Stepping Out of the Fish Tank: Ethnic Identity Work of Indian Parents

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Abstract

This article explores the ethnic identity work in which Indian parents engage with regard to allowing their daughters to pursue a tertiary education and a career. Life story interviews were conducted on a purposive sample of 12 sets of South African Indian parents. The results indicate that these parents, especially mothers experience tremendous inner identity conflict, as they are torn between ensuring that daughters maintain their honor and dignity as respectable Indian women, and allowing daughters the freedom to venture away from the protective space of the home and family. The study highlighted that although parents were living in the postapartheid era ethnic identity work was still influenced by the lingering impact of apartheid regarding the status of women. Daughters were still not accorded the same status as sons although they were perceived as future breadwinners in their natal families.

Keywords*:* identity work, ethnic identity, fish tank metaphor, life story interview, Indian parents

How do Indian parents living in South Africa engage in ethnic identity work when deciding whether to allow their daughters the freedom to pursue a tertiary education and career, while possibly maintaining traditional cultural beliefs relating to gender roles? When Indian parents were asked how they balanced cultural expectations that daughters must become housewives with the simultaneous possibility of educating daughters so that they could pursue a profession, Renitha, one of the mothers in the study, replied:

> *"Unlike in the past, where the Indian culture dictated that women should be at home and look after children, these days it is important to educate daughters and to let them work. But being successful in a career does not mean our women should not pay attention to their homes. A working woman is always a mother and a wife before she is a professional."* [1]

This comment epitomizes the ethnic identity work that many parents experience when faced with binaries regarding gender roles which are juxtaposed when it comes to the question of daughters' future education and careers. Many Indian parents tend to encourage their daughters to adhere to cultural expectations and urge them not to negate their fundamental roles as wives and mothers. Parents feel that pursuing education and careers may not allow daughters to be totally committed to their families and homes, which may affect the amount of support they give to a daughter's wish to pursue tertiary education and a career. This results in parents engaging in identity work which Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165) define as how "individuals form, repair, maintain, strengthen or revise constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness."

Most studies relating to ethnic identity on Indian women pursuing tertiary education and careers are conducted in Western countries such as Britain and the United States (Abbas, 2003; Antze, 2011; Hickey, 2006; Ijaz and Abbas, 2010). The literature that has focused on Indian parents educating daughters and allowing them to pursue careers has produced mixed

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[1] Biographical data of participants and proof quotes available by request from author

results. Studies outside India such as in the United States and United Kingdom reveal that daughters have reported that Indian parents were motivated to educate them and permit them to work (Abbas, 2003; Ijaz & Abbas, 2010; Mehta, 2009). By contrast, daughters in India indicated that many parents did not allow them to study and pursue careers, due to their strong adherence to Indian culture (D'Mello, 2006). These diametrically opposed positions have to be interpreted taking into account the socio-economic, historical, cultural, religious factors as well as the country of residence that influence the decisions of parents. Also, these mixed results should be interpreted with the knowledge that Indians are not a homogeneous group and should not be studied as such (Ahmed, 2001). Research has indicated that even when there is a shift from traditional Indian customs practiced by parents, such as educating their daughters and allowing them to work, parents still tend not to negate their ethnic values, and continue to emphasize women's roles as wives and mothers (Ijaz & Abbas, 2010). Prior studies on ethnic identities have generally failed to consider the life stories of parents, or the impact of how a changing socio-economic environment influence decisions to educate daughters and to allow them to pursue careers. The majority of these studies were conducted on first and second generation Indians living in the west (Abbas, 2003; Antze, 2011).

My study fills some of the gaps left by prior studies by considering the changes in the political climate, namely from the apartheid to the post-apartheid eras and the impetus for South African Indian parents to negotiate their ethnic identities. I adopt a qualitative interpretivist approach and apply social identity theory to frame the analysis. I drew on the life stories of fourth- and fifth-generation immigrant Indian parents in South Africa to illustrate how they negotiate their ethnic identities in the process of allowing their daughters to carve out their futures as professionals.

Parents expressed a diverse range of agentic behaviour to indicate the intricate balance they navigated regarding their adherence to cultural norms and their own aspirations

for their daughters. This study further indicated that parents were continually shaping and reshaping their ethnic identities, which operate in complex and paradoxical ways. My study contributes to research on ethnic identity by demonstrating that even when changes occur within the larger society, ingrained ethnic values that are reinforced by a person's significant social group/s and the political environment are difficult to negotiate and renegotiate, with the result that a person prefers to engage in minimal identity work.

In the remainder of the article, I present a review of the relevant literature on the South African context within which Indian parents who participated in the study reside. Thereafter, I consider prior research on ethnic identity and identity work. Next, I describe the interpretivist and life story interview methodology that was adopted in the study. To address the gap in knowledge about Indian parents' ethnic identity negotiation, I drew on a sample of parents who have lived through the apartheid era and who are now faced with abundant educational and career opportunities in the democratic South Africa (post-1994). I present participants' experiences relating to Indian women's education and career prospects. Finally, I discuss the findings, reflect on the limitations of the study and conclude with suggestions for future research.

