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INDIAN COUPLES' NARRATIVES OF THE EMPTY NEST EXPERIENCE

by

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The quest for knowledge meanders through different pathways, some steep, others laden with hurdles, and some even slippery, before the meaning becomes visible, as each page turns to the rhythm of the ticking clock.

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The quest for knowledge is eternal. Thus, the present meaning of the past journey shall lead me to new unchartered territory in the future.

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, Smita Joshi, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation is my own work, and to my knowledge, I have not committed any form of plagiarism.

Smita Joshi

1 December 2010

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to explore the narratives of three Indian couples who experienced the empty nest phenomenon. The participants were selected from the predominant Indian community of Laudium (Centurion), which is west of Pretoria, South Africa. The participants were between 50 to 70 years of age. The research was conducted within the narrative metaphor. The researcher conducted unstructured interviews with the participants, transcribed the material, and analyzed the narratives by means of the "Three-dimensional Space Approach". The narratives of the Indian couples revealed that the empty nest event created ramifications in various other areas of all the participants' lives, as they experienced a transition from being parents before the empty nest, to being parents after the empty nest. The research was conducted within the guidelines of the Postgraduate and Ethics Committees of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In this chapter, I shall focus primarily upon the research context, which sets the scene for the emergence of the research question. I will further address both the general and specific research goals, and briefly explain the development of the various chapters, which constitutes the structure of this research report.

1.2
RESEARCH CONTEXT

"Empty nest" is a popular American label, assigned to the time period which begins when the last child leaves the parental home (Simpson, 1996). It is less commonly known by the term, the "post-parental" period (Raup & Myers, 1989). In Western society, young people are expected to spread their wings and leave their parents' homes at certain ages (18 to 21 years), or following specific events, such as marriage, or the completion of studies. This is regarded as a stage in the so-called "normal" process of development (Simpson, 1996). Therefore, the adult child who lives at home seems to be amicably tolerated until the age of about 22 years. Thereafter, parents appear to be less tolerant about this living arrangement. The lack of understanding in dealing with an altered family structure, if adult children stayed at home, could produce confusion, irritability, and severe social-psychological strains for both parents and their children (Clemens & Axelson, 1985).

On the contrary, in Eastern society, within the Indian family, the "nest" is filled for a much longer period and there is no definite time to leave the nest. It is culturally acceptable to live in the parental home, after the completion of studies or even after marriage. This presents a stark contrast between Western and Eastern culture, which

adds an interesting difference with regard to the empty nest phenomenon, since there isn't a specific term that defines this stage within the Indian culture. However, for practical purposes, I will use the term "empty nest", when referring to the time when the adult children leave home. Thus, the family is part of a wider community, whereby interpersonal relations are "culturally-embedded", and the community context is significant, since it is a reflection of the diversity of family relationships, within supportive and restricted interpretations of culture (Commuri & Gentry, 2000).

The colourful patterning and mirrored reflection of a mosaic is an apt metaphor for the intricate interplay of historical, social, and cultural forces that both influence, and are influenced by individual actions. Thus, the decision to leave home is determined by the interplay between the inner world of the young adult, family history and the cultural messages perpetuated over time.

1.1.1 Mother's Role in the Indian Community

In Indian culture, a woman's role is viewed strictly as a function of her reproductive role. There are strongly entrenched traditional values, emphasizing the importance of an exclusive maternal role, which locates the mother predominantly within the home. Mothers are the centrifuges that hold families together (Seymour, 1999). The family is very important in Indian daily life, and loyalty to the family is regarded as "dharma", or sacred duty. The mother's role is that of a cultural "gate-keeper", which involves promoting Indian cultural values to her children, and managing emotions and relationships within the immediate and extended families. This reinforces a vital power base for women within the home. This "gate-keeping" role of the mother inhibits the father's collaborative effort in terms of caring for the children, and places him on the periphery of intimate parent-child interaction (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Preparing meals is central to the nurturing role of motherhood and family life. Therefore, food is an important cultural metaphor, which represents memories, and provides meanings for certain family behaviours (Lindridge & Hogg, 2006).

1.1.2 Father's Role in the Indian Community

In Indian culture, a man has been raised to be the primary caretaker of the family's material needs, which gives him special status, and positions him as the head of the family. While the mother stays at home, the father encounters the world outside the home, as the wage-earner who dedicates himself to career progress. He also experiences the influence of different cultures, which are renegotiated with the family's values. For many years, there has been a strong dichotomy of distinct roles, with the fathers earning a livelihood, and the mothers staying at home to take care of their children and households (Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha, 2001; Derne, 2000). Bhatnagar and Rajadhyaksha (2001), as well as Sekaran and Hall (1993), found that the Western perception of developmental stages with regard to work and family roles was inconsistent regarding the Indian culture. Rather, the socialization of gender roles was more prevalent, since the continuation of traditional values was the predominant factor. Even if Indian women achieve professional roles, their commitment to family roles is paramount, which in turn reinforces the father's role as the financial provider.

1.1.3 Children's Roles in the Indian Community

The role of Indian children is to be supportive of their parents, and they are socialized into collectivist cultural values of duty, co-operation, interdependence, obedience and reliability (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988). In accordance with the social constructionist perspective, "Gender is understood as the product of social processes and as embodying cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity" (Fox & Murry, 2000, p. 1164). Thus, there is a clear divide between the genders in the Indian family, and males and females have to "do" gender, rather than "be" a gender. These masculine and feminine behaviours become visible in social interactions, mannerisms, and language. Sons are perceived as carrying the family name and bloodline into the future, and given more freedom than that offered to daughters. It is the son's responsibility, especially the eldest son, to care for his aging parents, particularly in their

old age. Daughters are encouraged to participate in household chores, and embody their family's cultural values for the present and future generations, in their roles of being Indian wives and mothers (Lindridge & Hogg, 2006).

1.1.4 Change of the Research Question

Initially, my research question was, "How do Indian women experience the empty nest phenomenon?" However, I realized that because the mother is more involved in spending time with the children, I assumed that her experiences are more pertinent in relation to the empty nest. This is congruent with the dominant discourse present within the Indian cultural milieu, which undermines the experiences of fathers regarding the different stages of parenting, leading to the empty nest. It is equally important to allow the fathers' experiences to be voiced, and heard. Thus, I changed my research question to the following:

1.3
RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the above description, the research question of this research project is: "How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?"

1.3
RESEARCH GOALS

The research goals address the general goal, as well as the specific goals.

1.3.1 General Goal

The general research goal is aimed at understanding Indian couples' experiences of the empty nest phenomenon, as constructed in their narratives for the purposes of this research.

1.3.2 Specific Goals

1. To conduct a research overview on the empty nest phenomenon[1].
2. To describe the research position of this research project.
3. To describe the research enquiry of this research project.
4. To conduct the research enquiry of this research project.
5. To portray the research findings of this research project.

1.4
RESEARCH MOTIVATION

The motivation for doing this study is threefold, namely academic, research and personal.

1.4.1 Academic Motivation

The Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria (UP) has three Master of Arts (MA) programmes, namely: Clinical Psychology, Counselling Psychology and Research Psychology. As I am part of the MA (Counselling Psychology) programme, this research project falls within the domain of the MA (Counselling Psychology) programme. I have been trained according to the researcher-practitioner model, with an equal emphasis of 50% on research and 50% on practice. This research project accounts for 50% of my training as a future psychologist (Human, 2008).

[1] Since this study is a narrative study from a post-modernist, post structuralist position, I did not do a literature review as prescribed by conventional research protocol. Instead, I have viewed the literature as representing the opinions of “co-researchers” with whom I have been in constant conversation, and have therefore, interwoven the opinions of the “co-researchers” into the project, where applicable. I based this on the work of Bakker, Eskell-Blokland and Ruane (2010), as well as Lindsay (2006).

1.4.2 Research Motivation

I searched the following databases, EbscoHost, Eric, InfoTrac, Jstor, PsycInfo, Sabinet, and Social Work Abstract, through the Academic Information Services (AIS) of the UP. This allowed me to establish what research has already been done on the empty nest phenomenon. Most of the research was done from a quantitative position with the use of questionnaires (Clemens & Axelson, 1985; Dennerstein, Dudley & Guthrie, 2002; Hobdy, Hayslip, Kaminski, Crowley, Riggs & York, 2007; Raup & Myers, 1989; White & Edwards, 1990), while one qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews as a method for gathering material (Lindridge & Hogg 2006).The research has been done mainly in America, followed by Britain and Australia. Consequently, there is a lack of research from a qualitative position in general, and from a narrative position in particular. Furthermore, I could not find any research done in South Africa (SA) on the lived experiences of Indian couples when their adult children left home. Hence, I will be using a qualitative approach to listening and making sense of Indian couples' narratives of their empty nest experiences.

1.4.3 Personal Motivation

My personal motivation for this research project regarding Indian couples' narratives of the empty nest phenomenon is also linked to my personal narrative of an anticipated empty nest, in the future, when my son and daughter leave home.

1.5
RESEARCH REPORT

The research report is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to my research project, and addresses the research context, as well as the research question. Furthermore, it provides the research goals, the research motivation and describes the report structure.

Chapter 2 portrays narrative research as the selected research position, with specific reference to different perspectives on narrative, characteristics of narrative research, as well as the narrative research cycle.

Chapter 3 introduces the research enquiry by portraying the specific research contexts, research participants, research material, research quality and the research ethics that informed this project.

Chapter 4 is an introspective chapter. It provides a pre-reflection prior to the research of my role as a researcher, which on the one hand is a professional activity, while on the other hand it is an autobiographical activity.

Chapters 5 to 10 focus on the research findings, with specific reference to Mr. Kasoor (Chapter 5), Mrs. Kasoor (Chapter 6), Mr. Naidoo (Chapter 7), Mrs. Naidoo (Chapter 8), Mr. Khan (Chapter 9) and Mrs. Khan (Chapter 10).

Chapter 11 provides a summary of the research findings with the aim of answering the research question posed in chapter 1, and further addresses the limitations of this research project accompanied by related recommendations.

Chapter 12 is an introspective chapter. It provides a post-reflection subsequent to the research of my role as a researcher, which on the one hand is a professional activity, while on the other hand it is an autobiographical activity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the research context of my research project and introduced the research question. Thereafter, I stated the research goals, the research motivation and explained the structure of this research report. In the next chapter I will address my research position.

CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH POSITION

Introduction

In this chapter, I shall describe the research position of this research project. This is attained by providing a brief overview of the two broad approaches to research in psychology, namely quantitative research and qualitative research. Thereafter, narrative research as the selected research position will be portrayed, with specific reference to different perspectives on narrative, characteristics of narrative research, as well as the narrative research cycle.

2.1
RESEARCH

Research in psychology usually falls within two broad research approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative research.

2.1.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is a deductive approach to research, which involves representative samples, structured data collection procedures, as well as precise measurement through statistics. The objective is discovering causal laws by means of hypothesis testing, which enables professionals to predict, control and explain human behaviour. Personal experiences are eliminated in favour of reified constructs, classes of events, and systems of classification (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

2.1.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an inductive approach to research which attempts to understand the world from the participant's point of view. It claims that no single truth is possible,

since knowledge is constructed, both personally and socially**.** The material analysis is usually language-based, with the objective of establishing themes. There are various research approaches under the umbrella of qualitative research, such as phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, as well as narrative research (Creswell, 2007; Struwig & Stead, 2001).

In this research project, narrative research informed the research position (Chapter 2), as well as the research enquiry (Chapter 3). Narrative research enables me, as well as the participants, to understand how Indian couples make sense of the empty nest experience, and constitute their identities through the process of narrating their experiences (Andrews, 2000; Broyand, 1992; Johnson, 1993; Langdridge, 2007; Murray 2008).

2.2
NARRATIVE RESEARCH

In this section I discuss three perspectives on narrative, namely “narrative and objective reality”, “narrative and perceived reality”, as well as “narrative and constructed reality (-ies)”.

2.2.1 Perspectives on Narrative

In this section, three different perspectives on “narrative” are elaborated. These three perspectives are depicted in the following quotation (Anderson, 1990, p.75):

> Three umpires are sitting around over a beer and one says, “There’s balls and there’s strikes and I call `em the way they are”. Another says, “There’s balls and there’s strikes and I call `em the way I see them”. The third says, “There’s balls and there’s strikes and they ain’t nothin’ until I call `em”.

In all three instances there is an “umpire” (narrator), “balls and strikes” (reality) and a “call” (narrative). However, they also differ from one another, which will be explained in points 1-3.

1. Narrative and “Objective Reality”

The first umpire states, “There’s balls and there’s strikes and I call `em the way they are” (Anderson, 1990, p.75). The focus here is on the balls and strikes (reality). The umpire (narrator) calls (narrative) the balls and strikes (reality) exactly as they are. This implies that the umpire’s (narrator) call (narrative) is reflective of the balls and strikes (reality).

This perspective on narrative can also be described as the positivist perspective on narrative. According to the positivist perspective on narrative, a narrative is seen as a reflection of objective reality, exactly “as it is out there”. The external nature of reality lends itself, to be measured, labelled, and described. The narrative contains a unitary truth in its reflection of objective reality. Within the positivist perspective on narrative, language has a descriptive and passive nature, which merely fulfils the function of reflecting objective reality (Durrheim, 1997; Shaw, 2002; Smith, 2008; Taylor, 2001).

