CHAPTER 5:
UNPACKING CHILDHOOD IDENTITY THEMES

> *"My family tended to suppress us, especially as females. I always felt it was unfair, as the boys were allowed to express their views once they were 15 or 16 years of age. That's the problem in Indian cultures – we do not become as independent as people in other cultures because we have to suppress our views and thoughts. You find out that you are slightly behind and you don't express your views so people think that you just follow other people and it is a problem when you grow up."* (Preity)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

My interest in exploring the challenges experienced by Indian female managers in the South African workplace was to understand the multiple forces that have influenced their current life and career situations (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Bell & Nkomo, 2001). In addition to understanding the organisational context within which the women are now situated, I also set out to probe the influence of their early lives, as well as that of their cultural and religious context. These multiple influences are positioned within the broader historical context of South Africa, particularly the history of Indians in South Africa and their socio-economic and political location during apartheid and post-apartheid.

My focus in this research is on understanding the women's entire life structure and the interdependence among the different aspects. This focus assumes that an Indian woman manager's professional life does not exist apart from other life spheres or the historical and social context within which it is embedded in line with the arguments of Bell and Nkomo (2001). However, I do not take the position that the women were passive receptacles of the influences of their contexts. I wanted to learn about the strategies that the women in my study used in breaking through the barriers they encountered on their journeys to management careers. Following the principles of grounded theory, in this chapter, I share my interpretations of these influences and their significance for their journeys.

The focus in Chapters 5 and 6 is on the 13 women managers who participated in the main part of the study. Pseudonyms are used in this chapter and Chapter 6 when quoting the women's words to protect their identities. Many of their comments are cited *verbatim*, and their words are printed in italics and indented to highlight and honour their voices. However, identifying information is omitted to maintain confidentiality.

I honour the participants in this study for their candour and commitment to exploring their life and career journeys with me. What was discussed occasionally brought up discomfort, pain and new insights for both me, as the researcher, and for the participants. I also acknowledge my own subjectivity in this interpretation, which was a filter for the understanding I am about to share.

5.2 THE WOMEN'S EARLY LIVES

In order to understand the journeys of Indian females into management, their pasts have to be understood to gain a better understanding of their present situations. Hence, I discuss the participants' early lives in terms of the historical context in which they were raised, namely apartheid. I then move on to discuss the influence of Indian culture, religion, the family and society in the lives of these women and how these elements interacted and became part of these Indian females' identities. In Chapter 6, I then show how these early life influences informed their career journeys to and experiences in managerial positions in corporate South Africa. My analysis of the women's early life stories took me back and forth, through concentric circles of apartheid, culture, family and religion, all of which shaped their gender and racio-ethnic identities, as depicted in Figure 3.1.

5.2.1 Historical context – apartheid

5.2.1.1 A sense of apartness

The 13 Indian women managers who participated in the main part of the study were born and raised in the apartheid era and were confined to demarcated Indian townships, because at that time South African society was hierarchically stratified

according to race. They were all educated in designated Indian schools. During this era, every fibre of the lives of Indians was governed by apartheid policies. Indians were confined to separate residential and trading areas, schools, hospitals, sport, recreational facilities, Indian colleges and even an Indian university, namely the University of Durban Westville (Bhana, 2008). Forced segregation of amenities was enforced by the *Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, No 49 of 1953*, which aimed at reducing contact between whites and blacks (Boddy-Evans, 2010). The participants were all negatively affected by this era in various ways, some more than others. Many remember the ruthless manner in which non-white people were treated. Discrimination and exclusion were common, and oppression was harsh, deeply rooted, continuing and difficult for non-whites (Denmark & Paludi, 2008).

For the women, memories of the segregation of apartheid were paramount. The words of Karina capture the sense of apartness that the women experienced growing up under apartheid:

> *"I think apartheid was very rife in the era I was growing up in. I remember going to beaches and it would say blacks, whites and Indians. I remember in Durban those days. The buses and the toilets and certain restaurants were for whites only. I remember those things and going to the beach front and you are a little kid and want to jump on the trampoline and the security guard would come to you and say 'it's for whites only' and you did not understand that but you grew up in that era."*

One of the tenets of apartheid was that there should be no mixing of the races – a doctrine that many groups internalized, because it was harshly reinforced by the government. The majority of the participants did not have any contact with members of other races, except for the African maids and gardeners working at their homes. Many parents shielded their daughters from the cruelty of apartheid and would not expose them to situations which involved interactions with whites while these young women were growing up. Their parents would therefore not send them to any public places where they had to stand in separate queues or use amenities which were segregated. Nevertheless, apartheid was a reality and one from which they could not escape in the long term, no matter how much their parents tried to protect them, as

they had to venture out into the world to study and work. The protection Mahima's family provided against white rejection was experienced by all the women:

> *"We were very sheltered and protected by the family and we never went to restaurants, and when we went to restaurants…it never really clicked that these are owned by Indians and they were predominantly Indian, but we're always surrounded by Indian people. So I can't say we went to or were exposed to something where our family went to something and we were turned down."*

Waheeda, like the other women in the study, could not escape apartheid:

> *"My father always spoke about how badly the Indians were treated during the apartheid era and how privileged the whites were. We also grew up in that era, so we were aware of how it was. My parents always encouraged us to do our best and to get good jobs. They had a lot of faith in a bright future for us."*

Apartheid became such a part of the women's lives that they internalized and perpetuated the enforced segregation in their interactions with people from other racio-ethnic groups. Very few of the women had contact with or formed substantive relationships with blacks or whites. Most of the women attended multicultural universities. However, when they had the opportunity to interact with non-white pupils from other race groups in sport tournaments they could not cross the racial divide. At university, where whites tended to befriend Indians the women would not associate with these whites, as they were pressurized by Indian peers not to form such friendships. Shamila, like the other participants, found that racial segregation was present at the university she attended:

> *"The first time was when I went to university. What became apparent was the lack of mixing. All the Indians would be together, all the whites would be together and all the blacks would be together. If you were Indian and you would socialize with the whites, then you would be acting beyond your social status and being friends with the enemies and the pressure came from internal groups and not so much from others."*

After 1976, television provided an opportunity to "see" how white people were living and conducting their lives. The characters they saw on their television sets during the evenings while they were growing up provided them with a glimpse into the lives of white families. Subjects taught at school were geared towards portraying blacks as inferior. Depictions of idealized white family life and the purported superior strength and intelligence of white people had the effect of creating a belief among Indians in the superiority of the white race. Waheeda echoes the sentiments of the other women who participated in the study in her description of Indians' believing in white supremacy:

> *"Our history books always showed the white man winning wars, having superior intelligence, and even watching television shows we always saw the whites as being good people and having such good lives and the non-whites always suffering and being bad people. We grew up feeling the white man is better than us in every aspect. But the history books were distorted and the television shows were not reality but to make non-whites seem inferior. Many Indians still* believe *whites are better, as they will call a white guy to fix their broken television set, but have no faith in an Indian man, for example."*

It is important to understand not only the ways in which apartheid led to a physical separation of races, but also how much terror and force were used to ensure compliance with this legalized separation. It was illegal to criticize the apartheid government for its policies, and people suspected of opposing the government were arrested, were detained indefinitely without being charged, or were even killed (Underwood, 2010). Hence, Indian parents would not discuss political issues in their homes with children, as they were afraid of being detained without trial. Saira's comment depicts the women's parents' suppression of speech and fear of imprisonment during apartheid:

> *"My parents did not talk about race or issues of being Indian. During the apartheid days, parents were afraid of talking about these things. If these types of things had leaked they would be arrested and sent to prison."*

5.2.1.2 Inferior material resources

The Indian schools were not properly equipped. They did not have a wide choice in curricula and the Indian community had to sponsor any additional developments on school property. All the women were aware of the inferior level of education they were receiving, but did not protest against the injustices perpetrated by the government against them. Their reaction was to passively accept the inferior school conditions, as their parents were instrumental in discouraging them from protesting against the government in fear of retaliation. However, they did not realize the extent to which the education they were receiving at the time was inferior, until post-apartheid South Africa, when school pupils have a much higher level of education and far better facilities at school than they ever had. Waheeda's comment on the ill-equipped schools Indians attended during the apartheid era epitomises the opinions of the other women as well:

> *"I attended a government school. We had no choice but to attend an Indian school… We did not have a choice of subjects, so children who wanted to branch out into medicine were disadvantaged when applying for careers in the medical field, as they did not offer biology in the school and we had poorly equipped science laboratories… In terms of athletics, Indians did not have opportunities. If we wanted any improvements in school, the community used to sponsor such things."*

Apart from Indians' receiving an inferior education due to their race, the syllabus of Indian schools was segregated according to gender. Since women were regarded as second class citizens during the apartheid era and the State was patriarchal, subjects in school were segregated according to gender. The women were encouraged to do needlework and boys used to do woodwork. This further highlighted the women's inferior status in the wider society. Preity comments on having to take on "feminine" subjects at school, as were the case with the other women:

> *"I used to hate needlework. I would have preferred doing woodwork. Since I was a girl I had to stick to the traditional feminine subjects assigned to me in school by the apartheid government."*

Apartheid plagued and constrained the women in all aspects of their lives. Most of their parents had not completed their schooling, as the government of the day had made the school syllabus extremely difficult. As a result, the majority of the women did not have educated role models in their immediate families whom they could emulate. After matriculating, the majority of the participants enrolled at historically white English-medium universities, which appeared to resist apartheid but implemented racial quotas and were not committed to the liberal principles they ostensibly advocated (Padayachee, 2003).

A prevalent theme in the participants' stories was that they could not pursue careers that interested them, as there were restrictions due to the Job Reservation Act of 1926. Indian females were mainly teachers, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, nurses and workers on factory floors. Careers in the medical field allowed them to operate medical practices in their designated Indian areas. The apartheid government's aim was to support the Job Reservation Act where elite jobs and professions were reserved for whites and lower level posts for Indians. If Indian females received higher education levels they would aspire to jobs that were reserved for whites (Hart & Padayachee, 2000). The majority of the women's parents had their own businesses or they were teachers.