The South African Context

In 1860 during British colonialism two sets of Indians arrived in South Africa, namely indentured labourers and merchants. The first group consisted of indentured labourers who were brought to work in the sugarcane and sisal plantations in Natal (Maharaj, 1995). The Indian government set a requirement that four women should be brought to Natal for every ten indentured men (Freund, 1995). This resulted in some young widows, women who had been deserted by their husbands, disowned by their families, often poor and sickly, came to Natal to work as indentured labourers (Vahed, 2008). These women were paid low wages

and many were bought, sold and given away in return for rations, clothing, or other favours (Freund, 1995). As Indian women moved out of the indentured system, they were repatriated or married, or were subjugated in some other form of dependence on a male partner or relative (Vahed, 2008).

The second group, known as passenger Indians, arrived ten years later. They were merchants that were brought from India to meet the demands of the indentured labourers (Maharaj, 1995). Their wives and daughters did not need to work as husbands and fathers provided for them respectively (Freund, 1995).

Between 1860 and 1911, when the indentured labourer system was halted there were 152 184 Indians in South Africa. The 2011 Census indicate that there are currently approximately 1.3 million Indians in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Although substantial changes have taken place in the occupational distribution of passenger and indentured Indians in the South African economy, Tamil speaking Hindus remain in the lowest income bracket while Muslims and Gujerati Hindus belong to the entrepreneurial and professional class (Maharaj, 1995).

Thirty years ago, very few South African Indian women pursued tertiary education and a career (Vangarajaloo, 2011). There were two main reasons for not encouraging daughters to study and work. First, historically, Indian parents did not permit daughters to venture out of their homes to study or to seek work, as it was common for the Indian community to follow a patriarchal mindset of women becoming efficient wives and mothers and there was also a fear of Indian females being assaulted in the workplace, which could harm their family's good name (Freund, 1995). The trend was for Indian females to marry at a young age. Hence, many Indian females did not complete their schooling, but dropped out of school and got married. Others got married immediately after completing their schooling (Diesel, 2003).

Second, in South Africa, tertiary education and career opportunities were limited during the apartheid era for Indians (as they were for black Africans, and "coloureds", people of mixed descent). The apartheid government's job reservation policy relegated Indian women to low-level jobs, and in most cases, they were not even recruited into South African organizations (Diesel, 2003). Indian women who worked to overcome dire poverty were mostly employed as teachers, as nurses, or as seamstresses in textile factories. Many worked in the informal sector, selling goods from their homes or assisting their husbands in family businesses (Carrim, 2012). The notion of daughters' pursuing tertiary education and working as professionals in large corporations was therefore an alien concept to the majority of Indian parents until the first democratic elections in South Africa.

The 1994 democratic elections heralded a new era in Indian women's employment. Since legislation has changed to redress previous discriminatory employment practices, Indian women, as a previously disadvantaged group, are no longer restricted to lower level positions in organizations, but have the opportunity to reach top managerial positions. The political and economic conditions for Indian women in South Africa have indeed improved in theory, but many practical questions remain: To what extent are Indian parents willing to educate their daughters and to allow them to pursue careers? What motivates these decisions? How much pressure do extended families and communities exert in influencing the decisions of parents to educate daughters? These are some of the questions that this study attempts to answer.

Despite the cultural discourses that dictate that respectable Indian women be housebound, there has been a steady increase in the enrolment rates of South African Indian women at tertiary institutions and their participation in organizations since the 1994 democratic elections (Vangarajaloo, 2011). In South Africa, according to the 2011 census, out of the economically active Indian female population of 566 390, fewer than a fifth,

96 969, have tertiary qualifications, and 17 227 have no schooling at all (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Furthermore, 42 941 Indian females in the workplace do not have professional qualifications. Of the 96 969 professionally qualified Indian women, only 53 494 (55%) are in the workplace, according to a Commission for Employment Equity Report (CEE Report, 2012). These figures show that most Indian women who have obtained tertiary qualifications do not pursue careers thereafter. Moreover, the majority of Indian women (469 955) have not entered corporate South Africa (CEE Report, 2012), but may be housewives or are working in the informal sector.

Daughters' Education and Careers

The literature on Indian women describes daughters being inculcated with (inter)dependent and subservient behaviour to serve the interests of the family from a young age, unlike in Western cultures (Hickey, 2006). The literature shows that Indian daughters are taught deference and obedience at a tender age, and are not encouraged to be independent and individualistic, but to respect parents', elders' and teachers' authority (Hickey, 2006). Daughters who act independently of parental authority are regarded as deviant by the extended family and community (Ahmed, 2001). Parents are therefore instrumental in guiding daughters' education and career aspirations. Thus, daughters are expected to seek their parents' blessing and approval on university and career choices (Hickey, 2006). This stereotypical behaviour was reported by researchers in the past regarding Indian women's gender socialization in Western countries. However, some researchers' findings have challenged stereotypical beliefs of daughters being oppressed as a result of patriarchal family relations, having fixed religious identities and being dependent on men in the family (Maslak & Singhal, 2008; Mehta, 2009). For example, Mehta (2009) conducted a study on Asian women in the United States who were pursuing tertiary education regarding how they

negotiated their cultural identities in terms of dating, independence and clothing. The results of the study indicated that women in the study discarded certain elements of their cultural identities by preferring dating to arranged marriages, wanting to pursue careers after marriage and adopting western clothing.

Parents' support of daughters' educational and career aspirations is also related to parents' own level of education (Antze, 2011). For example, Kambhampati and Pal (2001) conducted a study in West Bengal to establish whether parents encouraged and supported sons or daughters to a greater extent in respect of their pursuing further studies and careers. The study indicated that mothers' education level increased daughters' chances of being educated but had no impact on sons' education level. Fathers' education level meant both sons and daughters' were equally encouraged in pursuing further education.

