5	The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act	40
2.4.6	The Indian Education Act	41
2.4.7	The Extension of University Education Act	42
2.4.8	Job Reservation Act	43
2.4.9	The demise of apartheid	44
2.5	THE POST-APARTHEID STATUS OF INDIANS.....	45
2.5.1	Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.....	45
2.5.2	The Employment Equity Act and its implications for Indians	49
2.5.3	Gender equality in post-apartheid South Africa.....	53
2.6	CONCLUSION.....	62
CHAPTER 3: GENDER AND MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE		63
3.1	INTRODUCTION	63
3.2	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	64
3.2.1	Person- or gender-centred approaches	65
3.2.2	A situation-centred or organisation-structured approach.....	75
3.2.3	A gender-organisation-system approach (GOS)	79
3.2.4	Intergroup perspective	83
3.2.5	The bicultural framework.....	86
3.2.6	Feminist theories on women in organisations	89
3.2.7	The woman's life context framework	97
3.3	INTERSECTIONALITY	101
3.3.1	History of intersectionality	102

3.3.2	Various views of intersectionality	103
3.3.3	The complex nature of intersectionality.....	105
3.3.4	Intersectionality in organisations	106
3.4	IDENTITY	107
3.4.1	Early identity theories.....	108
3.4.2	Social identities	109
3.4.3	Identity work.....	115
3.4.4	Hybrid identity	117
3.5	WOMEN-IN-MANAGEMENT RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA.	118
3.6	CONCLUSION.....	120
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....		123
4.1	WHAT IS A RESEARCH DESIGN?.....	123
4.2	RESEARCH APPROACH.....	123
4.2.1	Metatheory	125
4.3	KEY SCIENTIFIC BELIEFS.....	130
4.3.1	Ontological position.....	131
4.3.2	Epistemological position.....	131
4.4	RESEARCH STRATEGY – THE QUALITATIVE METHOD.....	132
4.4.1	The qualitative research method.....	132
4.4.2	Researcher’s role in the study.....	134
4.5	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	135
4.5.1	The manner in which entry was achieved	135
4.5.2	The sampling methods employed	136
4.5.3	Biographical data on the sample	138
4.5.4	Data collection method: interviews.....	139
4.5.5	Managing and recording data.....	143

4.5.6	Lessons learned from the pilot study.....	145
4.5.7	Grounded theory	145
4.5.8.	Data analysis using Atlas.ti	159
4.5.9	Strategies used to ensure the quality of the research	161
4.6	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS APPLICABLE TO THE STUDY .	167
4.7	CONCLUSION.....	168
CHAPTER 5: UNPACKING CHILDHOOD IDENTITY THEMES.....		169
5.1	INTRODUCTION	169
5.2	THE WOMEN’S EARLY LIVES	170
5.2.1	Historical context – apartheid.....	170
5.2.2	Socialization through Indian culture	177
5.2.3	The family’s role in the socialization process	188
5.3	METAPHOR OF A CAGED BIRD.....	195
5.3.1	Features of a bird cage	196
5.3.2	Characteristics of a bird	201
5.4	IDENTITY	203
5.4.1	Awareness of unfair treatment	209
5.4.2	Internalizing some elements of subordination	210
5.4.3	Building resistance against subordination	212
5.5	CONCLUSION.....	214
CHAPTER 6: STRUGGLING FOR IDENTITY IN THE CORPORATE CAGE		216
6.1	INTRODUCTION	216
6.2	INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT	222
6.2.1	Lack of career planning.....	222
6.2.2	Passivity and submissiveness.....	223