However, one of the findings of this study is that some of the women were brave enough to pursue careers previously closed to blacks, such as chartered accounting and human resource management. In order to register as a chartered accountant, Indians had to serve articles, and during apartheid, no firms would employ Indians as articled clerks. The result was that Indians became bookkeepers, as serving articles was not a prerequisite for that profession. Human resource management was reserved for whites. Nevertheless, some of the participants pursued these two types of career in spite of being warned by Indian lecturers to abandon their pursuits.

By the mid-1980s, multinational organisations were recruiting Indians to serve articles and these women were recruited immediately after completing their studies. However, whites held on tightly to their positions in human resource management, and it was only in the early 1990s that companies started recruiting top Indian female graduates into the human resource field. These women applied for jobs in

multinational organisations which were dominated by foreign nationals, as they believed they would have a chance of being employed due to their outstanding university results and were immediately recruited in the human resource and chartered accounting fields. However, their Indian female friends who were not top academic achievers in these fields were only recruited into South African organisations after the demise of apartheid. The first signs of the cracks in the apartheid system were noticeable during this period, and Indian females who were top academic achievers could actually enter careers once deemed not pursuable by the South African Indian community. Shabana captures the negativity the women experienced when applying for jobs after graduating:

> *"I started my articles in 1986, so until a year before that, Indian people couldn't become Chartered Accountants because they couldn't serve articles. I went along for an interview with Company E. In those days, it was the Big 8 firms – the international firms. I went along to them and to my mind they were never going to give me a job, as they had not really employed any Indian females up to that point – they had a couple of Indian males, but they hadn't appointed any females. So I thought, well, what do I have to lose? They're never going to appoint me. …it was interesting – they offered me a position the same day."*

I will now turn my attention to the role of the Indian culture in the socialization of the women in their youth. Because their families had weak ties with families abroad, they could not go back to India and lived apart from other races in South Africa, so Indian culture played a significant role in the lives of these women. The aspects of the Indian culture I focus on are gender roles, values (obedience and respect, honour and shame, passive and subservient behaviour, and hard work), the role of the extended family and community and religion. The family was the main socialization mechanism through which Indian culture was transmitted.

5.2.2 Socialization through Indian culture

5.2.2.1 Gender roles in Indian culture

Indian culture prescribes marriage and household duties for women, and careers for men. When the women who participated in the study were growing up, Indian females who worked were frowned upon. Labour outside the home was not a part of an Indian female's role. After completing school, when these women enrolled at universities, in the majority of cases, their friends and cousins got married and became housewives, as prescribed by Indian culture. I found that sons were treated in the same way as daughters until puberty. Thereafter, sons were not encouraged to assist mothers in household chores. Shamila mentions the gender role expectations of males and females in Indian culture which was also mentioned by the other women in the study:

> *"The Indian culture prescribes men to handle the affairs of business and women should focus on the home."*

Most of the women's friends were trained to be efficient housewives and were not motivated to excel in school or to pursue further studies. The main reason they did not pursue tertiary education was that their parents felt it was the duty of husbands to care for their daughters. At the end of her schooling career, Saira, like the other women, were amongst the very few who pursued tertiary education:

> *"Most of my friends married after school and most of my family as well. For a female to be educated was not important, as the emphasis in the Indian culture is for a woman to be a good wife and mother and to take care of her home, although Islam does not prevent a woman from being educated. So all my friends and cousins married men who could support them financially, and none of them have ventured into the workplace."*

Nevertheless, professional women were regarded with respect, provided they were in the medical field or law, as these fields were regarded as prestigious. These types of career would then raise the status of the family and these females would be

sought after by eligible bachelors and their families. Waheeda captures the essence of Indian society's views on women who worked in the era she was raised in:

> *"In the 1980s fewer females were going to study and I think their opportunities were less. I suppose because it was the 1980s Indians were more conservative and not many Indian females were being educated and working and people would look down upon a working woman because she was regarded as low. They only had respect for women who were doctors, dentists or lawyers, because once again there were double standards. These are occupations that bring prestige to the community and improve the class status of the family and Indians are generally prestige-orientated and want to be part of the upper class and therefore these women are regarded with awe and respected, but women in other occupations are regarded as low."*

Regarding mixed-gender gatherings, the women found men always dominated and would be in the forefront. Women would take a back seat and were not encouraged to conduct presentations or coordinate formal gatherings. The women would be in a physically separate location from men, and would be passive recipients of information presented by males. Leadership roles were thus discouraged, as they conflicted with the cultural expectations of appropriate behaviour for Indian females. Waheeda highlights the separation in mixed-gender gatherings which other participants experienced as well:

> *"In the Indian culture, the woman is encouraged to be more in the shadow than in the limelight, so we play more the support function as opposed to the leadership role. Even in our religious gatherings, the men would give the speeches and conduct the talks. When women give talks, it will be in a religious gathering where there are women only. These will then be small group gatherings and do not occur so often as the male gatherings. Whereas with the male religious gatherings, women will attend, but will sit separate to the men or the gathering will consist of males only, and will then be huge gatherings where women are not encouraged to deliver talks."*

The next section deals with the values emphasised by the Indian culture in the socialization of the women in the study.

5.2.2.2 Values emphasised by Indian culture

- *Obedience and respect*

The women mentioned that an obedient daughter and wife are the ideal of womanhood in Indian culture. Obedience to authority is an important part of Indian culture and the participants found that as daughters they were not allowed to challenge parents, elders and teachers. All the women mentioned that they were obedient as children, as rebelling against parents or their teachers was against their value system. Mahima's comment encapsulates the obedience these women displayed in their childhood:

> *"The teachers were very fond of me because my homework was always up to date and I was a quiet and obedient child. Usually teachers approved and liked quiet children as we were the ones giving teachers the least problems."*

For Shamila, respecting elders is a prerequisite in the Indian culture, as the other women also pointed out:

> *"In the Indian culture, the young are supposed to respect the elders, otherwise the whole community will talk bad about you if you are rude towards your elders and even your parents get insulted for raising ill-mannered children."*

- *Honour and shame*

The participants remarked that, being confined to Indian townships and having nowhere else to go, their families had to conform to Indian cultural expectations. Family honour became vital to South African Indians, as it is connected to women's modesty. The women pointed out that honour is related to sexuality in Indian culture – the reputation of a family depends on the behaviour of its daughters. The women reported a number of restrictions relating to their freedom

of external movement and association. In keeping with the idea of chastity as prescribed by Indian culture, the women were expected to dress modestly, because wearing revealing clothes would have implied flaunting their sexuality. They were allowed to participate in extracurricular activities and go out with friends, but always had to be chaperoned by elders in the family. The reasons provided by their parents were that chaste daughters enhanced the reputation of the family and were more likely to attract suitable marriage prospects. Also, living in close proximity to one's family and the community in Indian townships, and having close contact with family abroad acted as a deterrent to families' deviating from the prescribed cultural and religious norms. It was for this reason that women were not allowed to associate with boys once they reached puberty. When they were not participating in activities outside the home, they were largely housebound. Even as young adults, they were not allowed to live on their own and had to attend universities in their home towns and live with their parents. Saira commented on the sheltered lives women such as the participants led while growing up:

> *"We were three of us, two girls and a boy and my father was very strict with my sister and me. He never allowed us to go out with our friends unchaperoned. The way we dressed – he never enforced traditional dress on us, but he was particular in what we wore. We had to wear long tops with pants and we were not allowed to wear tight clothes with short tops. We were not allowed to expose our bodies and wear sleeveless clothes and open back dresses."*

Mahima, like the other women, was always supervised when playing with boys before reaching puberty. Upon reaching puberty she had to stop associating with boys:

> *"Even before I reached puberty my mother would supervise me closely when I played with boys. When I was 13 years old, my parents told me it was not appropriate for me to play with the boys, as I have reached puberty, and in the Hindu culture and religion once a girl reaches puberty she should start looking after the honour of her family and not*

be seen with boys. Up until that age, they regarded me as a child, but once I reached puberty everything changed."

Bipasha highlights some of the other women's feelings when she draws attention to the strict control parents exercised in protecting the honour and dignity of their daughters:

"My mother was fine to let go of us when we were married, but if you are single you had to live at home. I mean my sister used to go to the Laudium College of Education and we were living in Lenasia. She wasn't allowed to go stay at the res there. She had to travel a distance of 60 kilometres every day from Lenasia to Laudium."

Shamila, like all the other women, never had a boyfriend, even when she was a young adult at university:

"In the Indian culture, having a boyfriend brings the reputation of your family down and a girl's honour is her family's honour, so I was not allowed to have boyfriends."

Waheeda underscores the importance of maintaining close links to extended family on the Indian subcontinent, although most of the women's families were third and fourth generation South Africans:

"Most Indian families kept in touch with their families in India and Pakistan. As most of the Indians who came to South Africa were from the same district in India and interrelated, so if a girl misbehaves in South Africa, her relatives and the whole district in India or Pakistan will hear about it, as family members and neighbours broadcast it abroad. So basically it is a 'small' community we are living in. Till today we cannot get away from our families abroad. There is still that link. Among us Indians when a girl and boy want to get married, the first question is 'who are your grandparents?' In that way your family lineage is linked and if your grandparents or great-grandparents were not good people, the marriage between the girl and boy will never take place. This is changing in many families these days, as marriages take place between

girls and boys of different castes, but in many traditional families this still takes place."

- *Passive and subservient behaviour among women*

The women in the study state that the Indian culture encourages women to behave in a passive and subservient manner. Women are not encouraged to be outspoken, but are expected to be gentle in speech, to exercise restraint and not to engage in public outbursts. Conflict is viewed in a negative light in Indian culture, and women therefore abstain from arguing with people outside the home. The participants mentioned that another reason they did not engage in arguments with neighbours and the community was that they did not want to create the impression they were from low-class families, and their cultural upbringing emphasised harmony with the wider community. Once again, living in a tight-knit community, not having the freedom of living amongst other races and having to face the members of the community on a daily basis, the women interviewed in the study reported that they did everything possible to maintain harmony and to enhance their social status. In the event of any misunderstandings with members of their community, their fathers and brothers would solve the problems or such conflict would be ignored to maintain harmonious relationships. The women displayed passivity when confronted with conflict. Shamila typifies the passive behaviour the women had to engage in due to cultural expectations as follows:

"Indian females are supposed to be docile and subservient. Otherwise they will be regarded as being uncouth. That [docile and subservient behaviour] is regarded as appropriate behaviour in the Indian culture for women, as men are to be the ones to fight for the women's rights and to stand up for them. Women are not supposed to behave like men, who are supposed to be loud and outspoken."