Identity Work and Ethnic Identity

My study drew on social identity theory as a theoretical lens. It is clear from studies conducted on immigrants that ethnic identity forms an integral part of people's social identity. Moreover, there is a growing body of research illustrating the powerful impact of people's social identities on their perceptions, behaviour and experiences (Maslak and Singhal, 2008; Mehta, 2009). These studies regard ethnic identity as one aspect of social identity and define it as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255).

Immigrant Indians as well as those born and raised in a host culture that is different to theirs, are constantly faced with the challenges of working and reworking their identities to achieve a coherent sense of self in trying to adapt to the host culture and at the same time not negating their cultural values. This tension in their identities results in identity work which

can be defined as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow and Andersen, 1987, p. 1348). Phelan and Hunt (1998, p.277) suggest an alternative definition of identity work as "an interactional accomplishment that is socially constructed, interpreted and communicated via words, deeds and images." Identity is therefore an ongoing process where individuals "expand effort to repair and clarify representations of self" (Phelan and Hunt, 1998, p. 278).

British colonialism and thereafter apartheid played a major role in the ethnic identity work Indians engaged in. Although British colonialism and later the apartheid system had placed Indians in segregated townships with minimal contact among different racial groups (Carrim, 2012) a link with western culture through the press, cinemas, departmental stores and institutions of higher learning where interracial interaction took place South African Indians embraced styles of dress and language associated with a white culture (Duphelia-Mesthrie, 2000). This led to a decline in traditional, cultural and religious norms and has increased the secularisation of especially the educated Indian community. A further breakdown in Indian customs and norms took place in the 1970's when joint family structures were replaced by nuclear homes (Duphelia-Mesthrie, 2000). Due to their stigmatised racial identities they were constantly negotiating more inclusive racial and ethnic identities to fit in with western values practiced by white South Africans but within culturally acceptable boundaries (Freund, 1995). My analysis therefore considers the role of racial and gender differences which shape women's experiences and which are influenced by the political climate in which people live, a point ignored in ethnic studies (Das Gupta, 1997).

In the past, Indian parents had to undergo minimal ethnic identity work regarding their daughters' futures, because the dominant cultural beliefs maintained the traditional role of women as homemakers and obedient wives. These days, however, with social changes taking

place worldwide due to globalization and (im)migration, parents' identities are increasingly

challenged. Parents experience tensions relating to their ethnic identities when boundaries

around these roles become more permeable, due to changing economic and social conditions,

and there is pressure to allow Indian females to deviate from their assigned roles as

homemakers. Inman, Howard, Walker, and Beaumont (2007) point out that community and

external family pressure to conform to cultural values and norms may lead to a perpetuation

of customs by parents, and warn that this may result in less engagement in identity work.

Thus, it may be argued that ethnic identities are situational, as well as relational. The

relational aspect of ethnic identity means that identity is negotiated between parents and

extended family and the community. The situational aspect implies that the questions "who

am I?" or "who are we?" are answered according to the economic need to allow daughters to

pursue careers and the macro environment that Indian parents encounter and that allows them

greater opportunities to educate their daughters (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

The concept of identity is a popular field of research in minority studies relating to

Asian Indian immigrants in Western countries such as the United States (Mehta, 2009) and

the United Kingdom (Abbas, 2003; Ahmad, 2006). Studies on ethnic identity have also been

conducted in India (D'Mello, 2006; Maslak & Singhal, 2008). Most research on ethnic

identity focuses on acculturation and assimilation to the host culture and on how Indians

adopt bicultural identities (Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006), and ethnic continuity

which manifests in strict adherence to cultural values and norms (Inman et al., 2007). Prior

studies focusing on parents allowing daughters to study and pursue careers focus on the

ethnic identity of these parents without explicitly delineating how and to what extent they

engaged in identity work (Abbas, 2003). The majority of studies suggest that ethnic identity

is fluid and is constantly being adjusted by daughters in Western countries, but remains fairly

static among parents (Ahmed, 2001; D'Mello, 2006). For example, in their study on parents'

changing attitudes toward daughters' education and careers, Ijaz and Abbas (2010) acknowledge that their study contains complex issues of identity, but their study does not take into account how parents engage in identity work in the context of their community's cultural and religious expectations and the political context.

However, in the current study, I focused on the extent to which South African Indian parents engage in identity work when faced with conflicting roles relating to daughters' education and careers on the one hand, and maintaining their respectability on the other hand.

My study therefore provides an important departure from the research relating to ethnic identity conducted amongst Indians living in the United States and the United Kingdom, as I focus on the status of Indian women during the apartheid dispensation and to what extent do the remnants of this era still dictate gendered ethnic identity work.

The main research question stemming from the above background on ethnic identity work of Indian parents is to what extent does the history of apartheid have on the gendered ethnic identity work Indian South Africans parents do?

METHOD

To comprehend the ethnic identity negotiation engaged in by Indian parents in allowing their daughters to pursue a tertiary education and a career, a qualitative, interpretivist methodology was used. I adopted this approach because I was interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of how parents engaged in identity work related to their ethnic identities in the context of a democratic South Africa (after 1994) and also within their respective families and communities (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

I obtained the assistance of a research assistant to conduct semi-structured life-story interviews to gain a perspective of the ethnic identity work parents engaged in, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1989). I focused on a life-story approach because prior studies on the

ethnic identity of Indians in Western countries have tended to concentrate on Indians' current

situation and have not taken their historical context into account. I believe that understanding

the past will enable me to comprehend the current ethnic identity work of Indian parents

better. I opted for semi-structured interviews, because they allowed me to compare the

responses of participants. Each set of parents were interviewed for three hours. A few

examples of the questions that were asked during the interviews are provided in table 1.