Another metaphor to describe this perspective on narrative is the mirror metaphor. A mirror offers an exact reflection, for example, of a person standing in front of the mirror. The person standing in front of the mirror and the reflection of the person in the mirror are exactly equal to each other. Thus, a narrative is a reflection of the objective reality that exists “out there”, and is therefore equal to the objective reality “out there”.

2. Narrative and “Perceived Reality”

The second umpire states, “There’s balls and there’s strikes and I call `em the way I see them” (Anderson, 1990, p.75). The focus here is not on the balls and strikes (reality), but rather on the umpire (narrator), and more specifically on the umpire’s (narrator)

seeing (perception) of the balls and strikes (reality). The umpire (narrator) calls (narrative) the balls and strikes (reality), not as they are, but as he/she sees (perceives) the balls and strikes (reality).

This perspective on narrative can also be described as the constructivist[2] perspective on narrative. According to the constructivist perspective on narrative, a narrative is not seen as a reflection of objective reality, but it is seen as the reflection of an individual's perception of objective reality, and therefore depicts a subjectively perceived reality "in there". Within the constructivist perspective on narrative, language has a descriptive and passive nature, which merely fulfils the function of reflecting the subjective perception of people (Butchart, 1988; Cresswell, 2007; Gergen, 1988; Willig, 2001).

Another metaphor to describe this perspective on narrative is the photo metaphor. When a photographer sees (perceives) a landscape, and photographs the landscape, this photograph reflects the photographer's perception of the landscape, the landscape as it is "in there", rather than the entire landscape as it is "out there". Therefore, a narrative is not a reflection of the objective reality "out there", but rather a reflection of a person's subjective perception "in there" of objective reality.

3. Narrative and "Constructed Reality(-ies)"

The third umpire states, "There's balls and there's strikes and they ain't nothin' until I call `em" (Anderson, 1990, p.75). The focus here is not on the balls and strikes (reality), nor is it on the umpire's (narrator) subjective perception of objective reality, but it is on the umpire's (narrator) calling (narrative) of the balls and strikes (reality). The calling (narrative) of the umpire (narrator) brings the balls and strikes (reality (-ies)) to life.

[2] I acknowledge that the term "constructivism" has many interpretations, but in this research report I shall follow the description by Patton (2007), as well as Roberts (2000), that this term refers to the "in there" world of people.

This perspective on narrative can also be described as the social constructionist[3] perspective on narrative. According to the social constructionist perspective on narrative, a narrative is seen, not as a reflection of objective reality, nor is it a reflection of peoples' subjective perceptions of objective reality, but it is a construction of reality (ies). Therefore, the focus is not on the objective reality "out there", nor is it on a person's subjective perception "in there", but it is on the constructed identities in the narrative that lies "in between" the narrator and receiver of a narrative.

Sclater states the following about narrative (Sclater, 2003, p.327):

> It's a way of integrating the inner and the outer. The story provides an intermediate or transitional area of experience in which the self continually negotiates its position in the world, inscribes itself in relation to available cultural scripts, integrates past, present and future through acts of remembering and telling.

Narrative is thus the "in between" place, where a person's inner and outer world meet (Magadla, 1996; Steyn, 1999; Willig, 2001), where the self is in constant conversation with itself, and with its world over time (Bakhtin, 1981; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Josselson & Lieblich, 1995). Within the social constructionist perspective on narrative, language is performative and active in nature, and constructs reality (-ies) (Durrheim, 1997; Jenkins, 2001; Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997; Smith, 2008).

Another metaphor to describe this perspective on narrative is the quilt metaphor. A quilt is created from various pieces of colourful material, which on their own, neither look the same, nor perform the same function, as when they are stitched together to form a quilt. Just as a quilt links various pieces of different materials to form something new, similarly, a narrative also links history (past, present and future), as well as context (the

[3] I acknowledge that the term "social constructionism" has many interpretations, but in this research report I shall follow the description by Patton (2007), as well as Roberts (2000), that this term refers to the "in between" world of people.

inner and outer world of people), and this interplay between history and context creates something new, namely constructed identities.

If I translate the cricket metaphor to this research study, it could be portrayed in the following way:

> Three Indian couples are sitting around having a tea-time conversation about their children. One couple says, “There’s the empty nest phenomenon and we call it as it is.” Another couple says, “There’s the empty nest phenomenon and we call it the way we see it.” The third couple says, “There’s the empty nest phenomenon and it ain’t nothing until we call it.”

I have opted to conduct this research project from a social constructionist perspective, within a post-modernist and post-structuralist position (Neukrug, 2011; Roberts, 2000; Weingarten, 1998). Therefore, I shall not perceive the narratives of the Indian couples on the empty nest phenomenon, as either reflecting the empty nest phenomenon (objective reality) “out there”, or reflecting their subjective perception of the empty nest phenomenon (perceived reality) “in there”. Rather, I shall perceive the narratives of the Indian couples on the empty nest phenomenon as the meeting place where interplay is created between history and context, hereby constructing reality (-ies)[4]. Thus, the focus of this study will be on the narrated identities of the Indian couples as they are constructed in their narratives.

2.2.2 Characteristics of Narrative Research

In an article by Lindsay (2006), the comparative model of Herron (1971) was used to indicate the differences between narrative research and interpretive phenomenological research. The following section focuses on these differences in terms of subject,

[4] In this research project the “constructed reality (-ies)” will specifically refer to constructed identities, also known as “narrated identity (-ies)” and/or “storied identity (-ies)”, within narrative research studies.

agency, material, method and outcome. I shall conduct this narrative research project in accordance with these guidelines.

1. Subject in Narrative Research

The subject matter in narrative research focuses on the unfolding of experience over time. A narrative researcher will view experience in relation to where it has come from (past), where it is now (present), and where it is going (future).

In interpretive phenomenological research, the researcher will focus on experience as it comes into being in the here-and-now. From an interpretive phenomenological position an isolated event captures both the past and the future in the present moment.

In this narrative research study, which falls within a post-modernist and post-structuralist position (Neukrug, 2011; Roberts, 2000; Weingarten, 1998), I shall focus on three Indian couples' narratives on parenting, with specific emphasis on how these couples interpreted the empty nest phenomenon, thereby constituting their narrated identity(-ies) through their narratives over time.

2. Agency in Narrative Research

On the one hand, agency lies with the researcher in narrative research. The researcher is autobiographically (as a person) and professionally (as a researcher), present in narrative research, and approaches the subject matter from a position of curiosity. On the other hand, agency also lies with the participants, also called co-researchers, who tell and retell their narratives, and through this process interpret their worlds, and constitute their narrated identity(-ies).

In interpretive phenomenological research, agency resides with the researcher, who has foreknowledge about the subject, which will be made explicit during the research process. The researcher as agent is separate from the participants, and not

autobiographically implicated in the research process. An interpretive phenomenological researcher approaches the subject matter from a position of being an expert interpreter.

In this narrative research study I shall be present autobiographically (as a person), and professionally (as a researcher), and will allow the Indian couples, as participants, to be co-researchers in the research project. This will be done by means of autobiographical (as a person) and professional (as a researcher) pre- and post-reflections in the research report, as well as establishing involvement with the participants or co-researchers.

3. Material in Narrative Research

In narrative research, various forms of material can be used, such as interviews, letters and pictures. The researcher, together with the participants, approaches the narratives as material to be understood, in relation to the unfolding of the participants' experiences of a specific phenomenon over time, and within a specific context. This ensures that the uniqueness of each participant's narrative is honoured.

The researcher, working from an interpretive phenomenological position, primarily makes use of interviews as research material. The researcher approaches the material, with the aim of discovering recurring themes in the material of the participants, and common themes amongst the participants. The recurring themes may also be presented to other researchers for their input.

In this narrative research study I shall be engaging with the narratives as interviewed research material of three Indian couples, with the purpose of understanding how they interpreted the empty nest phenomenon, thereby constituting their narrated identity(-ies) over time. The participants will be kept involved, not only in the interviewing phase, but also through a reflection phase after the interviews.

4. Method in Narrative Research

In narrative research, the method entails that the researcher and the participants narrate their experiences of a specific phenomenon. Narrative research focuses on the backward-forward movement (past, present, future), as well as the inward-outward movement (person-context) within narratives. Furthermore, academic literature is seen as conveying shared experiences, which is interwoven as an additional narrative within the co-researchers' narratives.

In interpretive phenomenological research, interview texts are analyzed and studied with the purpose of discovering recurring themes. These recurring themes are seen as central to the appearance, the coming-into-being, of the phenomenon that is being studied. Furthermore, academic literature is seen as challenging, affirming and/or extending the interpretations, which come to the fore through the recurring themes.

In this narrative research study, I shall focus on the backward-forward movement (past, present, future), as well as the inward-outward movement (person-context) in relation to the narratives of the three Indian couples. Furthermore, I shall view academic literature as a form of shared experiences with the experiences of the participants, which will be interwoven as an additional narrative within the participants' narratives. The literature will therefore be seen as a conversational partner (Bakker et al., 2010).

5. The Outcome of Narrative Research

Based on the collaborative nature of narrative research between the researcher and participants, both the researcher and the participants grow in their understanding of how their experiences unfolded over time, and within various contexts. The outcome is therefore educative in nature, through enhancing awareness for the researcher and the participants.

As a result of the discovery of recurring themes, as well as common themes in the research material of the participants, the outcome of interpretive phenomenological research leads to enhanced knowledge of the phenomenon that is being studied by the researcher. Therefore, the outcome is not enhancement of awareness for the researcher and participants, but of the phenomenon being studied.

In this narrative research study, I shall endeavour to achieve the following objective, whereby the research process will allow the three Indian couples, as well as myself, autobiographically (as a person) and professionally (as a researcher), to grow in our understanding of our narrated identity (-ies) in relation to the empty nest experience.

2.3
NARRATIVE RESEARCH CYCLE

The narrative research cycle is depicted in the words that, “Every story shares the common function of someone telling something to someone about something” (Kearney, 2006, p.5). This is also echoed in Carson (2000), who states that there are three important aspects of narratives. Firstly, if narratives are told, they need to be heard; secondly, if they are heard they need to be understood, and thirdly, if understood, they need to be re-told. Thus, it is apparent that the narrative research cycle entails a narrator, a narrative and a receiver.

2.3.1 The “Narrator” in the Narrative Research Cycle

In the narrative research cycle, the narrator constructs a narrative. On the one hand the narrative is an interpretive activity, while on the other hand it is a constitutive activity. These two aspects of narrative can be understood in the words of Andrews (2000, p. 77-78):

> Stories are not only the way in which we come to ascribe significance to experiences … they are one of the primary means through which we constitute

our very selves. We become who we are through telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell.

1. Narrating as an Interpretive Activity

The first part of the quotation above states that "Stories are not only the way in which we come to ascribe significance to experiences …" (Andrews, 2000, p. 77-78). From this part of the quotation it seems that narrative allows people to ascribe significance to their experiences and to interpret their experiences by attributing meaning to them, thereby allowing them to make sense of their experiences (Crossley, 2000; Johnson, 1993; Lock, Epston & Maisel, 2004).

2. Narrating as a Constitutive Activity

The second part of the above quotation states that "… they are one of the primary means through which we constitute our very selves. We become who we are through telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell" (Andrews, 2000, p. 77-78). From this part of the quotation, it seems that constructing a narrative does not only allow people to interpret their experiences, it also constitutes their narrated identity (-ies). Furthermore, the narrated identity (-ies) are not only constructed, but also lived (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Murray, 2008; Sclater, 2003).

2.3.2 The "Narrative" in the Narrative Research Cycle

1. Narrative as a Historical Product

Referring back to the quotation in 2.2.1 (3), it is evident that a narrative is a historical product. History implies that when people narrate their experiences, they do so by taking past-lived experiences, and possible future-imagined experiences into account, as past and future merge into the present narrative (Larner, 1998). "Since all stories have a beginning (or a history), a middle (or a present), and an ending (or a future),

then the interpretation of current events is as much future shaped as it is past-determined" (White & Epston, 1990, p.10). The narrator of a narrative chooses, from an unlimited array, those experiences that he/she deems significant and arranges them into a coherent whole, with the purpose to organize the disorganized and give it meaning (Broyand, 1992). Kierkegaard very aptly stated, that we live life forward, but understand it backwards (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995).

2. Narrative as a Personal-Contextual Product

Referring back to the quotation in 2.2.1 (3), it is evident that a narrative is also a personal-contextual product, whereby subjective experience (self) and objective reality (world) find a meeting place within a narrative (Sclater, 2003). The meanings attributed to sequenced events across time do not occur in a vacuum, there is always a wider context within which narratives form, evolve and become meaningful (Payne, 2000). In any culture, specific narratives will be louder than others, emphasizing customary ways of being, which creates a community identity visible in language, rituals, symbols, behaviour, and processes (Weisner & Millet, 2001; White & Denborough, 1998). Societies construct the "lenses" through which their members attach meaning to the world, and "constitute" themselves (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Foucault (1979) emphasizes how norms permeate peoples' lives at the deepest levels, including their gestures, desires, habits and so forth, and he refers to these as a form of "dressage". Ricoeur (as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 131) states, "We learn to become the narrator of our own story without completely becoming the author of our life".

2.3.3 The "Receiver" in the Narrative Research Cycle

Referring back to 2.2.2 (2), one of the characteristics of narrative research is that the researcher is professionally (as a researcher) and autobiographically (as a person) situated in the research.