- *Hard work*

All the participants mentioned that they worked hard, as this is the value that was most emphasised when they were growing up. The women also witnessed their

parents working hard and being successful. Hard work had earned these women awards and leadership positions at school and this acted as a positive motivator, and was a catalyst in achieving university graduate status. Saira said the idea of working hard was inculcated in her at a young age, and this applied to the other women in the study as well:

> *"For us giving our best and working hard has been instilled in us by our parents from a young age. Also our parents were hard workers and by seeing them working so hard, we believe it is something normal and we should also be like that."*

In line with the above discussion of Indian culture in general, I now turn my attention to the role played by the women's extended families and community regarding their socialization in terms of Indian culture. I focus specifically on the roles of the extended family, teachers and the community in this regard.

5.2.2.3 Role of the extended family and the community in socializing girls

The women in the study were trailblazers within their respective families and communities regarding the pursuit of tertiary education and careers. Their parents' siblings tried to dissuade their fathers from sending these women to study further. The **extended family** felt that, by pursuing further studies, these women were breaking all traditions and argued that this would bring humiliation to their family and would ruin their honour. The participants also complained that jealousy from their extended families was rife when they wanted to attend university, as in most cases even their male cousins did not pursue tertiary education. Their mothers were also subjected to derision from the older females in the extended family for supporting the decision of their daughters to pursue tertiary education. Shabana's mother, like most of the other women's mothers, was a victim of taunts from her female relatives because her husband and she had dared to go against their conservative family's ways and had educated their daughters:

> *"There were all these proposals coming for my sister and myself when we were at school. I was in Standard 6 and now I was expected to get married, as the girls did not go beyond Standard 6 or 7. So my mother*

> *bore the brunt of all this because they were too scared to tell my father anything. So my mother suffered from all of this because all my aunts were at my mother all the time because what a scandal, how could she do this and allow her daughters to go to school and finish and go to university and what were they going to do and how she would pay for it and go to hell. So it was extremely difficult for my mother."*

Waheeda's extended family placed tremendous pressure on her father when he wanted her to attend university – this was an experience most of the participants had with their respective extended families:

> *"My extended family was always discouraging me from studying. They were always talking to my father not to allow me to study and I was fortunate my father did not listen to them. They were jealous and they are conservative and felt women should not study."*

I found a contradiction in terms of the women's behaviour towards their extended families. On the one hand, the women rebelled against extended families' requesting them to adhere to cultural norms and not pursuing tertiary education, but, on the other hand, when visiting the homes of extended families, the women conformed to the dress code and behaviour regarded as appropriate in Indian culture, for example, not discussing politics and business with the men in the family, as the men regard such talk as inappropriate for women. Saira's comment on her clothing encapsulates the amount of respect the women displayed toward members of the extended family:

> *"In the extended family I would never dress like this. You know not for anything else other than respect because you know wearing jeans and a shirt or whatever is a problem for them. I've got cousins who are Aalimas (female religious authorities), all of them you know, in scarf or covered, so you tend to stick out there."*

School is another form of socialisation where children learn acceptable forms of behaviour in the wider society. Indian culture was perpetuated in the schools the women attended. Teachers did not encourage girls to fight with boys, as the teachers regarded such behaviour in a negative light. The women therefore

suppressed their anger and approached problems without tackling the males head on. The teachers were strict disciplinarians and expected pupils to obey and respect them without asking too many questions. Critical thinking was not encouraged and girls were discouraged from being outspoken by their teachers. Here again teachers subscribed to the cultural behaviours they deemed appropriate for women. This further encouraged the participants to adopt passive behaviour. In addition, teachers also practised segregation of sexes outside school hours. The participants found it strange that during school hours male teachers were friendly toward them and spoke a lot to them. However, the same male teachers who were so friendly during school hours would not even greet the women or even talk to them outside normal school hours as they were afraid the community would accuse them of having an illicit affair with the female student.

I however also noted a contradiction to the traditional Indian cultural norm expectations when participants mentioned some male teachers who did not discourage the participants from progressing in their studies. These women noticed how female teachers were subjugated by male teachers within the school system. Within the education system as a whole, women faced a double-bind in that they were disempowered both by the apartheid system and by Indian male teachers who subscribed to Indian norms relegating women to second class citizen status and homemaker roles, thus leading to female teachers' subjugation and subordination. Shamila, like the other participants, lost confidence from a young age due to the negative attitudes of male teachers towards her:

> *"We lack confidence and assertiveness and it has a lot to do with our schooling. In our school days our teachers were suppressed and they were transferring that on to us subconsciously, that's number one. Number two when you have weak teachers and you ask questions and the teachers cannot answer the questions, they actually insult you so that they don't feel they are incompetent. And that happened to me when I was in school. And now you're a shy person and you're unassertive and that goes to your head and you ask yourself, what have I done so wrong and you don't do it again. You never question again and that definitely happens at school."*

Saira felt that teachers perpetuated Indian culture at school, a belief the majority of the participants shared:

> *"Teachers perpetuated the Indian culture because you congregated together and that is how you maintained the Indian culture."*

The **community** within which the women who participated in the study were raised ensured that young girls adhered to the Indian traditions and norms. These women remarked that when young girls and women were perceived as not toeing the line, the community would take up the issue and would reprimand the transgressors and their families. The participants therefore ensured they did not deviate from Indian cultural expectations, as it would bring shame and dishonour to the family. Parents were more concerned about what society would think of their daughters' behaviour than about how their daughters felt, and would therefore curb the women in their exploration toward self-discovery. Mahima explains that society dictated how she dressed and behaved, and her views were reiterated by the other women in the study:

> *"It was more a societal expectation of what others are going to say, what others are going to think, but has always been the norm in my family and I think that when you walk out wearing a short skirt, it is not so much about whether you are comfortable or your child is comfortable, but more about what other people will say and how they will look at you, and this will not necessarily reflect your character or the way you are as a person, but your image gives the person looking from the outside thinking that is not acceptable for a female. Or look at her and how she is dressed, you know, that kind of comment that you would hear other people saying."*

5.2.2.4 The role of religious leaders in socializing the women

I thought *a priori* that religion would be found to play a separate role in the early lives of the participants, but discovered that it forms part of the culture. While religion played a pivotal role in the lives of these women, they did not highlight it in their discussions relating to their childhood and mainly made reference to it by discussing

the role played by religious leaders in inculcating religious values. Religion did, however, become salient in the women's adult lives, and especially in their workplaces, as I discuss more fully in Chapter 6.

Religious institutions played a role in the process of socialization when the women were growing up. Religious leaders played a major part of the formative years of these women's lives. Both Muslim and Hindu women attended religious classes every afternoon after school and in this way their religious beliefs were moulded and shaped by spiritual leaders, in addition to their teachings at home. Religious classes also allowed the women in the study to learn their vernacular languages. The women reported that they were restricted in their movements, as religious teachers monitored their behaviour all the time. Since their parents invariably subscribed to the belief that religious teachers cannot be questioned, the participants had to walk the straight and narrow path in case there were any complaints about their behaviour. Saira describes her experiences of religious teachers monitoring her behaviour, a phenomenon which the other women also encountered:

> *"The religious leaders would watch our every move, even out of Madressah (classes Muslim children attend after school to learn about the teachings of Islam). We were told to wear Islamic clothes outside Madressah and we would get a tongue lashing if we did not; we had to behave modestly and not to stand on the streets talking to boys, etc. In that sense it was good as they taught us values that would enhance our reputation. We were not allowed to attend any parties at school. They did not emphasise secular education and they did not want us to take part in netball, for example, and wear shorts. We were not allowed to take part in drama classes, but I took part in all these events as my father encouraged it."*

While the wider community played an important role in moulding the participants, family played a critical role in shaping the women's gender identities and played a dominant role throughout the early lives of these women. Specifically, family structure influenced the women's behaviour, the values they learned as young girls and their understanding of what it means to be a woman.

5.2.3 The family's role in the socialization process

Josselson (1996) points out, that children are born to a particular family in a particular social time, to a social class, a race and gender. Our families teach us what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, and we are provided with a religious structure and a set of values that form our outlook on the world.

5.2.3.1 Family structure

The majority of the women who participated in the study lived in nuclear families, but some lived in extended families for a part of their childhood before their parents moved into their own nuclear units. In Western cultures, living in a nuclear family is the norm, but an extended/joint family structure is standard in Indian culture. In the past, living in nuclear families was the exception rather than the rule amongst Indians in South Africa. Joint and extended family units are still prevalent among many South African Indians. Since the women in the study were raised in families that went against the model of acceptable Indian family structures, I feel that this aspect of the family structure should be explored at this juncture, as I want to make it clear that they were living in nuclear family units. In the current study, I found that, although the women lived in nuclear families, they still maintained relations with their extended families. Extended family members had limited influence on major decisions in the women's lives relating to their education and careers, but they still influenced the participants' prescribed gender role behaviours to a large extent. Sushmita summarises the women's close connection to extended families as follows:

> *"I think growing up in an extended family had the advantage that you had a fantastic support network, you had role models – you had lots of people that influenced and shaped who you became. My parents then moved and we were a family unit of our own. For me that was not a problem, because we all lived close to each other. We lived almost as neighbours, so they were still very much part of my life."*

5.2.3.2 Fathers' contradictory messages in socializing daughters

Fathers play a pivotal role in socializing daughters in terms of Indian culture. In the majority of cases, the fathers of the participants were entrepreneurs operating their own businesses. To me it seemed that the women's fathers' roles in socializing these women according to Indian cultural traditions were a push-pull factor. On the one hand, the participants' fathers wanted their daughters to pursue tertiary education and become independent, and on the other hand, these women's fathers wanted them to adhere to Indian cultural values such as obedience and respect, and passive and subservient behaviour, and to promote family honour while avoiding family shame. I provide a few examples the women mentioned in terms of these push-pull factors below.