Table 1. Some Examples of the Interview Questions.

1. Tell me about the role(s) of Indian women during apartheid.

2. Were Indian women allowed to pursue tertiary education and careers during apartheid? If no, why not?

3. What job opportunities are available to Indian women during postapartheid?

4. To what extent did women receive community support during apartheid related to their education and careers? Please elaborate.

Purposive and snowball sampling was used (Babbie, 2008). The sample consisted of

parents whose daughters attended various schools. The principals of the various schools were

contacted and the purpose of the study was outlined and permission was obtained to address

the girls in their final year of study at the school. The aim of the research was outlined and

daughters were asked to discuss the objective of the research with their parents. Those girls

whose parents were willing to take part in the study were contacted. The interviewer

telephonically provided the parents with more detail on the reasons for the research. A

meeting was set up at the participants' homes and interviews were conducted with their

informed consent. Twelve sets of parents were interviewed.

After each interview, data were transcribed and uploaded on to the Atlas.ti software

system. This software program enabled me to compare themes and information across

participants, which resulted in the story-line becoming much clearer. The program also

enabled me to conceptualize higher order themes due to the ease of comparing data obtained from participants.

The data gathered from the interviews were reread several times to make meaning of the information relayed by the participants. I thereafter extracted themes using content analysis. I constantly engaged in comparing data, which allowed themes to emerge in an inductive manner (Babbie, 2008). I sought relationships between the various themes extracted and the core theme around which the other themes centred was identified (Bryman & Bell, 2007). To enhance the credibility of the study, a trained observer was provided with the transcripts of the interviews and independently coded the themes. I had a face-to-face session with the trained observer and compared themes. The trained observer also obtained similar themes, which enhanced the credibility of the study. Participants were also provided with a copy of the final themes. They agreed that I had captured their narratives accurately.

RESULTS

Demographics

The biographical data indicates that majority of parents in the study had not pursued tertiary education themselves. Very few of the mothers (only two participants) and fathers (only five participants) had tertiary education. The remaining mothers had completed their schooling and married immediately thereafter, and were housewives at the time of the study. Majority of fathers owned their own businesses in Indian townships. The age of parents ranged from 32 to 61 years. Parents were all raised in the apartheid era. Parents from the two largest religious denominations in the Indian community in South Africa, namely Islam and Hinduism were chosen. The mothers, who were housewives, assisted husbands in the family business, prepared and sold food, or were seamstresses and operated their businesses from their homes. Parents were from middle class families.

Apartheid versus the post-apartheid era

Women's status

I trace the status of women in the macro environment from the apartheid to the post-apartheid eras. Parents mentioned that, during the apartheid era women in South Africa were regarded as minors and were not allowed to conclude contracts or own property. For Indian women this situation was exacerbated due to their low status within the macro environment where unlike white women they were not allowed to vote. Fahima like the other parents in the study points to the disadvantaged position Indian women held in the macro environment:

"When I got married in the 1980's we were still in the apartheid era. I wanted to open a bank account but I couldn't as my husband had to be a signatory."

The 1994 elections heralded a new era for Indian women's emancipation. Parents pointed out that women are no longer regarded as minors and for the first time in South African history they can vote, own property and enter into contracts. Anisha echoes the sentiments of other participants related to the emancipated Indian women in post-apartheid South Africa:

"The 1994 democratic elections has freed me as a woman and I feel worthy as a person. Now I don't have to depend on my husband to sign contracts on my behalf."

Level of education

From parents' comments it was clear that the level of schooling was also a problem during the apartheid era. During this era Indians lived in their own townships due to enforced legislation which placed the four racial groups in their own designated areas. Indian pupils lived in demarcated Indian areas and could only attend Indian schools. Parents complained that compared to other race groups the apartheid government had ensured that their school syllabus was very difficult. They indicated that this was a way of curbing Indians from

exceling at school and competing against whites as Indians were regarded as hard workers and academic achievers. Thus, while the majority of mothers in the study had completed their schooling and some had achieved good grades but their results did not translate into qualifying them for university entrance. Farzaana like the other interviewees recalled being disadvantaged by the high examination standards placed on Indian pupils to curb them from attending university:

" I wanted to study medicine but did not meet the requirements as our final year school exam papers were of a high standard and I just could not get good grades."

Parents noted that both girls and boys followed the same school syllabus. The exception being girls did needlework as an extra subject and boys took on woodwork. These subjects were introduced in the school syllabus to develop skills in Indians considering they did not have diverse work opportunities within corporates. Menagay echoes the views of the other parents in terms of the school curriculum that was followed:

"Girls took on masculine subjects such as physics, chemistry, accounting and mathematics which were compulsory. From grade 1 to grade 9 we had needlework and boys took woodwork."