1. Receiving as a Professional Activity

The receiver in the narrative research cycle is professionally (as a researcher) involved from a position of curiosity, also known as the “not-knowing” position (Freedman & Combs, 1996). From this position the researcher observes the narrator, facilitates an interviewing process, transcribes the interview material, analyzes the transcribed material, and writes the findings for the research project (Kelly & Howie, 2007; Riessman, 1993).

2. Receiving as an Autobiographical Activity

Besides receiving a narrative professionally (as a researcher), the researcher is also autobiographically (as a person) involved in receiving a narrative. This means that the telling of a narrative can also have an influence on the researcher, as a person. The researcher, as a person, needs to be open to the telling of a narrative, thereby allowing the narrative to reflect on his/her own life. In this sense narratives have their own unique way of generalizing themselves, since a narrative has the potential to influence the life of each “open” receiver.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have briefly stated my research position, by describing the two broad approaches to research in psychology, namely quantitative research and qualitative research. Furthermore, three perspectives regarding narrative were presented. In relation to these three perspectives, I have positioned myself within a post-modernist, post-structuralist perspective. Consequently, I see a narrative as being socially constructed between people. I also indicated the characteristics of narrative research and described the narrative research cycle. In the next chapter I shall address the research enquiry.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH ENQUIRY

Introduction

In this chapter attention is paid to the research enquiry, which is congruent with my research position within the field of narrative psychology. Firstly, I shall address the specific contexts of my research project, followed by my interaction with the research participants, the research material, the research quality and the research ethics.

3.1
RESEARCH CONTEXTS

In this section I shall address the two contexts that were applicable to this research project, namely the academic context of the UP and the community context of Laudium, SA.

3.1.1 Academic Context

The UP was established in 1908 as the Pretoria campus of the Johannesburg based Transvaal University College (TUC). There were four professors, three lecturers and 32 students. In 1930 TUC's name was changed to UP. At that time there were 900 students, while currently the university has more than 50 000 students and comprises nine faculties and a business school (University of Pretoria [UP], 2008).

The Department of Psychology, in the Faculty of Humanities, hosts three professional psychology training programmes, namely, MA (Clinical Psychology), MA (Counselling Psychology) and MA (Research Psychology). My research project falls within the domain of the MA (Counselling Psychology) programme. I have been trained according to the researcher-practitioner model, in terms of which my research experience will enhance my practitioner knowledge. My research project was influenced by this

academic context, and it was informed by the guidelines stipulated by the Research Proposal and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities (Psychology, 2008).

3.1.2 Community Context

The research was conducted in Laudium (Centurion), which is west of Pretoria, SA. Laudium was proclaimed an Indian township in 1961, and it is a relatively wealthy area, with very large residences, which is unusual for a township. Laudium has roughly equal numbers of Hindu and Muslim residents, and many recent South Asian (Indian and Pakistani) residents, who immigrated to SA after the end of apartheid. There are various mosques and temples, and a large number of government schools. However, since the end of apartheid, most Indian children from Laudium have started attending private schools in formerly white areas (Wikipedia, 2010). This community context provides an understanding of the empty nest phenomenon from an Indian cultural perspective. Consequently, certain narratives will be more dominant than others, specifying customary ways of behaving within that culture (Freedman & Combs, 1996). I spent twenty five years in the community of Laudium.

3.2
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In this section, three aspects pertaining to the research participants will be addressed. These are the sampling criteria, the sampling method, and a description of the research participants.

3.2.1 Indian Couples as Research Participants

1. Sampling Criteria

The sampling criteria that were used in this research project were the following:

a. The research participants needed to be South African citizens.
b. The research participants needed to be married Indian couples, residing in Laudium, SA.
c. The research participants needed to be married Indian couples, who had experienced the empty nest phenomenon as described in Chapter 1, in terms of which the empty nest begins when the last child leaves the parental home (Simpson, 1996).

2. Sampling Method

Based on the above-mentioned sampling criteria, two sampling methods were employed in this research project, namely, purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was employed to select the first couple as described within the sampling criteria in 3.2.1 (1). Thereafter, snowball sampling in which each couple referred the next couple was employed (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

3. Indian Couples as Research Participants

a. Couple 1: Mr. Kasoor is 67 years old, and Mrs. Kasoor is 64 years old. Presently both of them live at home.
b. Couple 2: Mr. Naidoo is 70 years old, and Mrs. Naidoo is 63 years old. Presently both of them and Mr. Naidoo's mother live at home, and their youngest son, Rishi, lives in an adjacent apartment.
c. Couple 3: Mr. Khan is 53 years old, and Mrs. Khan is 52 years old. Presently both of them live at home.

3.2.2 Postgraduate Student as a Research Participant

1. Postgraduate Student as a Researcher (See: Chapter 2 (2.3.3 (1))

As a researcher, I was involved professionally in the research project. This position entailed interviewing the participants on their experience of the empty nest phenomenon (Freedman & Combs, 1996), transcribing the interviews (Krefting, 1991), analyzing the narratives (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) and writing the research findings (Riessman, 1993).

2. Postgraduate Student as a Person (See: Chapter 2 (2.3.3 (2))

As a person, I reflected on myself as an Indian woman, specifically as an Indian mother, and as a researcher prior, during, and subsequent to the research process. These reflections are depicted in Chapter 4 as pre-reflections, Chapters 5 to 10 as personal reflections interwoven into the research findings, as well as in Chapter 12 as post-reflections.

3.3
RESEARCH MATERIAL

The process of engaging with the research material for this research project can be represented as:

3.3.1 Phase 1: Prior to the Research Project

2. Institutional Permission: Prior to the research project, permission was obtained to conduct the research project from the Research Proposal and Ethics Committee (30/07/2009) in the Faculty of Humanities at the UP.

3. Participant Consent:

Subsequent to obtaining permission from the Research Proposal and Ethics Committee as stated in 3.3.1 (1), I contacted and met the three couples, in order to explain the research to them and obtain the required consent from them.

See: Appendix A

4. Researcher's Position:

Research as a Professional Activity (See: Chapter 2 (2.3.3 (1))

I did a research project in the last year of my Bachelor of Arts (BA) (Psychology) degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), and in my BA Honours (Psychology) year at the University of South Africa (UNISA.) This is my first attempt at doing a mini-thesis at the MA level. I therefore view myself as a novice researcher. This is addressed further in Chapter 4.

Research as an Autobiographical Activity (See: Chapter 2 (2.3.3 (2))

I also reflected on myself as a person, specifically as an Indian mother prior to this research project, in order to understand my personal narrative's potential influence on the research process. This is addressed further in Chapter 4.

3.3.2 Phase 2: The Research Project

After obtaining the participants' consent and reflecting on myself as a researcher and an Indian mother, the process described below was followed:

1. Narrative Account: Both husband and wife was asked to write a narrative about their experience of the empty nest phenomenon. This provided a re-visiting of personal experiences in a private space, before sharing these narratives with me and his/her partner in a public space. These written narratives formed the basis of the narrative interview described in 3.2.2 (2). The writing of the narratives by the couples, and subsequent sharing of them with me, allowed for agency in the narrative research process to be established, as depicted in 2.2.2 (2).

2. Narrative Interview: Subsequent to the writing of the narratives, each participant shared his/her narrative account with me and his/her partner. I then explored each participant's experience of the empty nest phenomenon through a narrative interviewing process. This was done by allowing the participants to narrate their experiences of parenthood before the empty nest experience, the actual empty nest experience, as well as their experience of parenthood after the empty nest experience. This process created an understanding of the subject of the narrative research process, as it

allowed the participants to make sense of their parenting process over time, thereby also constituting their narrated identities over time (Andrews, 2000), as portrayed in 2.2.2 (1).

The interviews were conducted in the couples' homes, which is a familiar context (Creswell, 2007). I asked one of the partners to share his/her written account, while the other partner and I listened. Thereafter, the listening partner shared his/her written account, while the other partner and I listened. Two of the three couples shared family photos, which helped to recreate certain memories linked to childhood relationships, family rituals, and history (Plummer, 1983). This process allowed the material aspect of narrative research to be addressed, which provided an understanding of the participants' interpretations of the empty nest experience, and the construction of their identities over time as described in 2.2.2 (3).

I adopted a flexible empathic approach, accompanied by curiosity. I also respected the narrative flow, in terms of the past, present, and future, and the interplay between their outer worlds and their inner worlds. I listened, reflected, clarified, and summarized (Creswell, 2007; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Kvale, 1996). This process allowed the method aspect of narrative research to be addressed as seen in

2.2.2 (4). At the end of each interview, I explored if there was anything that the listening partner wanted to clarify. I also explored the experience of writing versus telling the narrative, and diarized my observations (Silverman, 2004). In addition, I allowed the participant to ask me any question/s, in order to allow for transparency.

The interviews were tape-recorded, which allowed me to listen carefully, whilst maintaining eye contact. The interviews with each couple were approximately four hours, according to the following structure:

Part 1: Introduction (30 minutes)
Part 2: Interview Partner 1 (60 minutes)
Part 3: Interview Partner 2 (60 minutes)
Part 4: Conclusion (60 minutes)

Furthermore, the recordings provided a complete record of the interviews for analysis and report writing (Dawson, 2006).

3. Narrative Transcription:

There were different encounters with the research material, which helped to assure "rigor" in the research process (Krefting, 1991). My first encounter was with the written account of the empty nest experience. My second encounter was with the interview itself. My third encounter was with the transcription, which I

did myself, line for line, and this provided intimate contact with the narratives (Dawson, 2006). My fourth encounter was with the analysis of the narratives.

4. Narrative Analysis:

I followed the "Three-Dimensional-Space" approach to do the narrative analysis (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

This approach allows for the narratives to be analyzed by means of three dimensions with the aim of understanding how the participants interpreted their empty nest experience (See: 2.3.1 (1)) and constituted their narrated identities (2.3.1 (2)):

Dimension 1: Historical Analysis (See: 2.3.2 (1)).
Dimension 2: Personal-Contextual Analysis (See: 2.3.2 (2)).
Dimension 3: Time/Place Analysis.

5. Narrative Writing:

There was writing of my pre-reflection of myself as a researcher and an Indian mother, prior to this research project, followed by various writings of the research findings. This process allowed for the emergence of four voices, which were interwoven into the narrative writing:

Initially, I wrote my interpretation of the participant's narrative. I attached my personal

meaning to the shared narrative of each participant, as he/she created personal meaning in the narration process, which was accompanied by the construction of narrated identities (See: 2.3.3 (1)).

Secondly, my writing was followed by allowing each participant's voice to surface in the narrative, by directly quoting what was said in the interview. This ensured that each narrative was given the appropriate respect and importance (See: 2.3.3 (1)).

Thirdly, this writing led to including my personal voice as expressed in my narrative writing of being an Indian mother. I shared the similarities and differences between my personal narrative and the participant's personal narrative, in relation to being an Indian parent (Freedman & Combs, 1996) (See: 2.3.3 (2)).

Lastly, the fourth voice of literature was interwoven as an additional narrative, in the participant's narrative analysis. Thus, I engaged with literature as a "conversational partner", in my understanding of the empty nest phenomenon (Bakker et al., 2010; Lindsay, 2006).

The four voices referred to above are evident in my analysis of each of the participants'

narratives and are portrayed in Chapters 5 to 10.

3.3.3 Phase 3: After the Research Project

1. Participant's Reflection:

Subsequent to the research project, I visited the three couples once again, and engaged in conversation with each participant, regarding my interpretation of his/her narrative. I also verbally shared the similarities and differences between my personal narrative, and the participant's narrative. The participant's response and reflection was addressed, accompanied by his/her experience of the research process. These are described in the conclusions of Chapters 5 to 10. This allowed the outcome aspect of narrative research to be addressed as seen in 2.2.2 (5).

2. Researcher's Position:

Research as a Professional Activity (See: Chapter 2 (2.3.3 (1))

My experience of the research process was addressed, accompanied by what I gained professionally by this process. Furthermore, I also created a link between myself as a researcher and as a practitioner. This is shared in Chapter 12.

Research as an Autobiographical Activity (See: Chapter 2 (2.3.3 (2))

I addressed the influence of the Indian couples' narratives on me, as a person, specifically as an Indian mother. I also focused on my changed perspective of the empty nest phenomenon, which will be addressed in my post-reflection in Chapter 12. This allowed the outcome aspect of narrative research to be addressed as seen in 2.2.2 (5).

3.4
RESEARCH QUALITY

In this section, four aspects related to the research quality will be addressed, namely, supervision, fellow student review, participant involvement and material engagement.

3.4.1 Supervision

I met Prof. Human, my supervisor, individually on a weekly basis, during the different stages of my research process. This was extremely beneficial, because it enhanced my self-awareness, which helped me to look and listen in new ways (Hames, 2007; Krefting, 1991).

3.4.2 Fellow Student Review

I also engaged in regular monthly meetings with my peers, who provided me with their valued feedback, and I also provided feedback regarding their research. I learnt a lot from this mutually beneficial interaction with my peers (Hames, 2007; Krefting, 1991).

3.4.3 Participant Involvement

I provided a feedback session to each of the participants, regarding my analysis of his/her narrative. I also shared my personal narrative, which was interwoven in each of the analysis, in order to discuss the similarities and differences, in relation to being a parent. Furthermore, each participant shared his/her overall experience of the research process (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sparkes, 1998; Smith, 1989).

3.4.4 Material Engagement

I engaged with the material in different ways: narrative account; narrative interview; narrative transcription and narrative analysis. This was also a way of enhancing the quality of the research (Creswell, 2007; Krefting, 1991).