All the women's fathers supported their daughters' pursuing careers, although these dreams went against the gender role expectations in Indian culture, where women were expected to stay at home. These fathers wanted their daughters to be independent career women, and did not emphasise household chores, which was at odds with Indian cultural norms. These fathers also prevented their wives from burdening the participants with cooking and housework, as the fathers wanted their daughters to perform well at school, so that they would be in a position to pursue tertiary education. This worked in the women's favour, as they could focus on their studies and were not hampered by mundane household chores. Mahima voices the experiences of the other women relating to fathers' emphasising education more than household chores:

> *"My father had given me the opportunity to study and had allowed me to focus on my studies and had not forced the traditional Indian gender roles such as cooking and learning to run a home on me. He always told my mother to leave me alone, I will come around."*

The high career expectations from fathers led the women to become achievers at school. Hard work was modelled and encouraged by their parents. Parents, especially fathers, supported the women in their achievements at school. It is also for this reason that the women were not pushed into marriage by their fathers. Their fathers' encouragement appears to be unusual within the largely patriarchal Indian

society in which the women grew up. One possible explanation for these fathers' behaviour is the effect that apartheid had on their ability to improve the lives of the family. These fathers realized that education would give their daughters an edge over other Indian women who were struggling. No matter how well the women performed at school, their fathers would always encourage them to perform even better. This propelled the women to achieve even higher results, as they felt they did not want to disappoint their fathers. Karina's father's expectations of her school performance are typical of the expectations of the other women's fathers:

> *"My father made me feel terrible. I wasn't a 90s student. I was more between the 60s and 80s student and that made me feel terrible. My father still made me feel terrible – you can do better. It was always you can do better, you can do better. And I grew up with that. Good is not enough and if you got a good in your report it was not good enough – they wanted excellent. You know that type of thing."*

Fathers adhered to the usual cultural socialization of sons and daughters. When it came to conversations related to business, these were restricted to the males in the family. While education was encouraged by fathers, the women were kept away from business discussions, which is once again a contradiction in how the participants' fathers behaved. Fathers exposed sons to business wheeling and dealing from a young age, but daughters were not included in these types of activities. Most of the women therefore entered the corporate environment ignorant of how to conduct business and of corporate life. Shamila encountered the same type of unfair treatment in relation to her brother which the other women also experienced:

> *"Indian men have always been in charge of the financial affairs in the home, as they are till today in many homes the primary breadwinners in the family. The Indian culture prescribes men to handle the affairs of business and women should focus on the home. Indian men believe they are providers and should take charge of everything related to paying bonds, insurance, etc. supporting the family and it is so much a part of their socialization that they believe since the woman's domain is the kitchen, women should not interfere in the financial side of affairs.*

> *Especially when they have sons – their sons are groomed to take charge of financial affairs of the home."*

The participants' fathers' contradictory messages led to a number of consequences within their families and these eventually filtered through to the community. Due to fathers' undermining the women's ability to conduct business, their sons [the participants' brothers] did not adopt egalitarian views towards the division of labour and instead embraced sexist views towards the females in their homes. Where mothers assisted fathers in the businesses, sons were raised with the notion that it is acceptable for women to be both workers and housewives, thus further weakening any egalitarian views sons might have had towards a division of labour within the home. Fathers thus gave the participants contradictory messages. One was that they should pursue careers like men, and the other was that they were responsible for household chores. Although the participants' fathers stopped the participants' mothers from involving their daughters in too many household chores (because they wanted the participants to succeed in their studies), the message that came across very strongly was still that housework is a woman's domain. Waheeda captures the contradictory messages the women received from their fathers regarding females' gender roles in the following comment:

> *"My father had raised my brothers not to do any household chores, as he believed that is a woman's domain and men should not be involved in doing housework. That is the Indian male mentality where they want the women to run a home, as it is their duty as females, but women should also assist them like men in their businesses. So my brother grew up in a house full of women – we were four sisters – and he never lifted a finger to assist in the house. My mother had no say in the matter, as my father would scold her if she even asked my brother to assist in keeping his room clean. My brother was therefore raised in a very patriarchal fashion where the men have their role and women have double roles – their traditional roles in the homes and to be career women."*

Fathers also gave brothers more freedom regarding dating and staying out till late at night, compared to their sisters. In this respect, Rani echoes the experiences of the rest of the women and their roles as females in Indian families:

> *"I think within Indian families, irrespective of what cultural background you are from or sect, as a female you should have an unblemished record, okay. And I think you will be able to identify with what I'm saying to you. It's like if you were involved in a physical fight as opposed to your brother, the way it's going to be dealt with will be very different. So even in terms of relationships, my father was very distinct with me. You will not have a relationship with anyone until you are 22. And that is something I did. Whereas with my brother, I, on the other hand, was ordering his flowers, etc. for his girlfriends at school, of which my parents were aware of. They didn't mind that. Yet if the roles were reversed it would not have been received well."*

The participants all admitted that they had a closer relationship with their fathers than with their mothers. Fathers played an important role in the success stories of these women. Had it not been for their fathers' being far-sighted, liberal-minded, wanting a better start in life for their daughters and going against the grain of society, these women might not have been able to pursue tertiary education. Fathers also allowed their daughters to choose their careers, as in most cases the fathers themselves were not fully cognizant of the careers available to their daughters and what these careers entailed. These fathers placed an equal emphasis on the education of their sons and that of their daughters. Firdous, like all the other participants, regards her father as the most significant person in her life in encouraging her to study:

> *"I think the most influential person in my life was definitely my father. He placed a very high premium on education and allowed equal opportunity to all his children to acquire as much education as we wanted."*

5.2.3.3 Non-identification with mother

The participants' mothers were homemakers. Some of the women's mothers became wage earners, but the majority were never exposed to earning a living. For those women whose mothers were earning, their jobs were a necessity rather than a choice. The participants' mothers never entered the corporate environment, but earned a living in the informal economy, either by assisting their husbands in the family businesses, or by engaging in their own entrepreneurial endeavours due to

financial difficulties. The participants' mothers did not step out of the confines of the Indian townships to gain employment. Their work was restricted to Indian areas and interacting with Indian people, which led them to maintain strong cultural and religious values. For the women's mothers, gender stereotypes, gender prejudice and patriarchal factors dictated they should be subjugated and under the control of men and should only work when a male was no longer able to support the family. Mahima aptly describes the role of her mother as a housewife which she and the other women observed in their formative years:

> *"My mother had to learn cooking and cleaning skills as opposed to wanting to work. The reason being, that the norm in the Indian culture is that the primary role of a woman is that of a wife and a mother. More importantly it is supporting her husband by being a good wife and therefore a professional life becomes secondary."*

One aspect that encouraged passive behaviour among the women who participated in the study was that they grew up in homes where they witnessed their mothers being controlled by their husbands. Their fathers made the final decisions in the homes and, in the majority of cases their mothers were overruled if they expressed an opinion. The participants' fathers were breadwinners and even where mothers were working, their monetary contributions to the households were secondary. The women witnessed the subservient behaviour of their mothers towards the males in the home, and they also modelled their mothers' behaviours by dutifully obeying fathers' and brothers' demands. In the majority of cases, the women's brothers were revered and their mothers were at the brothers' beck and call. Even where brothers were younger than the participants, sisters would carry out their commands. These women were socialized in patriarchal families and societies where females are placed in subservient positions. They internalized patriarchal attitudes and beliefs which oppressed and discriminated against them. Waheeda found herself in a weaker position compared to her brother, like the majority of the women in this study:

> *"My brother always did have more power and I accepted it. There was nothing I could do about it as my father gave him the power and my father's word was law… So it was very difficult for me to rebel against him and since I was living in his house, his word was law. Sometimes it*

> *made you feel lousy, especially when my brother used to also treat us older sisters without respect and like he was the boss of the house where we had to be at his beck and call, but I accepted it."*

Unlike with their relationships and strong identification with their fathers, the women who participated in the study did not wish to emulate their mothers and accordingly their mothers had a much smaller influence on them. The majority of women were tomboys and they did not enjoy cooking and when their mothers would ask for assistance they would grudgingly assist in household chores. When they could, they hid behind their studies in order to avoid being too involved in conducting "feminine" tasks. The majority of the women at some point in their childhood learned to cook and assist their mothers in household chores. Unlike their mothers, however, these women focused on their studies and careers. They did not have very close relationships with their mothers, as their mothers wanted them to be perfect housewives and cooks, and these women were rebelling against these types of gender prescriptions. These arguments affected them into their adult lives when they were married with children, and their mothers would still be arguing with them regarding their cooking skills. To this day, the women in this study are not passionate about cooking and engage in this activity out of necessity to feed their families, rather than for the love of it.

Shamila, like the other women in the study, had a rocky relationship with her mother because Shamila was not passionate about the home:

> *"The things my mother wanted me to do I did not like to do, such as cooking and homely things. That was not me at all. Being a good housewife was the biggest issue we constantly had."*

The participants' accounts of their early life stories led me to explore the metaphor of a caged bird to illustrate the restrictive lives the women led when they were growing up, as set out in the next section. The metaphor of the bird is divided into two parts. The first part deals with a description of the cage and the second part deals with a description of the characteristics of a bird.

5.3 METAPHOR OF A CAGED BIRD

When I started analysing my data I did not anticipate I would be using a metaphor to unpack the lives of Indian female managers. However, as I listened to and re-read the women's life stories and generated themes, I felt I could associate their life stories with a metaphor.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2006-2007), a metaphor is a figure of speech replacing one idea or object with another to suggest an analogous relationship. Analogous in this context implies that if dissimilar things relate to each other in some aspects, they are likely to relate in others too (Carpenter, 2008). Aita, McIlvain, Susman, and Crabtree (2003) suggest that using metaphors in qualitative research as an analytic strategy assists in explaining complex experiences and leads to a deeper understanding of phenomena, such as the life stories of Indian female managers.

I toyed with the idea of two metaphors and started researching both. The first metaphor I chose was that of birds with broken wings. However, I realized reading through the women's stories that their wings were not broken and decided on a second metaphor which I felt was more suited to the life stories of these women, namely that of caged birds.