University entrance

When parents were growing up there were minimal choices of universities they could attend. Parents revealed, enrolment at South African universities depended on obtaining permission from the government. The University of Westville which was a higher education institution for Indian students only was one option. Two multiracial universities (The University of the Witwatersrand and University of Cape Town) were other options. The latter two universities worked according to a quota system where only the very best Indian students were eligible to

attend. Moosa confirms the other parents' comments as he had to obtain permission from the Minister of Education during the apartheid era to study at a multicultural university:

"Although I had exceptional marks there was no guarantee I would have been accepted at a white University as I was non-white. I was fortunate to have been accepted and to have qualified as an engineer. I was also fortunate that I was employed by an overseas company based in South Africa."

Parents remarked that there are better educational and career opportunities available for their daughters in post-apartheid South Africa. Daughters are able to attend the best schools and enrol at universities of their choice. Also, daughters have the freedom to choose school subjects unlike in the past where the school curriculum was fixed and parents had no choice but to accept certain subjects. Parents mentioned that daughters who want to enter for example the commerce field are free to choose only commerce subjects in their last two years at school. In this way they have the basic grounding in this field when they pursue a tertiary education. Shiraz like the other parents in the study commented on the diverse school and university options daughters have of attending in the post-apartheid era:

"Our daughter wants to pursue IT programming after completing her schooling. Since last year she has opted to take on computer sciences as her main subjects. Meaning that she is already geared toward that profession and does not have to focus on subjects like for example, biology that will detract from her future career. Not like in our times when we were forced to take on certain school subjects."

I thought a priori that the choice of school would influence parents' decision to allow daughters to attend tertiary education and pursue careers but this was not the case. Rubina

like the other interviewees pointed out that their choice of school for their daughter did not influence their decision in allowing her to pursue tertiary education and a career in the future:

"Sending my daughter to an Islamic school does not affect our decision to allow her to follow a career and to study further. We decided to send her to an Islamic school as it is only one block away from our home. It is out of convenience and the proximity of the school to our home that we are sending her there."

Career opportunities

Career opportunities for Indian women in the corporate environment were minimal during apartheid, as clerical work was reserved for white women. Parents comment that managerial positions and male-dominated careers such as engineering were reserved for white males only. Rashid's lament over the limited education and career opportunities experienced by Indian women is illustrative of what was generally heard from the interviewees:

"During the apartheid era there were no career opportunities for Indian South African women. Sending them to university would have been futile as they would not have been appointed as accountants, marketing managers or even human resource practitioners. Company policy was to place white women in secretarial and administrative positions while white males were managers. Our women were not recruited in organisations"

Parents mentioned that due to labour legislation and equitable gender policies women have the same career opportunities as men in the post-apartheid era. Parents indicate although South African labour legislation favours the employment and career progression of women, patriarchy still reigns supreme in the corporate environment. Men are still in senior management posts and keep the majority of women at lower levels in organisations. Rajen,

like the other parents in the sample supports the new developments in labour legislation for women in South Africa:

   "Today South Africa has diverse individuals in organisations, where men and women are working together at all levels. With the development of gender equality, the Employment Equity Act and Affirmative Action policies, women have the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder and to be on par with men."

Islam and Hinduism

Women's rights

Muslim parents in the study stated in Islam women have the freedom to be educated and to pursue careers of their choice. However, during the apartheid era state policy restricted the immigration of foreigners into South Africa and this included religious leaders. South African religious leaders were from Indian communities and held beliefs rooted in patriarchy unlike some of their overseas counterparts who held egalitarian views regarding women's education and careers. Since South African Muslims were not aware of women's rights, they accepted conservative religious injunctions from local religious leaders. This situation changed during the post-apartheid era when religious leaders with liberal views regarding women's rights started immigrating to South Africa. South African Muslims for the first time experienced diverse and liberal opinions regarding Muslim women's privileges from religious leaders. With the result that these days there is a greater awareness of Muslim women's rights. Haseena, like the other Muslim parents, shared her views regarding the Islamic perspective relating to educating women:

   "Islam allows Muslim women to be educated and to work in a field of her choice as long as she guards her chastity. Yet when I was growing up our Imaams told us we could not study and work and our parents and community enforced these beliefs."

Hindu parents stated that during the apartheid era their parents subscribed to Manu's patriarchal beliefs which subjugated women. Hindu parents became aware of women's rights in the post-apartheid era when many came into contact with Hindu priests and women immigrants from the Asian subcontinent that held tertiary qualifications and were professionals. It was these women and the Hindu priests that enlightened parents about women's rights in Hinduism in terms of the ancient Vedic scriptures and pointed out that Manu's laws which were a recent introduction in Hinduism should be discarded as it subjugates women. Dinesh highlights the educational and religious disadvantages Hindu women experienced in the past:

"In the past Hindu women were expected to follow their religious teachings and to prepare for marriage. Education was not a priority as it was believed that it was against their religious beliefs. This was how Hindu women were trampled upon as men used religion to enhance their position in the family and society."

Role models

The parents in my study mentioned women were not aware of any opportunities that could change their restrictive situations; they had no proper guidance from women teachers, mothers and aunts as these women were also restricted by the same religious rules that applied to the younger generation. Women did not have role models that could inform them regarding their right to be educated and to work. Fahima like the other parents shares her views regarding the lack of professional women role models in the Indian community:

"In my community and family none of the women were educated. So who could I go to for advice regarding further studies and working for an organisation? Those days very few women studied and this was the exception rather than the norm."