3.5
RESEARCH ETHICS

In this section, four aspects pertaining to the research ethics will be addressed. These are information, participation, confidentiality, and material storage.

3.5.1 Information

The participants were fully informed regarding the purpose, research procedures, duration, and results of the research study. Contact details were provided for the requirement of further information (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002; Health Professions Council of South Africa [HPCSA], 2006, 2008).

3.5.2 Participation

The participants were assured of their selective right to deny participation, and withdraw at any time. The participants were also informed of follow-up interviews, which would be

conducted after the research process. Furthermore, the participants were reassured that if the process of sharing their narratives triggered painful experiences, this would be given empathic consideration. Prof. Human, a registered psychologist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) would be willing to see them in a professional capacity at no cost (APA, 2002; HPCSA, 2006, 2008).

3.5.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality issues were respected at all times, and fictional names were used in the analysis, during discussions, and the final writing of the findings (APA, 2002; HPCSA, 2006, 2008).

3.5.4 Material Storage

The material will be stored for 15 years in the Department of Psychology, at the UP. This is in accordance with guidelines set by the Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities at the University.

Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the research context, research participants, research material, research quality, and the research ethics of my research project. In the following chapter, I will share my pre-reflections as both a researcher and a person prior to the research project.

CHAPTER 4
PRE-REFLECTION

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a pre-reflection of myself as the researcher, prior to my relationship with this research project, and myself as a person, specifically as an Indian mother, prior to my engagement with the Indian couples' narratives of their empty nest experience.

4.1
PRE-REFLECTION AS A RESEARCHER

In terms of my previous research experience, I did a research project in the last year of my BA degree at WITS, which was aimed at understanding homosexual dating behaviour in singles' clubs. I also did a research project in my BA (Honours) (Psychology) year at UNISA, which was aimed at understanding resilience in quadriplegics. Since these two research projects were done quite some time ago, I was sceptical about my capabilities as a researcher at the outset of the current research project. However, from my previous experience, I also knew that the different steps of the research journey will guide the overall research outcome, which provided some comfort. Nonetheless, I view myself as a novice researcher, and this is my first research project at the master's level.

4.2
PRE-REFLECTION AS A PERSON (INDIAN MOTHER)

It is important for me to ponder and reflect on myself as an Indian daughter, woman, wife, and mother, since I am an active participant in the dynamics of the research process. This kind of reflexivity will allow me to understand what this topic means to me personally, and how this may affect my interpretation of the participants' narratives. In

constructing my personal narrative, I have selected specific past events in my life according to a historical timeline, linked to the present and my imagined future. I will describe the effects of my outer world on my inner world, and acknowledge the pervading influence of my Indian, Hindu culture. I will specifically elaborate on the influence of how I was parented, on my becoming a parent, and how this may influence the research process.

4.2.4 Being Parented (Mother) and Research

In accordance with the Hindu culture, my mother stayed at home, while my brothers and I were growing up. Thus, her action to stay at home was strongly shaped by the wider culture. This had a very positive influence on me, because I felt anchored in various ways by her constant presence. She was always at home when I returned from school, and shared my happenings of the day with her. This was very important, since it allowed me to attach meaning to what had transpired during my day. However, as I grew older I did not share as much about my life, even though she was at home. The cultural scripts dictated the sharing of certain aspects only, which created some distance in our relationship, in spite of the closeness. Consequently, during different times in my life, there was harmony and discord between my inner world, my outer world, and the dominant cultural narratives.

I left home when I got married, which created an empty nest. Before I left home, my mother verbally expressed her anticipated feelings of sadness and emptiness about me leaving home, which made me feel somewhat responsible for her emotions. I also experienced mixed emotions about leaving home and the associated changes, but I was also excited about the new aspects of my life, linked to sharing a home with my husband. Once I actually left home, my mother coped much better, which also set me free to explore my new life as a married woman.

When I became a mother to my son and daughter, the nurturing experience provided by my mother coupled with the experience of distance had a very powerful influence on

me. I decided to stay at home, while they were growing up, because I also wanted them to enjoy the comfort of having me at home, so that I could take care of them, and attentively listen to the daily happenings of their lives. Interestingly, the more curious I was, the more they shared with me, which created a strong mother-child relationship. It was also very important for me, to provide a context that allowed for open sharing, beyond the prescriptive norms of society. My outer world had a strong influence on my inner world, and my past identity as a daughter was pivotal in shaping my present and future identity as a mother. Thus, there is a strong interplay between my identity as a daughter and my identity as a mother.

My experience of how I was parented by my mother had a powerful influence on how I parented my children, which jointly influence this research project. Therefore, prior to my engagement with the Indian mothers' narratives, it was important for me to be aware that my personal experience would not influence my analysis of the research material, in a distorted way. I needed to accept my lack of knowledge regarding working mothers, who also share a close relationship with their child/children. I also needed to understand that cultural norms do allow for intimacy in relationships, but in specified ways. This process of self-awareness would allow for a more receptive form of listening to the participants' narratives, uncluttered by preconditions.

4.2.5 Being Parented (Father) and Research

My relationship with my father was characterized by both distance and intimacy. The distance was linked to the definition of being an Indian man, whereby fathers are supposed to be more focused on work, rather than closely involved in daily father-child interaction. However, there were times when he pleasantly surprised me, such as, when he prepared my favourite foods, played games with me, and went shopping with me.

Nonetheless, during my adolescent and early adulthood years, I once again experienced the limiting effects of the dominant cultural narrative, which emphasized prescribed ways of behaving, as a sign of respect. Consequently, I was unable to share

some of my thoughts and feelings in an uninhibited way, as this would have been construed as disrespectful. At this stage, I started to seriously question the limitations of rigid norms, and blind acceptance of conformist thinking, since they disallowed important ways of being. This experience in my outer world negatively affected my inner world, and made me realize the quiet and insidious effect of dominant cultural narratives on society, and individuals that constitute society.

When I got married and left home, my father did not express his feelings about my leaving home. At times I felt sad, because I assumed that my presence was not relevant to him. However, I realized that I was mistaken, because he visited frequently and spent many afternoons with me, which suggested that he was missing me, but was expressing it in action rather than words. I learnt that there are different ways of saying the very same thing, and it was essential for me to be receptive to the difference, otherwise I could have easily missed what he was saying to me without saying it! I also experienced the different effect associated with the different ways in which my mother and father expressed their feelings regarding the empty nest. When I became a parent, it was very important for me to share a transparent relationship with my children, devoid of the strictly regulating function of norms, regarding parent-child interaction.

My experience of how I was parented by my father had a strong influence on how I parented my children, which in turn jointly influence this research project. With regard to this experience, it was significant for me to develop a balanced view in relation to cultural norms, since there are norms, which also have a positive constitutive effect on society. This balanced perception may also contribute positively to my subsequent interpretation of the couples' narratives.

4.2.3 Parenting and Research

Once both my children were at university, I had ample free time, and I started to think about exploring new facets of myself. I lived many years of my life believing, that in order to be a “good” mother, I should be a full-time mother, who stayed at home. However, for almost three years now, I have been a student at the UP completing my MA (Counselling Psychology) degree. This additional identity as a student, has led to the reshuffling of duties for my husband and children, which has been very liberating indeed! I hope it has been so for them as well.

My picture of the imagined future, regarding my personal empty nest is that I will continue to have an emotionally connected relationship with both my children, since the past, present and future is like the continuous movement of a flowing river. I will also allow them the space and freedom to discover their unchartered territories, like I discovered mine, with their support. Next year I will qualify as a counselling psychologist, which means that I shall have an added sense of meaning in my life, above being a wife and mother. I have learnt that although my identity as a mother is constant over time, there are variations in the way I express myself as a mother, in the differing contexts of my relationships with my children over time. Thus, constancy and change are in dynamic movement over time.

The choice of my research question was influenced by the anticipation of my own empty nest. This realization was not clearly apparent initially, but became gradually clearer to me. Thus, my identity as a student and my identity as a mother are closely linked, which jointly influence this research project. The construction of my additional identity as a student, may positively guide me in understanding alternate experiences in the lives of the Indian couples, as they construct new identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shared certain personal aspects of my life narrative, and the process of re-visiting specifically selected memories, and re-telling them, has helped me to create an improved understanding of myself in relation to the research process. I have become aware of how my experiences of being parented, as an Indian daughter, my parenting experiences, as an Indian mother, and my learning experiences as a student will inevitably influence my perceptions and interpretations of the participants' experiences. Thus, it is vital for me to be aware of my preconceptions, which can be conquered with knowledge and empathic understanding. In the next chapter, I will provide my interpretation of Mr. Kasoor's narrative, which is interwoven with both my personal narrative and literature, as additional narratives.

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Narrative of Mr. Kasoor
"New Steps to an Old Dance"

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the narrative of Mr. Kasoor, who is married to Mrs. Kasoor. They have three children. Their eldest daughter Aashnee left home, when she was 30 years old. The second eldest son, Kamal, left home when he was 24 years old. Their youngest son, Rakesh married Sunita and lived with Mr. Kasoor and Mrs. Kasoor for six months, before they left home. He was 29 years old when he left home. At the time of the research all the children had left the Kasoor household.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH ANSWER

The research question is: "How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?" After engaging with Mr. Kasoor's narrative, it appears that his experience of the empty nest phenomenon is accentuated by confusion, as his three children grew up and left home. This can be seen in the following words: "… in fact, there's no emptiness … I don't think you ever deal with the emptiness". Although there is the potential for future resolution of his confusion, it is also important to bear in mind that it may, or may not be resolved. However, despite his confusion, due to the loss of his identity as a father to young children, his narrative also seems to be speckled with gains.

Mr. Kasoor achieves the "speckled-gains-despite-confusion" by plaiting six narrative lines, which unveiled the development of six identities: "Baap"[5], "Sasra"[6], "Daadaa"[7],

[5] "Baap" is a Hindu word for "father".
[6] "Sasra" is a Hindu word for "father-in-law".

"Dhanee"[8], "Dharmic"[9] and "Nokar"[10]. Although different identities were given importance during the plaiting process, he constructed a dominant father identity, with the father-child context in the foreground. The empty nest event can be perceived as a pebble tossed in water, creating a ripple effect upon his other identities. I will provide a description of his identities and the interplay between them, within an Indian, Hindu context.

BEING A "BAAP" TO "NAANA CHOKRA"[11]

Mr. Kasoor's identity of being a husband also encompasses his identity of becoming a father to three children. There are different nuances in the context of each relationship over time, which influenced the construction of his changing identity as a father.

He related the order of his children leaving home, "It happened in, in, in steps you see, first Kamal left, after that Aashnee left, and lastly of course Rakesh got married, stayed with us for a while, and then of course, he left." He said that Kamal "has always been independent, and he always wants to be independent", and he left home "for a specific reason", but "he's the live wire, you know, so you, you could feel the, eh, (silence) the empty space." Mr. Kasoor's identity as a father to Kamal is constructed in terms of not being depended upon, since Kamal functioned independently in the past and continues to do so in the present. Nonetheless, he did share "how his life was going" with his father, which suggests a relationship of sharing. After Kamal left, "it provided more space for Aashnee and Rakesh". Interestingly, an "empty space" can also provide "more space" for other family members*... Listening to Mr. Kasoor's narrative tapped into my personal narrative in relation to "space", and it left me wondering about my personal empty nest experience, which is not very far away. This future experience will probably*

7 "Daadaa" is a Hindu word for "paternal grandfather".
8 "Dhanee" is a Hindu word for "husband".
9 "Dharmic" is a Hindu word for a "spiritual person".
10 "Nokar" is a Hindu word for "worker".
11 "Naana Chokra" is a Hindu word for "young children".

create the experience of an empty space, both physically and emotionally, *especially in the beginning...* Co-researchers Carter and McGoldrick (1989), as well as Glick (1977), state that the family life cycle is based on developmental stages marked by change. Harder (2002) found that the "launching" stage of children, when they leave home, can be most emotionally testing for parents.

Then Mr. Kasoor shared his recollections about his daughter, "Aashnee would always be the one, who would be more shall we say busy with her books, and things like that, which means you'll see her around all the time", whereas "now of course you go past her room and say hi, how's it going, but there's nobody there". There was intense sadness in his description of how he misses the strong presence of his daughter's quietness in the home. His identity as a father to Aashnee displays a close relationship... *I can also relate to his experience of missing his daughter, in terms of my anticipated future. My daughter is talkative and shares a lot with me about her daily occurrences. Thus, when she leaves home it will be very quiet, and I will miss her strong presence*...Co-researchers Lewis and associates (as cited in Broderick, 1988) found that fathers who experienced difficulties when their children left were those with caring personalities.

Thereafter, Mr. Kasoor gladly shared his memories about Rakesh as a "prankster". Therefore, when his son left he "started missing his pranks", and had "the feeling of walking around, and wondering now what". His identity as a father to Rakesh is constructed in the context of humour, which makes him a happy father... *My son is also very jovial and mischievous. Consequently, when he is away from home for long, I miss him, and I miss who I am, when I am with him. Thus, when he leaves home, I am concerned about whether I will laugh as much as I do, and be as playful as I am*... Co-researchers Lachman and James (as cited in De Vries, Kerrick & Oetinger, 2007) found that one of the major consequences of the empty nest transition is a reappraisal of one's life, and a rethinking of future directions.