6.2.3	Respect for elders and authority	224
6.2.4	Conflict avoidance.....	225
6.2.5	Discomfort working with males.....	225
6.2.6	Poor social networking skills	226
6.2.7	Lack of political skills.....	228
6.2.8	Husbands' careers take precedence.....	229
6.2.9	Lack of exposure to business.....	230
6.3	ORGANISATIONAL BARRIERS	230
6.3.1	Racial hierarchy	231
6.3.2	White males guarding their territories.....	232
6.3.3	Perceived incompetence	232
6.3.4	Women's authority undermined.....	233
6.3.5	Indian women as workplace mules	235
6.3.6	Isolation from social and professional networks.....	236
6.3.7	Lack of mentors and coaches	238
6.3.8	Male archetypes regarding the ideal manager	239
6.3.9	Non-accommodation of religious beliefs	240
6.3.10	Poor implementation of Employment Equity	240
6.4	INDIVIDUAL FACTORS THAT ENHANCED THE PARTICIPANTS' PROGRESS	242
6.4.1	High motivation	242
6.4.2	Outsourcing domestic chores and childcare	243
6.4.3	Supportive husbands	244
6.4.4	High levels of self-efficacy.....	245
6.4.5	Willingness to relocate	246
6.4.6	Working on diverse projects.....	247

6.4.7	Developing persuasion skills	248
6.4.8	Becoming assertive	249
6.4.9	Handling conflict.....	251
6.4.10	Working closely with males	251
6.5	CONTINUING THE CAGED BIRD METAPHOR	252
6.5.1	Intruders.....	254
6.5.2	Perching on mountain tops	254
6.6	IDENTITY	256
6.6.1	Perceived inequity in organisations.....	258
6.6.2	Fitting into the majority culture	258
6.6.3	Commitment to the organisation	260
6.7	HYBRID IDENTITIES	261
6.8	CONCLUSION.....	262
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION – WORKING AND REWORKING IDENTITIES		
	264
7.1	INTRODUCTION	264
7.2	IDENTITY AND IDENTITY WORK	266
7.3	THE INFLUENCE OF INDIAN CULTURE ON THE PARTICIPANTS' IDENTITIES	269
7.4	IDENTITY WORK IN THE WOMEN'S EARLY LIVES	270
7.5	IDENTITY WORK IN THE PARTICIPANTS' ADULT LIVES.....	275
7.6	CONCLUSION.....	283
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS		286
8.1	INTRODUCTION	286
8.2	CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH	286
8.3	STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH.....	289

8.4	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	291
8.5	CONCLUSION.....	292
	CHAPTER 9: REFLECTIONS ON MY RESEARCH JOURNEY	294
9.1	INTRODUCTION	294
9.2	REFLEXIVITY.....	294
9.3	MY STORY.....	296
9.4	MY REFLECTIVE JOURNAL	301
9.5	INSIDER VIEW.....	307
9.6	REFLECTIONS ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES.....	309
9.7	CONCLUDING REMARK	312
	REFERENCES	314
	ANNEXURE A: FIRST-LEVEL CODING FROM ATLAS.TI.....	383
	ANNEXURE B: DESCRIPTION OF THE WOMEN IN THE STUDY	385
	ANNEXURE C: EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	393
	ANNEXURE D: CONSENT LETTER	395

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Preamble to The Women’s Charter for Effective Equality .	59
Figure 3.1: Women’s life contexts	101
Figure 4.1: Research process used in the study	124
Figure 4.2: Development of the interview	139
Figure 4.3: Grounded theory process	158
Figure 5.1: Features of a bird cage	197
Figure 5.2: Characteristics of a bird	201
Figure 5.3: Identity formation in childhood	205
Figure 5.4: Conceptual model of identity formation	208
Figure 6.1: Identity salience in the corporate environment	218
Figure 6.2: Model of individual and organisational barriers and individual factors that enhance advancement forming part of women’s identity work	221
Figure 6.3: Eagle swooping on smaller bird	255
Figure 6.4: Struggle for corporate identity	257

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Profile of the national population and the national economically active population by race and gender	12
Table 1.2: Percentage of women directors	13
Table 1.3: Women executive managers by race	14
Table 1.4: Women in top management by race	14
Table 4.1: Metatheoretical assumptions of positivist vs. interpretivist research	130
Table 4.2: Biographical data of the Muslim and Hindu female managers in the main study	139
Table 4.3: Comparison of criteria for judging the quality of quantitative versus qualitative research	161