Parents indicated that the post-apartheid era has changed this trend as Indian women are found in most careers. They mentioned that professional women role models are found in all Indian communities and families. Uzair echoes the sentiments of other parents in the study relating to professional Indian women being on the increase in Indian families:

"In democratic South Africa with an abundance of career opportunities all the families I know has at least one daughter who is educated and working as a professional."

Community and extended family views

Women's respectability

Parents commented that during the apartheid era they were forced to live in Indian townships which insulated them from other races and resulted in reinforcing cultural values and norms. Indian culture prescribed men should be in charge of taking care of the financial needs of the family and therefore women who worked were frowned upon. The community did not encourage women to pursue tertiary education, as the perception was that women who attended university were 'out of line', since they had the freedom to mingle with male students. Also, the universities women would have had to attend during the apartheid era were out of town which implied staying away from home. The parents stated this type of freedom for daughters would have evoked criticism from the community, and families would have been regarded as low class and would not have been able to attract respectable suitors. Marrying foreign bridegrooms was difficult due to restrictive South African immigration laws and since most families did not have strong ties with families abroad it became difficult to arrange such marriages. Also, South African legislation prohibited marriages across racial lines which resulted in daughters having a small pool of South African Indian male suitors to choose from. These restrictions forced Indian women to maintain their respectability.

Rubina, like the other mothers, shared her views of the community's opinion of women who pursued further studies and careers in the past:

"During the apartheid years, our community discouraged women to pursue tertiary education and careers as the belief was, that it was the duty of men to provide for the family. Families whose daughters were seen as out of line were punished by the community as their daughters would not get husbands. Parents and daughters had to look after themselves and the family reputation."

Parents mentioned since democracy more Indian parents are educating their daughters and allowing them to pursue careers in South Africa as these days there are better workplace opportunities for daughters. The community these days is more tolerant of daughters working as the added income has assisted families meeting their financial needs and enhanced many families' social standing. Sunden comments on the tolerance of the community regarding daughters working:

"In the past our women were forced to earn a pittance to help the family survive. These days the community is encouraging women to work as daughters' income is raising the family name in society. Indian women also prefer visiting female doctors, lawyers and dentists with their problems so we need more women who are educated. "

Teachers' views

The mothers in my study remarked that male teachers valued the importance of education and encouraged them to pursue tertiary education and would call on their parents to discuss their performance and potential. Their parents were old-fashioned and since their fathers came from orthodox backgrounds they did not heed the advice of teachers and stopped their daughters from pursuing tertiary education. In the post-apartheid era participants noted that

parents concerned about the future careers of their daughters approach teachers for guidance and support which was unheard of in the past. Ruweida like the other mothers in the study highlights she was a good performer in school and encouraged by her teachers to excel in her studies:

"My teacher was my dad's friend and used to encourage me to perform well. My dad and teacher had many conversations about my education and I was highly motivated because I was determined to complete my schooling and study further. That's where my dreams ended! My father ensured that culture came first and as a young woman instructed me to prepare for marriage."

Women's education and work

In the apartheid era older male family members also played a major role in women not being able to study or pursue careers. Parents in this study came from extended/joint families where their grandfathers or their fathers' eldest brothers made decisions for the entire family. These decisions extended to younger brothers and their families as well. Parents were not allowed to take unilateral decisions as elder males had the final say in all matters and in this way daughters lost out on many education and career opportunities. Halim, like the other parents, acknowledged that his uncle had a major influence on family decisions:

"My extended family was traditional and believed that women were not to work or study further. When my sister completed her standard 8 (grade 10), the teacher encouraged my late father to send her to college, because she was bright. However at that time we were staying with my father's uncle, who was traditional. His uncle refused to send her to study further and my father accepted his decision."

Parents pointed out that with the increase in nuclear family structures since the apartheid era the joint/extended family units within the South African Indian community has vanished to a great extent. Parents commented that extended family members no longer have an influence on their decisions. Therefore, these days' parents decide in allowing daughters to be educated and to pursue careers. Also, nowadays due to the rise in cost of living, extended family members are allowing their daughters to pursue tertiary education and careers. Menagay remarks on the diminishing role of extended family members in nuclear family structures:

"I have never lived with my in-laws since I got married. My husband and I decide on family matters. My husband is the head of the house and his decision is final. Even now he has decided that he will educate our daughter and allow her to work. In our family all our relatives' daughters are educated and they have good careers. Those days are gone when families look down upon daughters who are studying and working and elder brothers making decisions for younger brothers."

Parenting sons and daughters

Raising sons and daughters

The parents in the study mentioned that when they were growing up their parents imposed stricter rules on daughters than on sons. Again this was strongly related to maintaining cultural norms that guarded the respectability of daughters. Daughters were restricted from studying but sons were allowed to pursue tertiary education and careers. When sons could not gain entry at South African universities, they were sent abroad to pursue tertiary education. They further noted that women were not allowed to study because parents felt unlike sons, educated daughters would not benefit them financially as they would marry and move out of their natal homes. Also, there were no job opportunities for Indian women and they would

have been relegated to lower level posts despite their education level. The participants in the study mentioned that the fear amongst parents during the apartheid era was that Indian women's respectability would be compromised due to being the target of sexual harassment. Since fathers and brothers had no recourse if their sisters and daughters were sexually harassed as they could not interfere in corporate affairs, they opted to prohibit women from entering the workplace. In order to maintain the women's sexual purity and protect her dignity, women were not allowed to venture into the corporate environment. Sadia, like the other mothers, expressed her views regarding her parents' restriction on her studies:

"My sisters and I were not encouraged to study although we wanted to, but my brother could study. They believed that we had to stay at home and prepare for our future roles as wives. My father encouraged my brother to study, because if a tragedy struck, my brother would support the family financially."