Listening to the life stories of the participants and later analysing my data, images of caged birds sprung up in my mind. Their early life stories painted a picture of many constraints on who they were as young girls and what they could become as adults. However, the cages failed to constrain them in the long run, although there was a certain sense of yearning for freedom among the participants. It is clear that this group of women found ways to escape the strictures placed upon them and found a means to escape the cage.

At this point, I feel I need to paint a picture of the features of the bird cage and explain what it symbolises in the current research. Thereafter, I will provide a description of Indian female managers and why they are like birds in a cage by summarising the themes generated from the data. I call the first cage the women

found themselves in the "**childhood cage**". I named the bigger cage, which the women encountered in the workplace, the "**corporate cage**", which is elaborated on in Chapter 6.

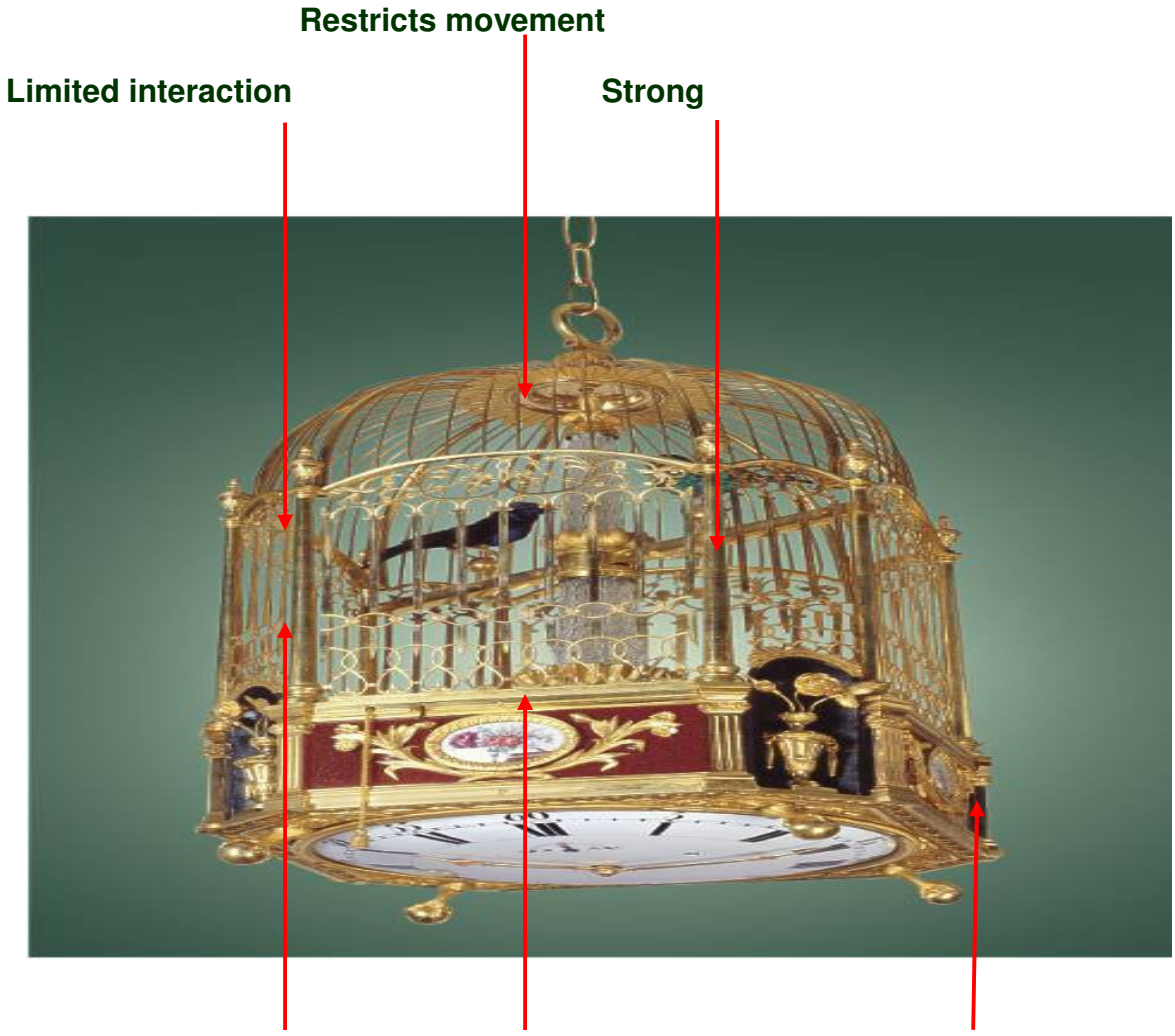
5.3.1 Features of a bird cage

The main features of a bird cage are that it

- is strong,
- restricts movement,
- allows limited interaction with the outside world
- protects what is inside the cage from harm,
- allows a view outside the cage, and ,
- has a door for entry and exit.

All these features are depicted in Figure 5.1 and are discussed individually below.

Figure 5.1: Features of a bird cage



5.3.1.1 Strong

What does their cage look like? The cage is made of strong metal bars that connect to make a strong prison. Metal bars that intertwine are much stronger than single bars on their own because it would take more strength to separate the bars from each other. A single bar is not attached to anything, so to break it would be easier. The strong metal bars depict the different elements in the lives of these women, such as their family, culture (Indian), religion (Islam or Hinduism) and the societal system within which they were raised (in this case, apartheid). These multiple elements intertwine to create a strong barrier through which it is difficult to escape. When one

element is overcome, there are others attached to it that are difficult to separate from this element and so it takes great tenacity and strength to break down all these elements. The strong links between the bars are more difficult to break through and since the bird is not a very strong creature, it may not be able to break through any of these bars, but may make only a small dent in the structure. In the end, the bird may be more harmed by pushing against these bars than the damage caused on the cage.

5.3.1.2 Restricts movement

A cage restricts movement. Birds are not free to explore and have to fly in the confined space within the cage. While some cages allow enough space for birds to fly, other cages are smaller and birds have very little space they can navigate in. Movement was also restricted for these women, as they lived in designated Indian townships and did not venture to other areas. Some women lived in very small Indian townships where their movements were even more restricted, as they were subjected to a small town mentality. Their movements were further restricted by family and Indian community. Fathers kept them homebound, and community members would monitor their every move and as a result their freedom was curbed. These women were entrapped by the patriarchal beliefs practised by their families, culture, community and the State. Once again, the different elements rose up to restrict their movements. These restrictions were tolerated by the women during their childhood, as they had no power to stand up against their family and community.

5.3.1.3 Limited interaction

Birds are usually confined to their bird cages, and when they are allowed to fly, it is usually in a limited space, thus making interaction with other birds difficult. Usually similar types of birds are kept in a cage and the birds are not allowed to interact with birds of other species due to a fear of their being harmed. The restrictions imposed on them by the macro-environment, community and the family limited the participants' interaction with people from other ethnic groups. Even when they had the freedom to associate with people from other ethnic groups, their community would frown upon such interactions. Their childhood was spent interacting with

Indian people, and they thus found it difficult later to interact with people from other races and also men within their own community.

5.3.1.4 Protects

A bird cage protects smaller birds from humans, animals and bigger birds that may harm or kill them. In the same manner, not only were the women who participated in this study protected by their community, which kept a watchful eye on them, but their parents shielded them. Parents protected these women from unwanted pregnancies by not allowing them to date or to go out with friends on their own, and they lived under their fathers' roofs even when they were studying at university.

These daughters did not have to work part-time while at school or university, as their fathers provided for them financially. Parents provided emotional and psychological support to these women regarding their progress at school and university. The women were living in a safe environment which was well insulated from the riots taking place in the African townships.

5.3.1.5 Views outside the cage

The birds can see out of the cage although it is strong, as it has gaps between the intertwined bars. The caged birds can look out through the cage bars and perhaps see other birds flying freely. They aspire to be free like the birds living in the open where the sky is their canopy and the earth is their bed. The free birds are free to fly anywhere in the world, while birds in a cage are confined to a small space. The women saw in the media how successful white women were in terms of their careers and they aspired to be the same. They could also see that their brothers were treated differently and had lots of freedom. The women in the study felt it was only a matter of time before they too would be flying outside their restrictive cages. Fathers also played a role in allowing daughters to see the world through their eyes. Most of the women's fathers had travelled and had been exposed to other cultures, and they wanted their daughters to learn about other people's cultures, as they would have to learn to work with different types of people.

5.3.1.6 The cage door as the only escape

Birds that are cage-bound find it difficult to venture out, as they do not interact much with other birds and they find the cage a safe haven. In order to avoid such phobias, bird owners sometimes leave cage doors open so birds can fly out of their confining space and interact with other birds. In the case of the participants, fathers were instrumental in opening the cage doors so their daughters could fly out of their restrictive cages. This was the women's only escape route from the confines of the cage. Their mothers also became a kind of reverse motivator, as the participants did not want to be like their mothers, and always tried to escape their gendered duties.

Taking the first step in attending university took courage. The women however escaped into the bigger cage (the university cage), although university life did not provide them with much freedom. The women still lived with their parents and did not have much freedom, as they were bound by rules set by their fathers, and parents protected their daughters, as the participants were not allowed to go out as they pleased. At least they had some emotional and physical freedom from their parents while they were on campus during the day. At university, they learned to solve their own problems with lecturers and administrative staff, and this was their first small taste of the real world. They did not rely on their parents to resolve their problems at university.