The sequencing of different experiences is powerfully informing Mr. Kasoor's identity as a father, "It's eh, eh, there's a void, in each case there's a void, but it's a different type. The one would be a quiet one, the one would be a boisterous one, you know, that type of emptiness" and it was not "a total sort of emptiness", but rather a "gradual" transition. In other words, the "characteristic" of each child and the context of each relationship determined the type of "void" experienced.

He then turned to past history, in order to find solace in his present experience of his changing identity of becoming a father to adult children, and to create future meaning, "I'm sure our parents also had those same feelings, you know, I mean we surviving. I think our children will be able to adapt." His relationship with time is based on different kinds of "adaptation", on the one hand, his adaptation to his children leaving home, and on the other hand, his children's adaptation to their own independence within the Indian culture... *My son will complete his degree this year, which is associated with significant future changes and "adaptation" in our family, since he may choose to live closer to his work. This will certainly create a different ambience in our home and I wonder how I will handle this in time...* Co-researcher Harder (2002) found that as young children develop into adults, there is a change from dependence on the family, to independence and acceptance of emotional and financial responsibility.

Mr. Kasoor continued, "In fact, there's no emptiness", but soon after, he said, "I, I don't think you ever deal with the emptiness. I think, that you know it's happened, that is the evolutionary process, we all went through it, huh, and you accept it for what it is, and you adapt to what it is", because "children will not be with you all the time". This inevitable process frustrates him intensely, because "there is no option, that is the way it is, like the cycle of birth and death", and "if you don't accept it, then, then you deluding yourself". His confusion regarding the empty nest experience was laboriously elaborated in the explanation of his relationship with the two terms "accepting" and "embracing", whereby "If you just accept it, then there's still a bit of resistance", but "if you embrace it, it's a whole-hearted acceptance, sort of." He further contradicted himself, "You've got to accept all that, you know. Sorry not accept, embrace all that, ha,

ha"... *I spent many years being a stay at home mother, but in anticipation of the changes linked to my children leaving home, I resumed my postgraduate studies. On the one hand, this new student identity enriches my life, since I have discovered a new personal landscape, but on the other hand, it also protects me from experiencing a lesser degree of emptiness, when the empty nest stage arrives*. *It seems that I have prepared rather well for this stage...* Although there is prolific literature focusing on mothers' experiences of the empty nest, co-researchers Hanson and Bozett (1985), as well as Lewis, Freneau and Roberts (1979) found that fathers also experience sadness and an array of other emotions related to the empty nest.

There is uncertainty whether Mr. Kasoor has embraced or accepted the empty nest, according to his personal definition. His narrative comprises different voices in dialogue with each other, at times contradicting each other. Thus, the construction of his identity as a father is relativistic in nature. It is important to understand the psychological function of the contradiction expressed in his narrative. Perhaps the present confusion is allowing him to construct his identity as a father, which is perched somewhere between "accepting" and "embracing", and allows him to look at his past and present experience of emptiness "as an outsider". The ambiguity may be resolved in the future, which may allow him to construct his identity as a father in a new or less confused way, or perhaps the confusion may persist as a third factor above the pendulum dance to and fro between "accepting" and "embracing", which does not necessarily need resolution.

Mr. Kasoor's need to share more after the termination of the interview was a reaction to his wife's previous comment, "He didn't spend that much time with the children, how much I used to spend." Consequently, he ended his narrative by creating present meaning linked to the past, by explaining that he "used to spend a lot of time" with his children and "used to make kites", and play "gillie danda"[12]. This interaction between them reflects the importance of the meanings attached to a sequenced interaction. Hence, depending on which period of life is being observed, a different narrative may become more prominent. In terms of his identity as a father, he was telling me that he

[12] "Gillie danda" is a Hindu word for the Afrikaans word "kennetjie", and refers to a game.

has been a connected father to his young children... *As a parent, I also spent playful time just having fun with my young children, which allowed me to reconnect with my own free-spirited playfulness. This interaction created a special past relationship, which continues in the present, and shall hopefully continue in the future*... Co-researcher Shaffer (2002) states that both mothers and fathers are important agents in moulding the character of their children in different ways.

When I explored if there was anything else that he wanted to add, Mr. Kasoor laughingly mentioned, "Probably everything has been covered, ha, ha, that you know, that I would, that I would like to tell you." Thus, a narrative is sequenced in a specific way to create a certain impression about one's identity, which is also dependent upon the person receiving the narrative. I will next describe the "speckled-gains-despite-confusion", which is evident in Mr. Kasoor's changing identity as a father to adult children, followed by his father in-law identity, grandfather identity, husband identity, spiritual person identity and worker identity.

BEING A "BAAP" TO "MOTAA CHOKRA"[13]

Although Mr. Kasoor's identity as a father is constant over time, there are also changes in his identity from being a father to young children, to becoming a father to adult children. Thus, both stability and change are in a perpetual dance on a narrative timeline.

As Mr. Kasoor's narrative progressed, it became apparent that after his children left, there was a significant change in his identity as a father, "They visit, you visit", and "you are now actually discovering how they are setting up their homes" and "it's actually wonderful, firstly, it's an observation, secondly, if you open to it, you can learn from it, and of course, you advise also." He said that his relationship with his children has become a "two-way street" with mutual input. He also has "a lot of pride" and "confidence" for their own "unique" ways of doing things and solving "problems"... *In my*

[13] "Motaa Chokra" is a Hindu word for "adult children".

present relationship with my children, I am also experiencing an interesting change in our interactions, from being a mother to young children, to becoming a mother to adult children. It will be exciting to experience how this interaction will unfold in the future... Harder (2002) states that there is a developmental change in terms of the redefinition of the parent-child relationship, as the child becomes an adult, which is punctuated by an adult-to-adult interaction.

Experiences are observed in time, and the meaning of daily experience changes, like shifting sand in the desert breeze, depending on the specific location in time, place and relationships. Mr. Kasoor's changing identity as a father can be depicted in the form of learning new steps to an old dance. The new steps represent the changes related to becoming a father to adult children, while the old steps represent the familiarity of being a father to young children.

BECOMING A "SASRA" AND BECOMING A "DAADAA"

Mr. Kasoor's identity as a father is also extended to the development of his additional identities as a father-in law and a grandfather, which were bestowed upon him by Rakesh.

Mr. Kasoor said, it felt "totally empty" because "it wasn't just Rakesh leaving, it was Sunita leaving" also, after spending "six months" at home after their marriage. Presently it has been a "thrilling experience" to have his first grandchild, but "we can't go and see her as often as we would like", which does not allow him to sufficiently enjoy his identity as a grandfather. According to Harder (2002) this is the time for embracing new members into the family, and the marital system is required to adjust to child rearing, financial and household tasks. Second-order change also occurs with the readjustment of relationships with extended families, as parenting and grand parenting roles overlap. Both Mr. Kasoor's identities as a father-in law and a grandfather can be perceived as "speckled gains", which will develop over time.

BEING A "DHANEE"

The empty nest precipitated a ripple effect upon Mr. Kasoor's marital relationship, as the context changed from sharing a home with children, to sharing it with each other. There is a sense of connecting with the old and familiar in a new way, because previously it was just the two of them, then one by one the children arrived, grew older and left, and now, it is the two of them once again.

Once all the children left, "you have more time for one another, and life as you started off as a newly married couple. So it's a different type of closeness, different type of love that you have" and "it has more depth"... *Now that my children are older, they spend less time with my husband and me, which means that we have more alone time as a couple. I am enjoying the experience of rediscovering each other, at a different stage in our lives, which shall also continue during the empty nest stage...* Co-researcher Edwards (as cited in Hobdy et al., 2007) found that an empty nest was associated with improvements in marital happiness. However, an overall feeling of life satisfaction improved when the contact with the "launched" child was frequent.

The change in Mr. Kasoor's identity as a father also created a change in his identity as a husband. Thus, paradoxically, the empty nest experience allowed a fuller intimacy in his marital relationship. This mirrors the picture of a couple dancing to an old song while the children were at home, but now dancing to the same old song in a new and intimate way, after the children left home.

BEING "DHARMIC"

The empty nest has important ramifications on his spiritual identity, which reflects an alternate personal narrative, accompanied by a new way of being.

After all the children left, the "spiritual aspect also becomes important", since he has more time for "reflection", and his spiritual relationship has been redefined "at a personal level". He no longer feels obliged to go to the temple, but prays in the privacy of his home, which does not fit the dominant cultural narrative of a formalized way of worshipping on specific days, at specific times, in a specific group, at a specific place, in a temple. As much as the outer cultural world has an impact on the inner worlds of individuals, the inner worlds also mutually impact the outer cultural world in a dialectical way. Socially, "there are functions almost every week, which we do have to attend to". Therefore, although spiritually he is willing to differ from the norm, in terms of his social identity, there are cultural narratives, internalized as personal narratives defining prescribed ways of being. Thus, the world of narratives both allows and restricts possible ways of being, in relation to the constructed identities.

It appears that having more time alone for introspection, since the children left, has allowed Mr. Kasoor to dance in a less inhibited way spiritually, by following his personal steps which are different to the collective steps of being spiritual.

BEING A "NOKAR"

Mr. Kasoor's work identity is tightly plaited with his father identity, and the construction of his work identity, after his children left home, plays a significant role in his experience of emptiness. His work identity also seems to have a protective function, in terms of creating definite boundaries of things he can, and cannot do in his daily life.

He stated, "In fact, there's no emptiness", because "the emptiness has been replaced by the work involved in running a shop." This poses the question of whether there's no emptiness, or whether he has substituted the emptiness related to his changing identity as a father with work, in order not to deal with it, or to deal with it through work. Furthermore, working does not allow enough "time as a couple to go visit people", and "to do some community work, and go to the temple", because his work is "difficult" and he gets "tired".

Thus, his work identity manages his social interactions, his community involvement and his visits to the temple. Interestingly, by inference, this implies that his work identity also plays a significant role in allowing him to respond to his alternate narrative of worshipping in a personal way, due to the "restriction of time" related to visiting the temple. His work identity has an influence on his father identity, as well as his husband identity, and his social and spiritual identity, which also reciprocally influence his work identity... *My identity as a student also has important ramifications upon my identity as a daughter, wife, and mother, in terms of what I can and cannot do, and these identities also reciprocally influence my identity as a student. In addition, the development of my identity as a student will also have an important influence on my future experience of the empty nest*... Co-researchers Raup and Myers (1989) found that different roles create fulfilment in different ways by replacing needs once satisfied by the parenting role.

Mr. Kasoor's work identity plays a very powerful role in relation to what he is not able to do, and may also not be allowing him to feel the experience of emptiness in relation to his identity as a father. Thus, the construction of his work identity creates a "speckled gain" relative to his other identities.

Conclusion

I provided Mr. Kasoor with feedback on my interpretation of his narrative, and discussed any similarities or differences that surfaced between his personal narrative, and my personal narrative. He explained that the research process has been insightful, and he felt emotionally "lighter" after sharing his experiences. He also explained that his current work identity provides him with a very different kind of interaction with his adult customers, as opposed to his previous work identity as a teacher. In terms of my experience of the research process, it was interesting that he elaborated on my metaphor of the empty nest event, as a pebble tossed in water, creating a ripple effect upon his other identities. He stated that it was important to know that the water was not

calm, before the pebble was tossed in it. Thus, there were already ripples in the water. From a therapeutic perspective, it would have been valuable to pursue this, in order to understand the change, which he introduced to my metaphor. However, from a research perspective, I acknowledged the importance of what he shared, and trusted that he would contact me if he needed to explore further. Thus, my role as a researcher is distinct from my role as a practitioner, although they are linked. This experience helped me to understand the significance of boundaries. I will next introduce Mrs. Kasoor and relate her narrative of the empty nest experience.

CHAPTER 6
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Narrative of Mrs. Kasoor
"Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who's the Closest of Them All?"

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the narrative of Mrs. Kasoor, who is married to Mr. Kasoor. As mentioned in Chapter 5, they have three children. Their eldest daughter Aashnee left home when she was 30 years old. The second eldest child, Kamal, a son, left home when he was 24 years old. Their youngest child, also a son, Rakesh married Sunita and lived with Mr. Kasoor and Mrs. Kasoor for six months, before they left home. He was 29 years old when he left home. At the time of the research all the children had left the Kasoor household.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH ANSWER

The research question is: "How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?" It seems that Mrs. Kasoor experienced overwhelming emptiness, when her three children left home, and at the end of her narrative, she emphatically stated, "the emptiness is still there" and "it stays, it stays".

Mrs. Kasoor narrated her life experiences in terms of the development of four identities: "Ma"[14], "Samaaj"[15], "Patnee"[16] and "Daadee"[17]. Her narrative is strongly fragranced with her identity as a mother, which unveiled the stark differences in the intensity of her relationship with each of her three children. I will provide a separate description of her

14 "Ma" is a Hindu word for "mother".
15 "Samaaj" is a Hindu word for "social" or "society".
16 "Patnee" is a Hindu word for "wife".
17 "Daadee" is a Hindu word for "paternal grandmother".

relationship with each child, so that the different nuances that pervade her identity as a mother can become more prominent. I will also focus on the interplay between the mother-child relationships, and her social identity, her wife identity and her grandmother identity, within an Indian, Hindu context.

BEING A "MA"

Mrs. Kasoor is a mother of three children who have all left the Kasoor household. She has different relationships with each of her three children, and experienced their leaving the home very differently.