Affordability

Another big challenge the parents highlighted was the affordability of education. During apartheid, due to limited career opportunities Indian families struggled financially. Most of the participants' mothers worked in order to supplement the financial needs of the family. Poor financial conditions aggravated the position for daughters, as preference was given to their brothers' education. Parents stated that very few multinational organisations provided bursaries to black students. Also, these bursaries were given to students whose parents were working in these organisations. This was another stumbling block in terms of Indian women's studies. These days with greater access to bursaries, scholarships and student loans tertiary education has become possible for Indian women. Farzana, like the other mothers, expressed the financial difficulty they experienced:

"As soon as we completed schooling we had to work for Indian businesses so that we could help maintain the family. Our parents were getting old and they earned a meagre wage. My mother had two jobs. Since we did not have money it was difficult for us to study further."

Attention to daughters' careers

These days, parents pay more attention to daughters' education and careers than that of sons. Due to nuclear family units sons are responsible of taking care of their own families. This together with the increase in divorce rates in the Indian community has resulted in daughters becoming breadwinners. Parents mentioned that due to the increase in divorce rates they would not encourage daughters to marry immediately after completing their tertiary education. Sharmla like the other participants points out the reason for paying more attention to her daughter's than her son's education and career:

"Nowadays, daughters are taking care of parents in the South African Indian community. We cannot rely on our son to look after us in old age as he has his wife and children to support. With the cost of living being so high and my husband being a cardiac patient and I have diabetes our daughter needs a good job to maintain us. That is why we feel our daughter's education is just as crucial as our son's if not more important."

Although parents are willing to educate their daughters but they still want them to maintain their respectability. Parents maintained that they still live in Indian communities where family reputation is important and is dependent on daughters' behaviours. Therefore, while sons are given freedom of movement and have less adult supervision, daughters are not allowed the same autonomy. Parents also want daughters to study at a university close to home whereas these restrictions do not apply to sons. Parents revealed that although women's status in the macro environment has improved but within their townships men are leaders and

women still occupy a secondary status. Farzaana like the other parents maintains the

respectability of her family by curbing her daughter's movements:

"We have to maintain our respectability because we live in an Indian community

where people still gossip. I give my daughter freedom but within limits."

A dichotomy I noticed was that although parents placed more emphasis on daughters'

education compared to that of sons, fathers did not expose daughters to the family business.

Parents stated that they believed that as long as sons lived in their natal homes it was their

duty to assist in the family business. Parents did not also want to expose daughters to

uncouth customers. Siva, a businessman who fixes electrical appliances encounters many

unsavoury characters and like the other entrepreneurs wants to protect his daughters from

such customers:

"In my line of business I mostly have male customers and if they are unhappy with an

item they tend to be vulgar and I do not want my daughter who comes from a respectable

family to be exposed to such customers. I get my son to assist me during holidays."

Parents' ethnic identity work

Mothers in the study mentioned they were the caretakers of their daughters' respectability

and socialisation to ethnic values. If their daughters did not toe the line the community and

extended family would blame mothers for being poor role models and encouraging their bad

habits. Mothers pointed out that they have constant pressure from family, community and

husbands to ensure daughters adhere to ethnic values and not to stray from established

traditional cultural norms.   Mothers have the responsibility to teach daughters the proper

Indian decorum and cultural protocols when dealing with adults and in community gatherings

so as not to embarrass the family and to ensure that daughters through their respectable

behaviour secure husbands from upper class families. Parents stated that fathers are not

involved to the same extent as mothers in their daughters' upbringing. Fathers are usually consulted on important matters by mothers such as for example permitting daughters to further their education but not on mundane issues. Thus implying that, mothers are the custodians of Indian traditions and perpetuating adherence to these norms and values onto subsequent generations of females. Mothers on the one hand ensure daughters adhere to ethnic values and then again allowing them to venture into the world which is laden with western values and norms but also curbing them from adopting alternative ways that are contrary to traditional Indian norms and values. Mothers therefore filter viewpoints and opinions that will bring the family name in disrepute and also weaken adherence to ethnic customs. Mothers mentioned that they only encourage daughters to inculcate westerns norms and values that will not negate their Indian cultural values. Mothers stated for example, daughters are allowed to wear western clothes as long as these are not minis and skimpy clothes. Daughters are allowed to go shopping with friends but mothers would go with them to the mall to supervise their daughters. Daughters are not allowed to go clubbing even if they are chaperoned by brothers. Bibi like the other women participants mentions the ethnic identity struggle she is experiencing in wanting to allow her daughter to pursue further studies and a career:

"On the one hand I want my daughter to follow our cultural values but on the hand I know going out into the world she will be exposed to a lot of norms that are against our ways. If she becomes too western I will be blamed for not being strict with her. Husbands get away with it because our community and family will point a finger at me for not keeping her in check."