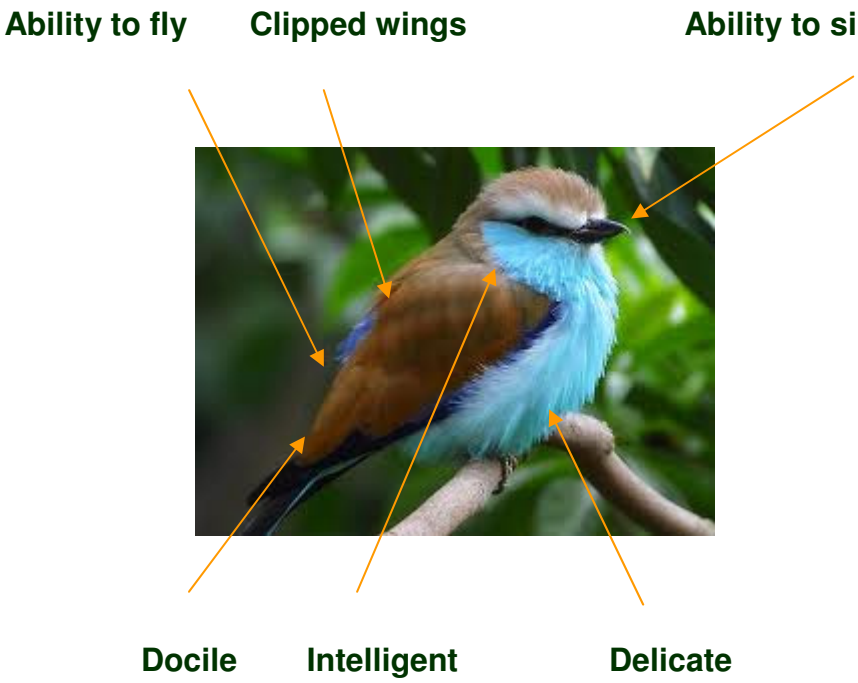
However, because apartheid was so entrenched in their lives, even when they had an opportunity to socialize with students from other racio-ethnic groups, they chose to remain with students from their own racio-ethnic group only. If they tried to cross the great divide between races, fellow Indian students would prevent them from associating especially with white students, who were regarded as the enemy. This led to interactions that were limited to their own ethnic group. They had to still take care of their family honour and did not indulge in activities that would bring shame to their families. The bars of the community, family, the macro-environment, culture and religion were still very strong, even in the bigger cage (the university cage) that they had entered. They also realized that education was the key to their freedom and did not want to jeopardize their future so they dedicated themselves to their studies.

What they saw through the bars of the cage this time was the world of work and their so-called freedom.

5.3.2 Characteristics of a bird

The metaphor of the caged bird also requires a closer look at the characteristics of a bird, to explain why and how, and to what extent, the participants managed to liberate themselves from the cage. Figure 5.2 demonstrates the relevant characteristics.

Figure 5.2: Characteristics of a bird



5.3.2.1 Ability to fly

Birds have the innate ability to fly. Even birds that are born and bred in cages can learn how to fly. Birds will find any escape route to free themselves from the confined space within cages and fly away into the wild. They want to be free and not live cooped up in cages. It became clear through the women's stories that they yearned to escape, but the cages created by the Indian culture are so secure and strong that it is difficult for them to fly away from such a stronghold. Even when their fathers opened the cage door for them, they flew only into a larger cage, namely the

"university cage" – their flight was not one to complete freedom, although they were on their journey to greater independence.

5.3.2.2 Clipped wings

The main reason for clipping a bird's wings is to prevent the bird from flying. A bird with clipped wings finds it difficult to fly far and will always be found near the cage. The women's wings were clipped when they were growing up, as they were prevented from exploring the outside world on their own. Parents and Indian community prevented the women from travelling alone by keeping a watchful eye on their movements. The apartheid system restricted their movements to Indian townships and facilities only and they lived in environments that were oppressive and dehumanising. Since they were secluded in their Indian townships, the media was censored, political activists were detained and parents did not speak against the government, they were not fully aware of how the apartheid system was disadvantaging them. One thing they were aware of, however, was that they faced restrictions in terms of educational and vocational opportunities, and at every turn they were made aware of their powerlessness.

5.3.2.3 Ability to sing

While some species of birds learn to sing from others, there are other species that have a genetic predisposition to sing on their own. Birds sing for various reasons: males sing courtship serenades; birds sing the dawn chorus and others sing during flight. What were the women singing? These women were raised during the 1970s and 1980s when freedom songs such as "We shall overcome" were sang by pupils all over South Africa against the policies of the apartheid government. These women's songs also consisted of prayers of freedom from their restrictive cultures and communities.

5.3.2.4 Intelligence

Birds are intelligent and have the ability to learn. These women are all intelligent and were achievers at school. At school they received awards for academic

achievements. All of them are university graduates, and 85 per cent of these women have obtained post-graduate degrees, implying that they are highly intelligent achievers.

5.3.2.5 Dependency and delicacy

Birds are dependent on their parents for food when they are fledglings. Birds are described as delicate, but they have the knack to survive in the wild and this takes courage from their side. As children these women were dependent on their parents to take care of them. Their fathers were, however, overprotective over them. Unlike free birds, these women were caged and they were unaccustomed to the wild, as they lived insulated lives while their fathers groomed their brothers to face the world.

5.3.2.6 Docility

Caged birds tend to be docile compared to birds in the wild. The owners of the cage make them passive, as they are provided with food and drink and do not have to hunt or look for seeds for survival. The women were raised in male-dominated homes and communities. In Indian culture, men are the breadwinners, pay the bills and handle problems outside the homes. These women were not placed in positions where they had to stand up to the community or family, as they were encouraged to walk away from conflict and not to assert themselves outside the home.

Bearing in mind this metaphor of a birdcage, what impact did growing up in the apartheid era, being raised by parents subscribing to patriarchal cultural beliefs, being influenced by Indian societal norms and practices have on the gender identity formation of the women in the study? This issue is discussed in the next section.

5.4 IDENTITY

A person's identity is shaped not by a singular factor, but multiple factors. Identity is about "who am I?". The question to be answered then is how these women saw themselves as Indian females.

In this section, I discuss the intersectional identities of the women in terms of race, gender and ethnicity. These core elements of their identities are interdependent, interactive and dynamic, rather than independent and static. The data clearly indicates that the context within which they were raised played a significant role in the participants' identity formation. Aspects relating to the context within which they were raised include the following:

- the apartheid era,
- Indian cultural values (this includes gender roles, obedience and respect, honour and shame, passive and subservient behaviour, and the role of the extended family and community in the socialisation process), and
- the family (which includes the immediate and extended families).

Cultural and religious values which are transmitted through the community and family also affected the identity formation of these women. These various elements cannot be isolated, but operated simultaneously in the identity formation of the women during childhood.

Figure 5.3 sets out identity formation in childhood.

Figure 5.3: Identity formation in childhood

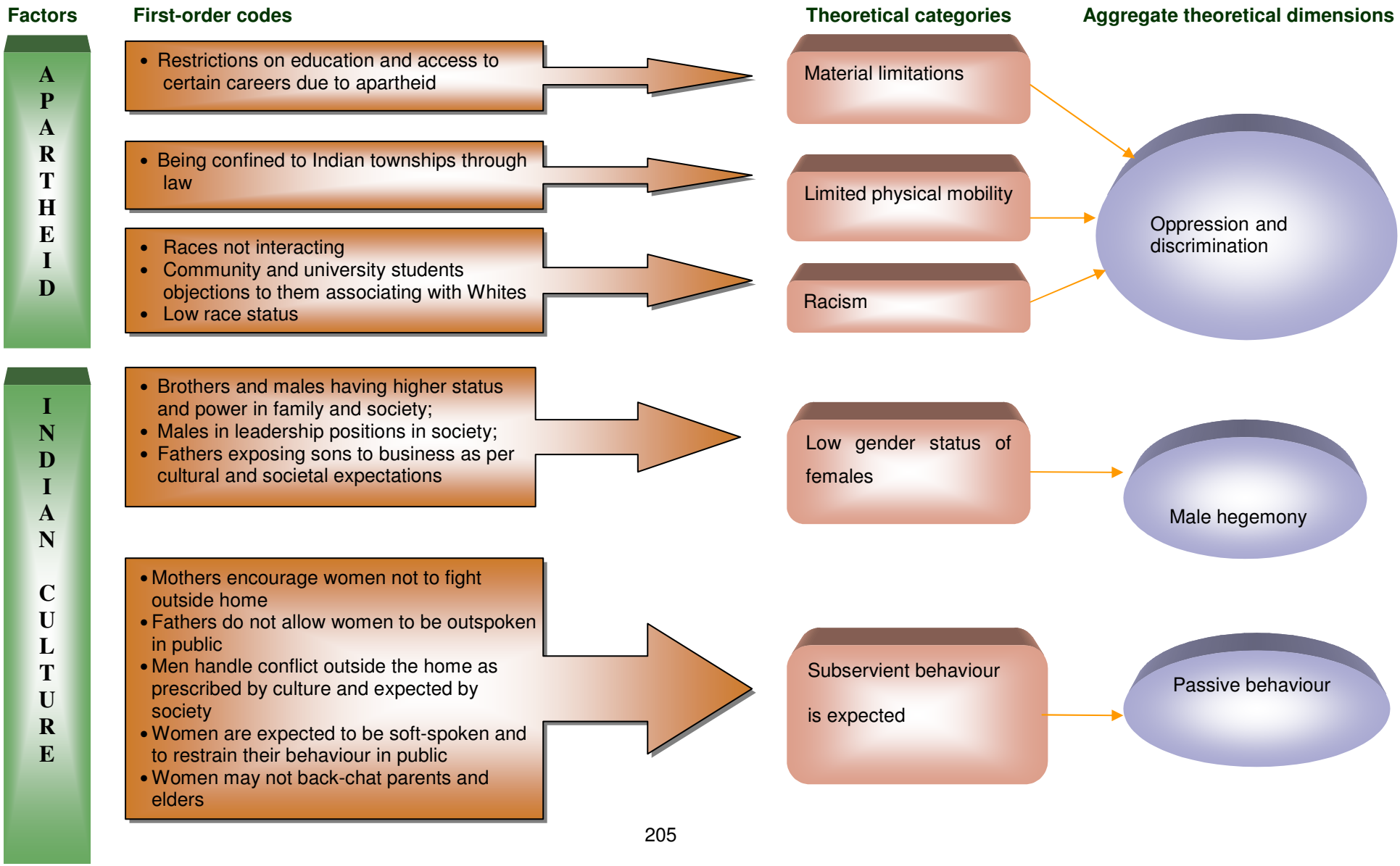


Figure 5.3 (contd)