The first child to leave the Kasoor residence was Kamal. Mrs. Kasoor's identity of being a mother to him is infused with the fragrance of love and appreciation. At the beginning of her narrative she stated, "When Kamal left first, well, I missed him", because he used to have music sessions at home with his friends, and "there's always noise". There is a lively audible aspect to his influence on her, besides the music lessons, such as when "he sings and whistles" till he comes out of the shower. She said, "You can't compare Kamal with none of the children", because he is "very loving" and he is very helpful with household chores, while "the others will sit in the lounge"... *I can relate to this experience, because my daughter is also willingly helpful with household chores, and I especially appreciated this during my internship year, when I worked full days. Thus, when she leaves home, I will miss her support and care*... Now that Kamal is in Durban, "It's so difficult" because she sees him "maybe twice a year", and "I, I still think, that he shouldn't have went away so far".

She started crying as she related, "The cupboards are still standing like that with their clothes and everything", and "like till today, Kamal, when he leaves from here, I always cry"... *Both my children are still living at home, but if they moved far away, I wonder how I will cope with it. However, I trust that the bond which we shared in the past, and continue to share in the present, shall be sustained in the future*... Co-researchers Bowlby and Owen (as cited in Hobdy et al.,2007) found that secure attachment style is

characterized by positive models of self and the other, and securely attached individuals may be more able to deal with developmental life challenges in a positive way. Mrs. Kasoor is "very happy" that Kamal is "very independent" and "doing well", but "he doesn't even tell us much, but whoever visits him tells us". There seems to be an interesting framing of the word "independent", which helps her to deal with his lack of direct sharing with her. There appears to be an alliance between Kamal and his mother, of how not to interact with Rakesh. She mentioned that Kamal told her, "Don't ever ask what you ate, because then you're interfering." This also suggests that he may be protecting Rakesh from their mother's intrusiveness, but also simultaneously creating a special bond in his relationship with his mother.

Mrs. Kasoor then gladly relived specific past experiences of being a stay-at-home mother, "In the mornings it's so busy, Kamal wants this cereal, Rakesh wants this, Aashnee wants something else." She then reminisced about her personal experience of existential time, "They were all so small and just grew up like that", and "we used to help them with the costumes, to sew the costumes", and were involved with the Krishnajyanti festival[18], and Gujarati school[19] homework." There was a sense of present longing in relation to her past experience of her identity as a mother who was needed by her young children. She created a link between the past and her future picture, "My children appreciate a lot of what we did for them. They always tell me, ma, it's payback time."

The experience of time within the narrative metaphor brings both the past and the future into present awareness... *In retrospect, with regard to my experience of motherhood, it feels like time has gone by rather quickly, whereas while they were growing up, the pace of time felt much slower. At times it also feels like the future is rushing towards me in the present, like when my son told me that he would like to work overseas for a while. However, I am also excited for him to have new experiences*... Co-researchers Raup and Myers (1989) found that parents gain the greatest psychological benefit from the transition to an empty nest, when they have developed and maintained good relations

[18] "Krishnajyanti festival" is a Hindu religious festival about the birth of Lord "Krishna".
[19] "Gujarati school" is a Hindu vernacular school that teaches the "Gujarati" dialect, and the Hindu culture and religion.

with their children over time. The context of Mrs. Kasoor's relationship with Kamal has led to the construction of her identity as a mother, who appreciates the sounds linked to her son's presence, and she feels cared and loved by his helpfulness. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, is Kamal the closest of them all?"

The second child to leave the Kasoor residence was Aashnee. Mrs. Kasoor's identity of being a mother to her is infused with the fragrance of distance and disappointment. Mrs. Kasoor said, "The emptiness, I could feel it, because Aashnee was like you know, she's a lot to herself." Thus, her experience of the emptiness when Kamal left was further escalated by Aashnee's quietness. This exemplifies the multiple factors related to different relationships, which contributed to her feelings of emptiness. There is a very strong emotional influence of her outer world on her inner world.

She next sequenced her experience of Aashnee, "She's like a bookworm, well, she discuss lot of things with her daddy, she speaks a lot with her daddy", and "she's too, very close to him." Perhaps, this intimate sharing places Mrs. Kasoor in a peripheral position. Once again, there is a strong influence of her outer world on her inner world, and this dynamic interplay creates distance in her relationship with her daughter. When Aashnee left home, "I missed her also a lot", but "if she got married and she went from here, I, it wouldn't have hurt me so much", but "she was single and she left home", and "it hurt me a lot, a lot, a lot". The loudness of the cultural narrative is also evident in her personal narrative, "in the whole society when the girl gets married, we have to send her away". Thus, Mrs. Kasoor is disappointed with her daughter's contrary behaviour to the cultural norm. There is disequilibrium between the dominant discourse and her daughter's alternate narrative, which has a detrimental effect on the mother-daughter relationship. She explicitly defined her relationship with her children, "the daughter is more close to the father, and the sons are more close to the mother"... *I am accepting of individual differences for the sake of respect for the individual, which helps me to embrace my children's subjective realities*...

Co-researchers Frank, Avery and Laman (1988) found that young women would encounter less independence regarding the time to leave home than young men, and it

would be more so in their relationships with their mothers. According to Singh (2005), the cultural context is critical in shaping parental experiences of the empty nest, since it influences the appropriate time for separation based on normative expectations. Individuals often collaborate in the control of their own lives and the lives of others, according to "normalizing" evaluation. This is a mechanism of social control whereby uniqueness is replaced by conformity, due to the fear of being constantly observed, by the "ever-present gaze" of society (Foucault, 1979, 1980). Thus, cultural narratives have a very powerful influence on individual identity, and relationships.

Mrs. Kasoor also feels "very disappointed", when Aashnee often cancels her visits, because "I'll make some seero,[20] or I'll make some laapsi[21], or make some sev[22], or something for her." It seems that food plays an important role in Mrs. Kasoor's need to connect with her daughter, which is also related to her role as an Indian mother. Co-researcher Sampson (1983,1993) found that although American culture celebrates individualism and autonomy, American adults continue to have frequent interaction with their parents throughout their lives, and it is typical between women and their mothers. It is important to understand how people make sense of their connectedness or independence, since the timing of the individuation process is linked to how much separation is regarded as being culturally acceptable. The sequencing of the different events in the context of Mrs. Kasoor's relationship with Aashnee plays a vital role in the construction of her identity as an unhappy mother, who is challenged in various ways, both culturally and personally. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, is Aashnee the closest of them all?"

The third child to leave the Kasoor residence was Rakesh. Mrs. Kasoor's identity of being a mother to him is strongly infused with the fragrance of laughter and intense closeness. She spoke about him in a very jovial way, "Rakesh, he is a brat, spoiled brat, and like every now and then coming, hugging, kissing, and you know, imitating people", and "he was a real, real comedy in the house." Consequently, "I started overcoming

20 "Seero" is a Hindu word for a "dessert" prepared with fine wheat.
21 "Laapsi" is a Hindu word for a "dessert" prepared with crushed wheat.
22 "Sev" is a Hindu word for a "dessert" prepared with vermicelli.

those two who left the house", since he "covered for them, because when I say Rakesh, he's everything to me." Thus, her experience of Kamal and Aashnee leaving home was softened by the humour and love that Rakesh created in the context of his relationship with his mother.

However, she angrily related the time when he left home, "First of all, I lost my father, when I came home Rakesh and Sunita was gone. So I was very depressed, it wasn't like easy for me to accept that." When asked to explain what helped her to deal with her emotions, "It was just talking to Rakesh, and he comforted me a lot", which meant "that I haven't lost him completely." This suggests a very close and possessive relationship with him, "He's still mine, he will come home."... *My son and I have enjoyed spending a lot of time with each other, but now that he is older, the amount of time that we spend is lessened, and could become even lesser in the future. It is important for me to adapt to this change, which also creates time for me to pursue my personal interests*... Co-researchers Raup and Myers (1989) found that as children enter this new stage of independence, they may experience that their parents are feeling rejected as a result of not being needed as much anymore. There may also be guilt linked to the "goodness" of one's parenting in preparing the children for adulthood.

Furthermore, when Rakesh left home with Sunita Mrs. Kasoor "helped him to fill his house, from spoon to grocery", and "oil, ghee[23], everything, masala[24], everything I did". She also "took Mukeshbhai[25] there, and he did a small vaastu"[26]. Mrs. Kasoor elaborated further, about how filling containers of food for him, helped her to deal with the emptiness after he left home, "Well, I used to cook for him, fill up tiffin[27], call him from work, that come, I've got something that you like" and "that made me happy". The present strong link in her relationship with him associated with food, can also be traced

23 "Ghee" is a Hindu word for "refined butter".
24 "Masala" is a Hindu word for "Indian spices".
25 "Mukeshbhai" is a Hindu priest from India, who performs Hindu rites and rituals in the Laudium community.
26 "Vaastu" is a Hindu word for a "prayer" to bless a new home.
27 "Tiffin" is a Hindu word for a "stainless steel container" with different compartments.

to the past as he was growing up, “Every day I’ve got to think, what I must cook for Rakesh”, because he is “the fussy one”.

Paradoxically, food has an important dual function in relation to her identity as a mother, and creates a very special bond in her relationship with Rakesh. Firstly, cooking specially for him and inviting him helps her to keep him close, and secondly, it also keeps her occupied, which in turn helps her to deal with the emptiness. Later in her narrative the powerful cultural discourse related to the importance of cooking became evident, as she described her relationship with cooking over time, “From small, you see, I was in the kitchen”, and now “First thing in the morning, I must decide what I’m gonna[28] cook, that’s the first thing comes in my mind, ha, ha”, and “I can be how sick”, but “I make sure, there’s a full meal, because that’s the priority, I’ve got pride in that.” Thus, the cultural narrative in her outer world has an influence on her inner world, and the construction of her identity as a Hindu woman and mother.

...Since I am also a Hindu woman, cooking is an important part of my daily life, but it is not just about having supper, but rather about the connection created while having supper. Although I will miss this experience when my children leave home, my husband and I will still share and connect with each other... Co-researcher Oliver (as cited in Raup & Myers, 1989, p. 181) studied post-parental maladjustment, and concluded that “The problem is not the empty nest; the problem is the empty woman.” Black and Hill (as cited in Raup & Myers, 1989) found that an over-involvement in the maternal role played an important part in a failure to adjust to the “empty nest”, due to lack of involvement outside the family.

In terms of Mrs. Kasoor’s experience of becoming a grandmother, “I tell you, my baby got a baby, he’ll still remain my baby, and he knows that, ha, ha.” Even though he’s a father now, she still perceives him as her baby, which suggests that her relationship with him as he grew older has still remained unchanged in certain ways... *In my relationship with my children, I have discovered that it is important for me to change, as*

[28] “Gonna” is an English slang word for “going to”.

they change, which allows for the opening of new and necessary ways of being with each other... Co-researcher Margaret Mahler (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975) coined the term "separation-individuation", which describes development in relational terms, since the infant needs different ways to be cared for, during different stages of the developmental process. Thus, life changes occur through negotiation and changes in interpersonal relationships.

Mrs. Kasoor's relationship with Rakesh has led to the construction of her identity as a mother, which is defined by emotional and physical intimacy. Her narrative revealed that the same mother is also a different mother, in the context of different relationships with each of her three children. In other words, she is who she is in relation to others. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, is Rakesh the closest of them all?"

BEING IN A "SAMAAJ"

Mrs. Kasoor's social identity is very closely intertwined with her identity as a mother, like two sticky strands of liquorice sweet. Her social identity helps her to cope with her experience of emptiness, related to the empty nest phenomenon.

She said, "I do a lot of social work" and "anybody's house, wedding or anything, I am there first to help," and "I forget for a while, but when I come home, then I still miss my children." It seems that the alternate experience provided by her social identity is short-lived, since she was emphatic about missing her children, which is a more dominant experience in her life. She also mentioned "enjoying the mandal"[29], which allows her to "visit old age homes", and "This type of things keeps me busy." However, despite her social identity, Mrs. Kasoor explained, "But now, that is all, will never, eh, like, make me forget my children. No, that gap is still there".

...I created a student identity to assist me in my anticipated empty nest experience, pertaining to my children leaving home. This student identity will become a professional

[29] "Mandal" is a Hindu word for a "cultural group".

identity once I register as a psychologist, which will also assist me in dealing with the empty nest phenomenon... Co-researchers Raup and Myers (1989) state that if women are able to find other roles to replace needs once satisfied by the mothering role, they could find fulfilment in different ways. In this way, an empty nest becomes a transitional phase in the experience of motherhood. These sentiments are echoed by other co-researchers as well, such as Thoits (1983), as well as Hobdy et al. (2007).

As much as Mrs. Kasoor expressed the value of her social identity, she simultaneously also expressed that her social identity does not fill the "gap", which has been created by the empty nest.

BEING A "PATNEE"

Mrs. Kasoor's marital relationship intensified her experience of emptiness. She felt hurt and alone, in relation to her husband's lack of empathy.

The sequencing of events is significant, "First of all, I lost my father, when I came home Rakesh and Sunita was gone. So, I was very depressed", and "there's nobody to talk about it", because "he (husband) just tells me, it's one of those things, and we have to accept it. That's not the answer, you know, I want somebody to comfort me that hurt me a lot". Mrs. Kasoor's experience of her husband as being unsupportive may have further escalated her experience of emptiness, regarding her son and daughter in-law leaving home... *From time to time, I find myself wondering how the relationship between my husband and I will interplay in relation to our experience of the empty nest phenomenon*... Co-researchers Raup and Myers (1989) state that most parents experience depression as part of their empty nest experience, as it is a time of change of identity, as well as loss of purpose and roles. This position is shared by other co-researcher, Holmes and Rahe, as cited in the work of White and Edwards (1990).