This results in mothers negotiating their ethnic identity to a greater extent than fathers as they have a greater responsibility in raising daughters according to traditional Indian ethnic

traditions. Thus, when mothers' ethnic identities are challenged by western ideologies, they undergo major identity struggle and work to reconcile their current beliefs with mores that are contradictory to their traditional value systems.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the ethnic identity work South African Indian parents engaged in, relating to daughters' further education and careers. The overall findings suggest that Indian parents experience tremendous difficulties in negotiating their ethnic identities when they have to deal with allowing their daughters the freedom to study and pursue careers. During the apartheid era parents were not aware of the rights of women but this has changed in some respects. It might be expected of this group of fourth- and fifth-generation Indian immigrant parents to have a weak ethnic identity, because Indians have been in South Africa for 150 years and had minimal contact with families on the Asian subcontinent. However, this was not the case, as the apartheid system ensured that Indians lived in their own segregated townships and only socialized with their own ethnic group, which strengthened adherence to their ethnic culture. These conditions were different from the situation in Western countries, where Indians choose freely to socialize only with their own ethnic and religious groups and have minimal contact with the host (Chakrabarti, 2008). Living among other Indians and being insulated from Western influences during the apartheid era resulted in strong ethnic beliefs, as any deviations would have resulted in families being ostracized by the wider community in these townships (Carrim, 2012).

This strong adherence to cultural values has filtered through into the post-apartheid era as well. In the post-apartheid era parents have the choice of moving into multicultural suburbs but they still live in Indian townships as they want to live near family and friends. The result being, that they are dictated by the norms in their communities, thus creating a

myopic viewpoint that results in a 'fish tank' perspective. Their viewpoints are interpreted from an ethnic perspective as they still adhere to notions of honour relating to female sexuality, and create barriers to daughters' movements (Mahalingham & Leu, 2005) as is evident in their attitudes toward raising sons and daughters. Mothers, compared to fathers are instrumental in socialising daughters to preserve the traditional gender status quo by passively accepting their subservient roles and raising chauvinistic sons and submissive daughters (Kallavayalil, 2004). This is reflected by males being leaders in their homes and communities and daughters being in subservient roles even when they are educated and hold high level organisational posts (Carrim, 2012).

There were, however, instances during the post-apartheid era where parents went against the cultural norms of women's roles in the homes. This was also as a result of members within the community also being in such a predicament. For example, the study indicated that parents emphasised daughters' tertiary education and careers to a greater extent than that of sons as the expectation was that during their old age daughters would assume breadwinner roles.

I expected *a priori* that religion would be an obstacle to advancing women's careers. However, Muslim and Hindu participants pointed out that culture, and not religion, was a barrier to women's education and career advancement. Their awareness of women's rights to education and work was only realised in the post-apartheid era after being exposed to religious leaders who had liberal views of women and highly educated female immigrants from India.

Parents engaged in ethnic identity work and beliefs about women's place being at home in terms of how prepared they were to delay their daughters' marriages. This is in contrast to findings in research in the United States, where daughters are encouraged to marry only after completing their tertiary education (Mahalingham & Leu, 2005). Although the

participants in the study clung strongly to cultural values and norms, extenuating and changing circumstances in post-apartheid South Africa, such as increased divorce rates in the Indian community and a rise in the number of unmarried daughters assuming the role of sole breadwinners resulted in their negotiating their ethnic identities, so that in the future their daughters and natal families will not suffer. By contrast, research in Britain and the United States among first-generation Indian immigrants indicates that divorces are a rare occurrence (Mahalingham & Leu, 2005), and their daughters are educated to increase the social standing of parents (Chakrabarti, 2008), whereas our study shows that this is a secondary reason for South African Indian parents to educate their daughters.

The life story interpretivist qualitative strategy is not the only way to understand the ethnic identity work Indian parents engage in regarding educating their daughters and allowing them to pursue careers. I do, however, hope that this study will create greater awareness of (South) African Indian parents' experiences and the lingering effects of apartheid on their gendered ethnic identity work.

Future studies in this field are essential, as I believe the findings may have a number of implications for Indian women entering corporate South Africa. Firstly, managers will benefit from understanding that single Indian women need to abide by parental ethnic norms and values. Such an understanding may help managers to gain insight into Indian women's reluctance to engage in certain workplace activities because they have to abide by cultural norms and values which may not fit easily into the mould of a Western workplace. Secondly, organizations in diverse sectors could make a more focused attempt to enlighten parents and prospective students in their final year at school about various career opportunities, and in this way enhance the diversity of their workforce. Thirdly, research focusing on parents living in non-Indian areas can be conducted to investigate the extent to which they abide by cultural norms and values. While this study provides novel insight into South African Indian

parents' ethnic identity work, it is limited in sense that we do not know how this may be similar to or different from other ethnic groups in South Africa. No studies could be located of this nature. Future research studies should consider a comparative research design encompassing other South African ethnic groups.

The point of departure in the study was to focus on parents' perspectives to achieve understanding of the extent to which South African Indian parents are prepared to engage in ethnic identity work in allowing daughters the freedom to pursue a tertiary education and careers. The study revealed that in some respects parents had a myopic perspective, but in other situations were prepared to step out of the fish bowl after weighing up the options. If the situation was favourable and did not deviate too far from ethnic values and norms, parents were prepared to work and rework their identities and change their perceptions. Overall, the parents were still 'trapped' in the apartheid era and found it difficult to negotiate and renegotiate their ethnic identities and deviated only to a limited extent from internalized cultural norms and values. Mothers especially engaged in greater ethnic identity renegotiation than fathers as they are the gatekeepers of perpetuating Indian ethnicity and mores. I believe that this study should serve as a basis for understanding the ethnic identity work parents engage in after their daughters have completed their tertiary education and embarked on their respective careers.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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