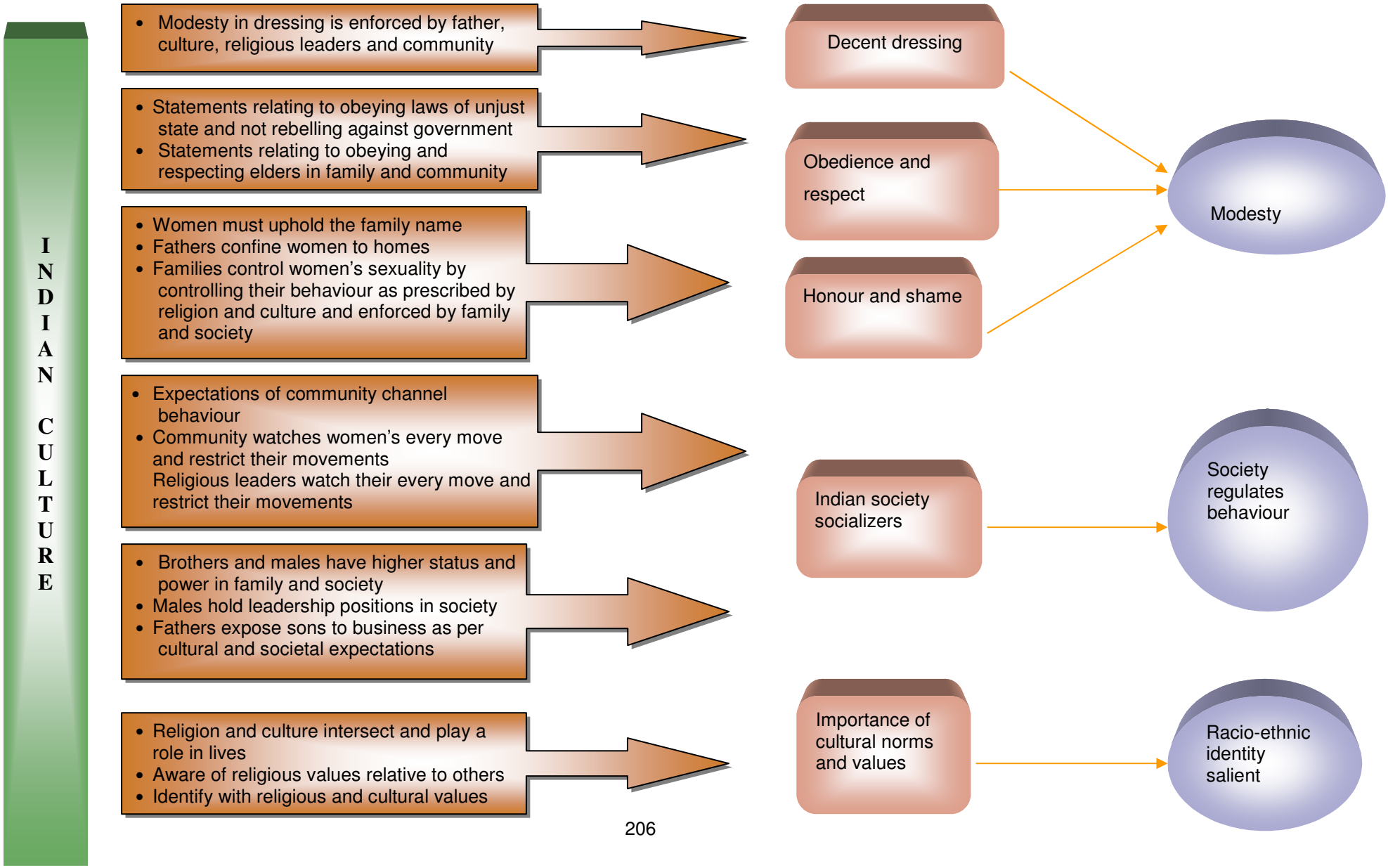
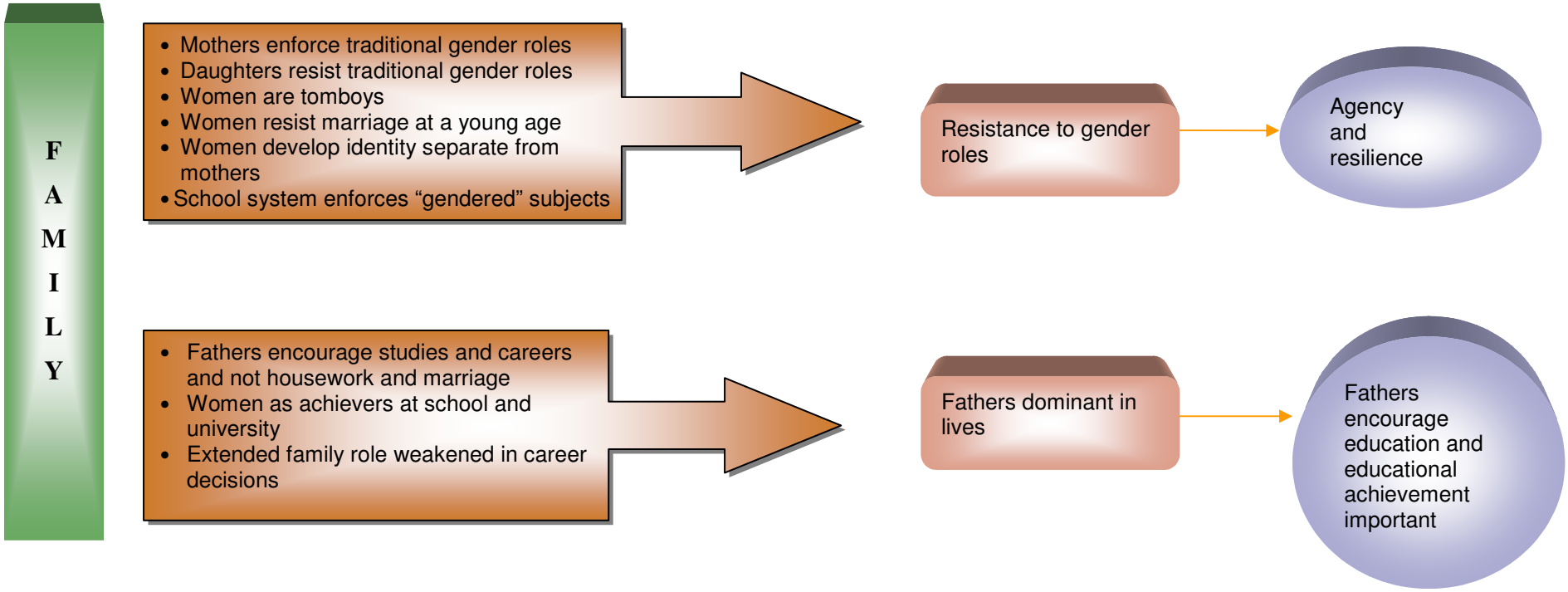
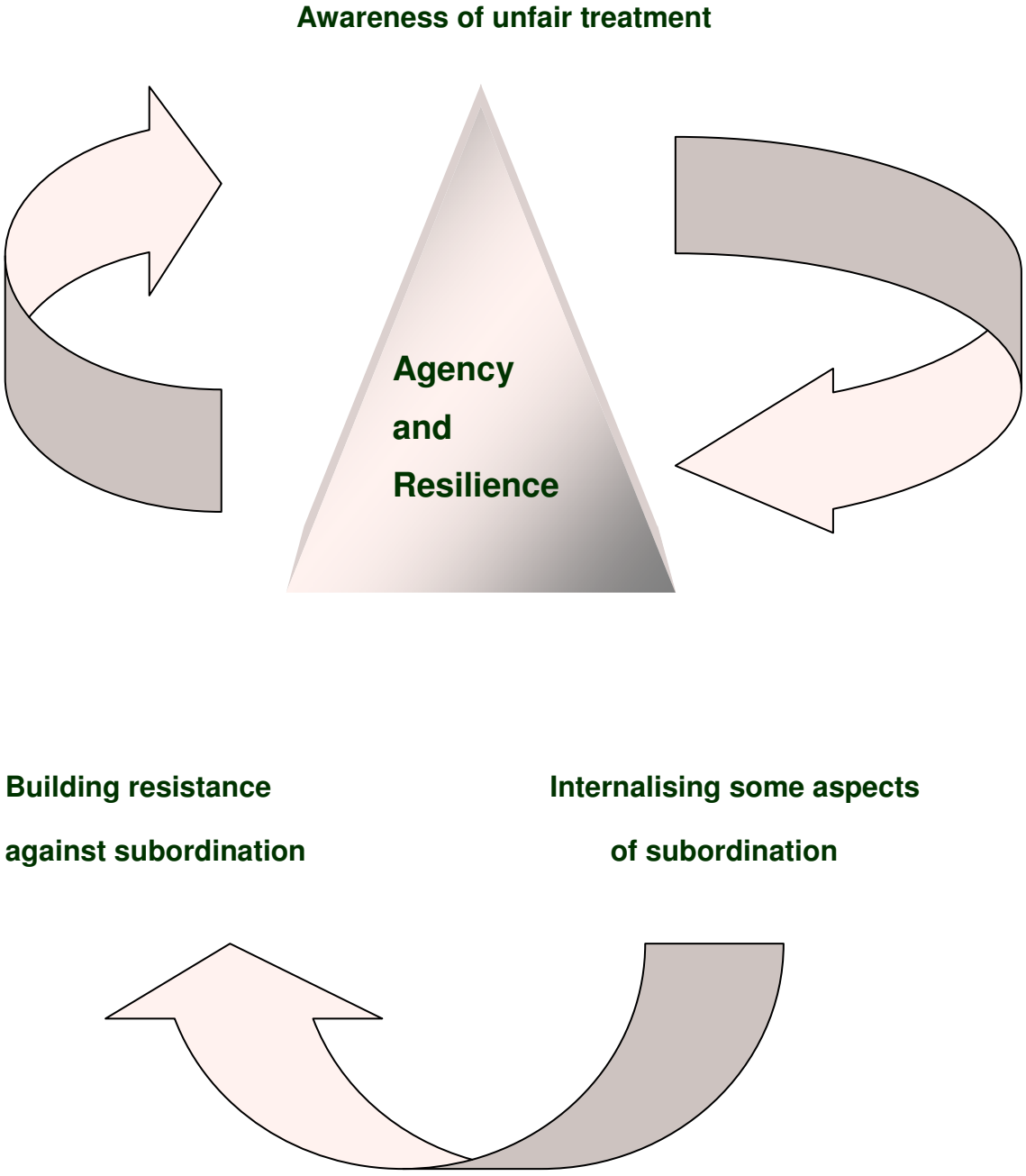


Figure 5.3 (contd)



I focus on the women's consciousness of not being treated fairly and what aspects of their identities they internalized and accepted and the aspects they resisted and rejected which are depicted in figure 5.4:

Figure 5.4: Conceptual model of identity formation



5.4.1 Awareness of unfair treatment

Structural barriers that existed in the identity formation of the women were patriarchal socialization of the women within the family and community, racism, cultural and religious principles to which women had to subscribe. One set of values that Indian parents and society in South Africa firmly clung to was the socialization of daughters according to Indian cultural norms and values. Patriarchal cultural beliefs amongst South African Indians remain central in socializing women and influenced the gender and racio-ethnic identity formation of the women who participated in this study. Patriarchy also influenced both Islam and Hinduism, as both religions are egalitarian, but have been distorted to suit the agendas of males in society (Moosa, 2004).