Mrs. Kasoor's wife identity continued to unfold in her narrative, as she shared the different ways in which she supported her husband, "I babysat", and "I used to fill tiffin

for the working mothers", and "give Gujarati school tuition, just to help him to put my children through university, because with a teacher's salary, you can't do all this", so "it wasn't easy", and "nobody knew how we were managing. This is the first time that I'm opening my mouth and telling you, that I did that much of work". I got the impression that it was important for her to share this, so that, what was previously ignored could be heard and acknowledged. She was also telling me that he did not support her, but she supported him.

In Mrs. Kasoor's narrative, the death of her father followed by her experience of the empty nest was a catalyst, which made the dynamics of her marital relationship appear in the spotlight.

BECOMING A "DAADEE"

Mrs. Kasoor's identity as a grandmother reflects her need to teach her grandchild the Hindu culture and religion. Where she felt unsupported by her husband regarding her empty nest experience, she feels that her grandchild opens up possibilities again.

The grandchild brings "extra spice in our life", and "now I feel that our life is fuller". Thus, her identity as a grandmother helps her to deal with the emptiness related to her identity as a mother. Nonetheless, she is concerned about the baby spending more time with the other grandmother, "I still tell Rakesh that look it's not that, only 'that' granny must look after the baby, every now and then, you must come and leave the baby with me also", otherwise "she's not going to know us", and "I want to teach her our culture", about "how to make deevo"[30] and "how to make shaantipaath"[31]. In terms of a timeline, it is very important for her to create a link between past traditions and the continuation of these into the future, by presently informing Rakesh of her desire to impart culturally valued teachings to her grandchild.

[30] "Deevo" is a Hindu word for a "lamp".
[31] "Shaantipaath" is a Hindu word for a "peace prayer".

The experience of emptiness caused by her children leaving her, as well as her experience of not being supported by her husband, despite her supporting him for many years, is somewhat softened by her relationship with her grandchild. Could it be that the grandchild will be the closest of them all?

Conclusion

I provided Mrs. Kasoor with feedback on my interpretation of her narrative, and discussed any similarities or differences that surfaced between her personal narrative, and my personal narrative. She explained that the research process has been a positive experience, and she found comfort and joy in sharing her experiences. Additionally, she found the shared differences of my personal narrative to be valuable and thought-provoking. She commented that with the passage of time things changed, and her experience of the emptiness lessened, because she spends her leisure time sewing, and has been preoccupied with her recent health issues. In terms of my experience of the research process, I learnt that the specific construction of meaning in the sharing of a specific narrative changes, depending on an individual's experience of the same event, during a different time. My awareness of the instrumental role of culture became significantly heightened, in terms of the impact that culture has on her self-definition, as well as, on her relationship with her daughter. I will next introduce Mr. Naidoo, and relate his narrative of the empty nest experience.

CHAPTER 7
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Narrative of Mr. Naidoo
"An Empty Nest Redefined"

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the narrative of Mr. Naidoo. When Mr. Naidoo was eleven years old his father died at the age of 34. He has a younger sister and brother. After his father's death he lived with his maternal grandparents and uncles, and spent a lot of time with his cousins. Whilst he was working as a teacher he stayed with his mother's cousin. His mother presently lives with him and his wife. Mr. Naidoo is married to Mrs. Yana Naidoo, and they have three children. Their eldest daughter left home when she was 21 years old. The second eldest son left home when he was 25 years old. Their youngest child, also a son, left home when he was 28 years old. Mr. Naidoo has friends and visitors who often spend time at his home. At the time of the research, their eldest daughter and second eldest son had left the Naidoo household. After living away from home, their youngest son and his wife recently returned to be close to the nest, and they are now living in an adjacent apartment.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH ANSWER

The research question is, "How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?" Mr. Naidoo provided a long narrative, with a very rich description of his life experiences, accompanied by a renewed understanding of the empty nest phenomenon. His experience of the empty nest is that it has been a "gradual" process, and "the loneliness of the empty nest" as different immediate and extended family members left home has not been "too difficult", since "the nest has never been empty", because the "community nest" also creates fullness. He perceives "the real empty nest" as a potential future picture of the nest without his partner.

His narrative can be perceived as a spider's web, with intricate patterning of different threads, which represent different narrative lines and narrative identities. His narrative is related in terms of the development of six identities: "Maghanand"[32], "Pehr"[33], "Khutumb"[34], "Poorsa"[35], "Appa"[36] and "Sungum"[37]. However, it is also important to be cognisant of his intellectual identity, which is very subtly and intermittently interwoven as a sticky thread with his other identities, throughout his narrative. His intellectual identity seems to have the function of helping him to create emotional distance from certain life experiences by intellectualizing them. Furthermore, it appears that he wanted to convince me that he is an intellectual. I will provide a description of his identities, and the interplay between them, within an Indian, Tamil context.

BEING A "MAGHANAND" AND A "PEHR"

Mr. Naidoo created a renewed understanding of the empty nest phenomenon as an empty nest in a young boy's life, after the death of his father. His identity as a son and grandson are intimately threaded as a result of this experience of loss. This event had a very powerful influence on the construction of his identity as a son who would fully support his mother in the absence of his father.

It is significant that Mr. Naidoo began his narrative of the empty nest experience, by going far back in time, when his father died at the age of "34", and he was "11" years old, his sister was "10" years, and his youngest brother was "2" years, and "… it was tough, it was hard, and it wasn't easy". Co-researcher Simpson (1996) states that the empty nest is a popular American label assigned to the time period when all the children have left the parental home. On the contrary, according to Mr. Naidoo's experience, the

32 "Maghanand" is a Tamil word for "son".
33 "Pehr" is a Tamil word for "grandson".
34 "Khutumb" is a Tamil word for "extended family".
35 "Poorsa" is a Tamil word for "husband".
36 "Appa" is a Tamil word for "father".
37 "Sungum" is a Tamil word for "social" or "society".

nest became empty when his father died. He explained his helplessness, “We all had to come back to Johannesburg, and we had to live with our, with my maternal grandparents, my mother then went to work in a factory.” He “couldn't go to university”, because he “couldn't afford it”, but went to college, and “became a teacher”.

He then got a small council home in Laudium, “I moved in with my mother and younger brother, because they were my responsibility.” His sister was married at this stage. The death of his father very strongly informed his identity as a son, who would be responsible for taking care of his family. Hence, the influence of his outer world on the construction of his identity is strongly evident. He described their “first home” with intense elation, “We loved and shined it, small little home, but it was ours”, and it was “more than special”. He “gave” his previous house to his maternal grandmother, because she “had gone through hard times”.

The context of Mr. Naidoo’s relationship with his mother and grandmother is highly relevant to the construction of his identity as both a son, and a man...*I also spent a lot of time with my mother and grandmother, as I was growing up, which had a powerful impact on the construction of my identity as a woman and mother. I am curious to discover, how this will influence my future experience of the empty nest...* Co-researcher Seymour (1999) found that women in the Indian family spend a great deal of time with the children, thus making them very influential. Mr. Naidoo said, “It's unbelievable how in the Indian family, that women play such a relevant, important role”, and they “keep the family together”, whereas “husbands were the first to die”.

This resonates with his past experience of the death of his father, and his mother’s and grandmother’s pivotal roles as the family caretakers. He places women on a “pedestal”, and this elevated positioning of women also influences his positioning of himself as a man, in a less elevated position. There is a stark juxtaposition of his description of the man’s role in the family, “The men would go drink, and get into all types of mischief”, and not even provide that well for their families. He “saw all this happen”, and in the absence of his father as a role model, his perception of men is determined largely by

what he experienced vicariously by observing other males. The influence of his outer world on his personal construction of meaning is significant.

He said, previously, “When there was a little extended family of children, brother, we could move out, to holidays, or go out, knowing that somebody was around”, whereas now, “there’s nobody to look after her (his mother)”, and “we couldn't leave her alone”, so “we had to change our way of life”, and “now it has really become an empty nest”. Since his experience of fullness is linked to an extended family network, it is inevitable, that his experience of the empty nest would also be linked to changes within this wider system.

This provides a different understanding of the empty nest from the typical definition, which states that an empty nest is when all the children have left the parental home. In his case, it also refers to his brother leaving home... *Since I have not lived in a widely extended family system, my future empty nest would be when my son and daughter leave home*... Co-researcher Shaffer (2002) states that the empty nest is a stage that defines the onset of structural and emotional changes within the family, and that family adaptation to this stage is determined by the cultural variations linked to the empty nest phenomenon.

The early loss of his father meant that it was Mr. Naidoo’s sole responsibility to take care of his mother, which resulted in his identity as the son becoming profoundly entrenched. His identity as the son is a dominant identity, or a major thread connecting with other threads, or identities.

BEING IN A “KHUTUMB”

As much as the death of his father very strongly informs his identity as a son, it is also strongly informing his extended family identity, which he acquired in the context of a fatherless child requiring support from other family members. Mr. Naidoo continued to

develop his extended family identity since it enriches his life with a sense of connectedness.

After his father's death he states, "We all lived together as part of an extended family, my uncles and everybody else". When he got his first teaching post, he boarded at his "mother's cousin's place", which reflects the strong support provided by different family members. Even after he got his own house, "this home was always like an extended family" with "my uncles" and "my cousins", so "this house was a congregation". Thus, his experience of a family from a young age was a much wider one than just his immediate family and he felt cushioned by it. Thus, there was harmony between his outer and inner world. His mother and brother "lived all along" with him, and his wife "accepted a big family" and "my brother was 12 years old", so she related to him "like he was her son". Mr. Naidoo built a "granny cottage" for his brother, who lived "next door" even after his marriage, till the age of "58". The construction of Mr. Naidoo's identity as a brother is also tightly threaded with his need to be a father figure to his younger brother.

Mr. Naidoo also described the support provided by the extended family, when his wife went to work, "My mother would be with the children" and "my grandmother" would also be "here often"... *While I was growing up, my maternal grandmother lived with us for a while, before she passed away. As a child, I enjoyed listening to her, as she related fascinating narratives in a very expressive way*. *When I gave birth to my son, she also helped me with the transition...* Co-researcher Seymour (1999) found that Indian families place importance on the interdependence and welfare of the extended family, which is in contrast to an American cultural system that emphasizes the independence of the nuclear family unit. This sentiment is also shared by Trawick (1992) who uses the term "de-individuation" to refer to the discouragement of an independent self, for the sake of the collective well-being.

Mr. Naidoo emphasized, "The house was always full, not only from our children, but the extended family", and therefore, "it wasn't an empty nest". His outer world of an

extended family had a defining influence on his inner experience of a full nest. As he shared his family photos, it provided a tangible experience of the richness of an extended family, “You can get the picture. It is a close-knit family”. He explained the multiple influences provided by different family members, “they were not your children only, they were children of the whole family”, and he personally experienced this whilst growing up. Co-researchers Seymour (1999) and Shaffer (2002) found that families have different configurations, depending on the needs of individual families, and the values placed on specific cultural contexts. In certain cultures children are raised collectively. Consequently, the empty nest experience may not be relevant to all cultures, or may affect members of different cultural backgrounds in different ways

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There is an interesting interplay between the political world, the extended family system, and Mr. Naidoo’s inner world, for instance, “the Group Areas Act, which was an iniquitous system”, but it kept “families closer together”. When this changed politically “people could live where ever they wanted to, the extended family slowly moved out” and it was “you, your wife, like I had my mother and my brother, and my children”. Thus, this change created a change in his extended family identity by narrowing it to a smaller family system. His future picture is that the extended family will be “dead” in the “next ten to fifteen years”, and family members will live together mainly for “financial reasons”... *I lived with my family for personal reasons, which were also culturally suitable, and I left home when I got married*... Co-researchers Beecher (2003), as well as Schnaiberg and Goldenberg (1989), found that it is important to understand the current social and economic pressure on young people to stay at home for longer periods. The present global financial crisis will influence this aspect. There is a dynamic interaction between the fluctuations within the economic context, and the empty nest phenomenon.

Mr. Naidoo’s narrative portrayed an extended family identity, which is extensively patterned like a spider’s web with interlacing threads, creating reverberations of meaning between the present linked to the past, and directing new threads to the future.

Mr. Naidoo's identity as a husband was chosen for him, and the "compatibility of the families" was a crucial factor in an arranged marriage. This reveals the cultural importance placed on collective family decisions rather than individual choices.

After he described his earlier years, he said, "I got married in 1966, and I met Yana". The sequencing is interesting since he married her before he met her. It was an arranged marriage, "as, as happened in most cases in the early days". The overriding power exercised by his outer world on his inner world is blatantly evident. He provided an academic explanation of "research studies" to explain his arranged marriage, which was culturally determined. It was found that "the most lasting marriages are fixed marriages", because "you looked for all the special qualities", rather than the "faults" in each other. The threading of his intellectual identity, firstly, allows him to talk about his personal experience of an arranged marriage from a distanced position, and secondly, it provides academic support for his arranged marriage. When asked about his personal experience, he praised his wife for her "many good qualities", during their "43 years of marriage". Now that he and his wife are retired, he intends to "enjoy" his life with her. Mr.Naidoo's identity as a husband and his identity as a son are two tightly intermingled threads. His dominant identity as a son became apparent in his description of the empty nest, "me and my wife, we could understand, and between my mother, so we could overcome it".