The women in the study revealed that their parents, and especially their fathers, had played a major role in their gender identity formation. Through socialization and ensuing adherence to Indian culture, the Indian community ensured that the women do not deviate from prescribed gender roles. The women witnessed their mothers' submission to cultural and societal values and norms, resulting in their mothers' not completing their schooling. Instead their mothers became housewives due to family pressure to conform. As part of their socialization, the participants were expected to be the custodians of their family reputation by being the epitome of obedience and respect. They had to be modest in their dressing and were chaperoned when going out as a method of controlling their sexuality. The women were very aware that their external movements were monitored by parents, the community and religious leaders. Voicing their opinions within the immediate family circle was permissible, but they could not challenge elders in the community.

The women were very aware of the power, freedom and advantages their brothers had within the family and externally. The women observed male hegemony when their brothers took advantage of their power in the home and Indian community. This often took the form of disrespect for sisters, even older sisters. The patriarchal social dynamics the women observed and experienced in Indian society and in the home had a profound effect on how

they came to understand the gender role of Indian women. Women were in the shadow of males who held power within the family and Indian society. In this shadow role, Indian women were dependent on men for support and stature. Thus the women in this study became aware of their gender disadvantages and consequently low status and had to adopt behaviours that did not necessarily reflect their personalities.

The message and realities of their gender subordination was further confounded because of the racial oppression of Indians under the apartheid system. Racism was the key component through which structure influenced the inequalities these women experienced in education, their exclusion from certain careers, social and economic disadvantages experienced during their childhood. They were aware of some of their parents being unable to complete schooling due to apartheid and of their own schools being ill-equipped. Apartheid also restricted their career choices and opportunities. Not only were career choices in South Africa racialized; they were also gendered. White women were confined to female occupations, and in this range there were some occupations African and Indian women could access. The women's interviews indicated that they were aware of their low status due to their gender and also their low racio-ethnic status within the country.

5.4.2 Internalizing some elements of subordination

The social, cultural and historical context played a large part in the identity formation of the women in the study. For the women to develop a healthy personal and group identity as a member of a marginalised group involved personal self-acceptance of being part of the oppressed gender group and acceptance of being part of a marginalised racio-ethnic group. The women mentioned the salience of their racio-ethnic group. They belonged to several marginalised groups (Indian, Muslim, Hindu, black) within South African society. In formulating their racio-ethnic identities, the women identified themselves as belonging to these marginalised groups, implying that they internalized being members of an oppressed racio-ethnic group in South Africa.

One form of unfair treatment by the apartheid government was keeping the races separate. Racio-ethnic identity was salient, especially during their childhood, as they lived in Indian areas, attended Indian schools, ate at Indian restaurants, watched movies in Indian cinemas, shopped at local Indian stores, played in Indian parks and on Indian beaches. The women accepted these types of discriminatory practices because their parents and the majority of the members of the Indian community did not stand up against the apartheid government, in this way encouraging passivity. Even when the opportunity to interact with other races arose, it was difficult for the majority of the participants to do so, due to societal pressure and internalized racism.

The oppressive structures of apartheid made it virtually impossible for the women in the study to escape its effects and resulted in a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem. The words of Zeenat capture the effects the women felt in the following way:

> *"We came from a time in history where apartheid broke us in every way; it broke us psychologically."*

In a sense they had nowhere to run and had to accept the Indian culture as a life raft and anchor which provided refuge from being marginalised, resulting in a strong racio-ethnic identity. The women therefore identified strongly with Indian culture and their religion. The women felt a connection to their culture and did not need to deviate from the cultural and religious expectations of their community. There was no deep exploration of alternative cultural and religious values, norms and beliefs, as there was limited interaction with other groups, even at university. The women internalized many aspects of their culture and religions. Many of the cultural prescriptions placed the women in an inferior position to men. Religious tenets were also distorted to uplift the status of men and to subjugate women. Most of the women internalized some of these norms and were unable to express in public their dissatisfaction against their subjugation, and this resulted in a lack of self-confidence. This is evidenced in the women's not taking on leadership positions at university. The women passively accepted the restrictions placed on them through the Indian

culture, because belonging to the Indian racio-ethnic group became a source of self-esteem and solace in the realization of knowing who they are.

The women accepted restrictions on their mobility and behaviour by not dating, even when they had the opportunity to do so at university. They dressed modestly; they obeyed parents, teachers and elders in the community; they accepted their low status in their families and Indian communities and they were dependent on their fathers to resolve conflict outside the home. The women allowed brothers to have power in the home and did not rebel against such arrangements. The women were surrounded in their insulated environments by women in the community who did not rebel against restrictions imposed on them by Indian culture and, having nowhere to escape to Indian women accepted such treatment without questioning it.

The women in the study were, however, different. They were raised in nuclear families where fathers wanted a better life for their daughters and the women themselves wanted to escape the strictures of Indian culture. The women's idea was not to become totally isolated from the Indian community by rebelling against all norms and customs, but to fulfil their dreams within the limits deemed acceptable and not too outrageous in the Indian community. Certain restrictions and limitations imposed by their community were acceptable to these women, but they rebelled against barriers to their future educational advancement.

5.4.3 Building resistance against subordination

According to Atewologun and Singh (2010), agency refers to an individual's capability to change his or her circumstances. The women in the study are a heterogeneous group and have had different experiences while growing up. They also responded differently to the expectations of how the community and family wanted them to behave. Those living in smaller communities were expected to conform more to family and societal expectations than those living in larger communities. Some were allowed to voice their opinions in the immediate family situation only, some protested in school boycotts against the

apartheid government and fought for equal educational opportunities, while others were allowed to stand up for their rights against members of the community, but had to approach the matter in a dignified and respectable manner.

The women resisted internalizing the gender roles their mothers were trapped in. This was one of the reasons why most of the women in the study had difficult relationships with their mothers. Their mothers felt that their daughters should be socialized into performing gender-appropriate roles, as this was their primary function in life, and that their daughters should not be too involved in their studies. The participants did not enjoy domestic chores and cooking and performed these duties only out of obedience to the requests of mothers rather than internalizing such gender roles.

The only professional women who were favourably regarded in Indian society in the participants' youth were those in the medical profession, teachers and lawyers. There were only a handful of women who pursued these careers. The women in the study defied Indian communities' views on working women and pursued non-traditional professions.

Education was another tool of agency and resistance. When it came to the participants' studies, their fathers deviated from the prescribed gender roles for their daughters and instead stressed self-development and academic success. They allowed the women to focus on their studies and would also stop mothers from burdening their daughters with domestic duties that might interfere. This behaviour on the part of their fathers helped the women to develop resiliency.

Aside from their fathers' encouraging them to study, the women were themselves motivated to study, as they resisted the prescribed gender roles of being housewives prescribed for adults. The women also felt that hard work; individual effort and being diligent in their studies would lead to their success. These women were academic achievers, despite the structured inequalities of

apartheid within their schools. Educational achievement signified resiliency in the lives of these women.

The women were resilient against extended family members and society who tried to block them from their studies. These women were aware of structural barriers within their extended families and the way Indian society regarded females who were focused on their studies. The women, however, did not pay attention to objections regarding their academic achievements. Instead of extended family deterring them, interference seemed to make them even more determined to succeed. The women in the study ensured that they succeeded at school and pursued tertiary education despite the objections from extended family and society. Once again the resilience of these women in pursuing individualistic goals is evident. While their friends married and had children, these women focused on their education.

For some, the motivation to pursue tertiary education was to have financial independence, while others had lost their fathers as a result of parents' divorcing or death and they had to take on the responsibilities of the home. However, they were also aware of the structural barriers at university as a result of apartheid that would hinder their progress towards their goals. Their resiliency helped them not to allow such obstacles to deter them from studying and applying to universities.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I firstly outlined the role of apartheid, Indian culture, religion and the role of the family in the lives of the women. Thereafter, I elaborated on the identity formation of these women during their childhood years and at university. Context as well as race, Indian culture, religion, the community and the family played important roles in their identity development. The women held strong cultural values, as they were confined to Indian townships where deviation from the norm was frowned upon. Their identity formation comprised multiple dimensions that overlapped, although sometimes certain dimensions were more prominent than others.

Despite the oppressive national context and gender subordination experienced in their families and Indian society, the women have forged identities that were agentic and resilient. Thus core themes in their narratives are agency and resilience. Throughout their early lives they had to change their circumstances either through leveraging the support from their fathers or they had to resist oppressive forces on their own. The women did not give up in the face of difficulties and persevered to overcome obstacles. While certain experiences took their toll on their self-confidence and self-esteem, excelling in their educational achievements boosted their morale and self-esteem.

The next chapter deals with the individual barriers to the participants' success and enhancers of their upward mobility, as well as the organisational barriers they faced in the corporate environment in their way to the top. The caged bird metaphor is again explored in terms of the organisational cage in which the women are stuck and where freedom implies perching with eagles on mountain tops. Identities influenced by their experiences in the workplace are also a focus of the next chapter.