He is afraid of the future because, "We getting old now, I, I, I find, the biggest fear I have is when, if something happens to me, my wife will have to adapt to the trauma situation", and although she is independent "it will be lonely, that will be the extreme case of the empty nest". He then continued by shifting from her experience of loneliness without him, to his personal experience, "a friend who comes and has a cup of tea, he lost his wife", and he is "extremely lonely, and that's my fear". In terms of the sequencing of events, his friend's visits are accompanied by the sharing of his loneliness after the death of his wife, which further emphasizes this possible future reality for Mr. Naidoo.

He emphasised the nest without his partner as “the real empty nest”, which will be “very difficult”, because “who's going to put out my clothes ha, ha”, and “who’s going to see that I have my food, who'll see that my, my medicines are on time”. Culture plays a significant role in the conditioning involved in being a so called “good” Indian wife, who fulfils certain role descriptions, which in turn encourages and sustains the dependent behaviour of the husband... *As an Indian wife it is very important for me to integrate my personal values with my cultural scripts, so that there is harmony between my inner and outer world*... Co-researchers Von Bertalanffy (1968), as well as Becvar and Becvar (1982) emphasise the patterns of relationships within family systems, which determine the behaviours that are sustained. There are also reciprocal influences between different systems, such as a family system, a community system and a cultural system.

Mr. Naidoo’s past and present identity as a husband has been constructed in a dependent way, and he is afraid of his potential future identity without his wife. He also seems to doubt his ability and willingness to take care of himself.

BEING AN “APPA”

Mr. Naidoo’s identity as the father, in the context of his relationship with each of his three children is strongly shaped by the wider political and cultural climate.

The first child to leave the Naidoo residence was his eldest daughter. He proudly shared her photo and mentioned that she obtained a diploma in a dental course. However, she did not attend her graduation, because it was “on apartheid lines”, and although “the barriers” linked to “apartheid” were changing, “they still were not wanting to take her. And I had to put up a big fight”. This reflects the role of the political situation in his outer world, on the construction of his identity as a father, who needed to “fight” to support his daughter. He described the time when she got married and left home, it was “difficult, because my daughter has always been very close to me”, and there was “a little emptiness”.

The second child to leave the Naidoo residence was his second eldest son, who got married and left home, “in a very nice way”. However, Mr. Naidoo “expected them to stay”, because in “Indian families”, especially “the eldest son, but the son that gets married, moves into the family home, live a little while, and then perhaps move away”. He said, “We were a bit surprised” but “with my studies too, I knew these patterns, so we could understand”. It appears that he was once again weaving an academic thread, accompanied by emotional distance, in order to manage his feelings related to his son leaving home. He continued, the new daughter-in- law comes “into the home, and she learns from the mother-in-law, things of how to cook”.

Thus, his expectations regarding the behaviours of his son and daughter-in-law are moulded by the Indian culture, which has a powerful influence on the construction of his identity as a father. He was surprised, and perhaps disappointed, by the unexpected event of them living away from home, which is in contradiction to the dominant cultural narrative. There is a strong influence of his outer world on his inner world... *In the future, if my son got married and lived independently, I would be comfortable with it, so that the relevant boundaries can be respected. It will also be interesting to experience how the boundaries will be negotiated in the different relationships in the future...* Co-researcher Simpson (1996) states that psychological developmental theories have been compared to biological processes, since both share concepts of growth and development. In Western society young people are expected to leave home at a certain age, which is regarded as a stage in the “normal” process of development. Thus, according to co-researcher Rosenthal (1984), the biological metaphor seems to be both descriptive and prescriptive in relation to life changes.

The third person to leave the Naidoo residence was his brother, which had “more influence”, because he was “very close”. This once again highlights Mr. Naidoo’s experience of the empty nest, as being embedded within a wider family context. The construction of his identity as a father is also knotted with his identity as an older brother, who has been a father figure to his younger brother, since their father died.

His youngest son was the fourth and last one to leave the Naidoo residence. He got married and “went on his own”, and then “there was an emptiness”, because he is “very close” and “eh, we could, we could feel it, there’s no doubt about that, we could feel it, but we were strong enough in our own interaction”. His identity as a father to his youngest son is defined by closeness. However, his identity as a husband helped him to cope with the emptiness experienced in his changing identity as a father. He explained that at his age the empty nest is “a boon, that we enjoy it, in the sense that it gives us a bit of privacy”, and “rest from the children, so you can understand and accept that empty nest situation”. Thus, he needs private time to make sense of his empty nest experience.

After living independently with his wife, his youngest son returned to live closer to the nest, and moved into an adjacent apartment, which “eased the pain or the loneliness”. He said his son visits often, “my son came home from work, he came straight away, he’s lying there on my bed, and making fuss over his mother”. Co-researchers Clemens and Axelson (1985) found that “fledgling adults” are returning home in large numbers, due to unemployment, divorce and financial needs, but also more hidden factors such as dependence, protection needs, and parental happiness. These sentiments are echoed by Haley (1980), who further states that some young adults refrain from leaving home as a result of guilt, which may be reinforced by their parents.

Mr. Naidoo then linked the present to his past experience, when his children were young, and described that he worked as a teacher, which “meant having time” in the afternoons to play games, such as, “cricket” which he enjoyed, and helping them with their “Maths lessons”. He further elaborated his concerns related to his identity as a grandfather, “the children of today are being overexposed”, and “they must go for this and that, and extra lessons”, and there is “the loss” of “a child's ability to play as a child”. His “biggest fear” is that as a result of the “technological explosion”, the children are not going to relate to their family, and the “interaction would be lost”. He has created a caring and protective identity as a grandfather.

Mr. Naidoo's father identity is mingled with closeness and distance in the context of his relationship with his children, and the academic thread allows him to create distance in the midst of closeness.

BEING IN A "SUNGUM"

Mr. Naidoo's social identity has been securely constructed, and it provides support to both his changing father identity, and changing extended family identity like the strong outlining threads, which keep the spider's web intact.

His social identity has a powerful influence on his "home life" and his experience of the empty nest, "the advantages of the Group Areas was, it was not an empty community nest", because the "wider community was still there to support you". The influence of his outer world on his inner world is pronounced, since the political context created a tighter community cohesiveness, which helped him to deal with his personal experience of the empty nest. He "had people coming in all the time, friends, or visitors", and there were always temple functions, where people would "congregate", and this "helped a lot"... *I am selective about people entering my world at specified times, since it is important for me to spend time by myself. This helps me to understand myself and the world much better*...

However, in terms of Mr. Naidoo's future picture "the community that was an extended community, would now become just like some of the other suburbs, you wouldn't even know your neighbour", and "slowly but surely the community in its present form will die". Consequently there will be a transformation of his social identity in the future, which will impact his inner world. He also expressed his related concern, "my grandchildren, I would have liked them to go to a vernacular school to learn their language", but "that wider community is going to be less influential", now that people are moving into other areas. In this way the political context strongly influences the cultural context... *I moved out of Laudium when my son and daughter were toddlers. Consequently, they did not*

attend a vernacular school and cannot speak Gujarati[38]*, although they do understand some of it*...

Mr. Naidoo further described the richness of the community, “all these material things, it means nothing, as you get older. These things are nothing. You need people. You need to talk to people, you need to meet, that's why I say in our home fortunately, the nest has never been empty because of this community there's always somebody”. The nest has never been empty because during different times it has been filled by immediate and extended family members, as well as community members. However, there have been experiences of emptiness at different times, as related in his narrative.

When asked about the experience of writing versus sharing his narrative, he stated, “Some of it you don’t think, you feel it inside, but you gave me an opportunity to think about it”, and “this factor of the extended community playing a part, I mean I never thought about that”, whereas “writing it was just a little story, it gave me an opportunity to, to reminisce”. Thus, the act of narrating his experiences allowed him to discover the meaning that the community provides in keeping his nest full, and to understand the composition of his social identity.

At different stages in Mr. Naidoo’s life the wider relational systems have cushioned him in a positive, comforting way. Both his extended family and the extended community have fulfilled this role effectively.

Conclusion

I provided Mr. Naidoo with the feedback on my interpretation of his narrative, and discussed any similarities or differences that surfaced between his personal narrative, and my personal narrative. He explained that the research process has been a learning experience for him, since he did not fully understand the term “empty nest”, since it is not commonly applicable in the Indian culture. However, after the interview, he

[38] “Gujarati” is a dialect in the Hindu language.

pondered at length about the “empty nest”, and felt even more grateful for the support provided by his extended family, and the community. He was also surprised to learn about the interplay of the different identities, because he thought that they existed in isolation. In terms of my experience of the research process, I learnt the value of patiently following where he led me, with regard to his experience of the empty nest. At times in the interview I felt a bit lost, because it seemed like he was meandering away from the topic. However, by following him, instead of redirecting him, I gained a renewed understanding of the empty nest. I will next introduce Mrs. Naidoo and relate her narrative of the empty nest experience.

CHAPTER 8
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Narrative of Mrs. Naidoo
"Painting on the Canvas of Life"

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the narrative of Mrs. Naidoo. She comes from a family of parents, four brothers, one sister, and cousins. She is married to Mr. Kiruben Naidoo. As mentioned in Chapter 7 they have three children. Their eldest daughter Veeba left home when she was 21 years old. The second eldest son, Rajan, and his wife left home when he was 25 years old. Their youngest son, Rishi, and his wife left home when he was 28 years old. Mrs. Naidoo has five grandchildren, two grandsons and three granddaughters. Her mother-in-law has lived with her since she got married. Her brother-in-law also lived with her for many years. At the time of the research their eldest daughter, Veeba, and second eldest son, Rajan, had left the Naidoo household. After living away from home, their youngest son, Rishi, returned with his wife to be close to the nest. They presently live in an adjacent apartment.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH ANSWER

The research question is, "How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?" Mrs. Naidoo's experience of the empty nest, as her three children left home, was softened by her primary focus on her husband and mother-in-law and whether "they were comfortable, and they were happy, and they were fine". Thus, the dominance of her identity as a wife and daughter-in-law de-emphasized the impact of her changing identity as a mother. Furthermore, after getting married and leaving home, their youngest son and his wife returned to be close to the nest, and moved into an adjacent apartment. This created an atmosphere of fullness in the "nest".

Mrs. Naidoo's narrative is related in terms of the development of five identities: "Manavi"[39], "Marimagal"[40], "Ammah"[41], "Parthie"[42] and "Mhamyiar"[43]. I have merged her wife identity and daughter-in-law identity because in her narration these two identities are inextricably linked, and both narrative lines are simultaneously intertwined. Just as Mrs. Naidoo has combined both her identities, before "painting" a picture of her experiences on the canvas of life, similarly, an artist combines and mixes different colours on a palette, before painting on an art canvas. I will provide a description of her identities and the interplay between them within an Indian, Tamil context.

BEING A "MANAVI" AND A "MARIMAGAL"

Mrs. Naidoo accepted her identity as a wife, which was chosen for her by her parents. Her related identity as a daughter-in-law is established according to the cultural norms, associated with an arranged marriage.

She began her narrative by plaiting her experience of her family of origin with her arranged marriage. She grew up with four brothers and a sister, and they were a "very close" family, and "our cousins would come around" and we "did things together all the time". She said, "Our marriage was sort of an arranged marriage, somebody introduced us, and that's how we met, and I learnt to love my husband." It seems that since she did not know her husband prior to the marriage, she needed time to "learn" to love him. She related that her mother told her that she was always "very content" with "whatever was done" for her. Mrs. Naidoo believes that her unquestioning acceptance and contentment has been a positive quality, which "carried" her throughout her life. She said, "I trusted my parents and whatever decisions they made", and "I had a mother-in-law and a brother-in-law, and I lived with them", and "I was so happy and so much in love with Kiruben". Her mother-in-law has lived with her for "44 years", since she got married... *As I was growing up it was important for me to exercise my own choice, thus, it was also*

39 "Manavi" is a Tamil word for "wife".
40 "Marimagal" is a Tamil word for "daughter-in-law".
41 "Ammah" is a Tamil word for "mother".
42 "Parthie" is a Tamil word for "grandmother".
43 "Mhamyiar" is a Tamil word for "mother-in-law".

important for me to choose my husband. When the children leave home, I will find comfort in the chosen intimacy of our marital relationship...

Co-researcher Seymour (1999) states that the patrifocal family system emphasizes the collective well-being of all members over any specific individual. Females are socialized to be obedient and self-sacrificing, so that they can adapt effectively as wives and daughters-in-law in their new homes. Therefore, “self-realization” is not a cultural ideal in collectivist-oriented societies. There is a sense of passivity and surrender associated with Mrs. Naidoo’s acceptance of choices made by her parents. However, it is important to understand this within the cultural context during a specific time when certain discourses regarding acceptance of parental decisions, in relation to arranged marriages were prominent. Her narrative clearly reveals the power of language both descriptively and constructively. In descriptive terms, her wider context has a major influence on how she speaks, which is a crucial determinant of how she can be in the world (Newman, 1997; White & Epston, 1990). In constructive terms, she talks not only as speaker, but also as a member of a specific culture, and a certain way of speaking reflects role relations within that culture (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995; Van Dijk, 1997). However, co-researchers Seymour (1999) and Trawick (1992) found that women are not just passively acted upon by socio-cultural circumstances, they also help to shape (reproduce) and reshape (transform) their socio-cultural system.

Mrs. Naidoo continued, “At the beginning my mother-in-law was difficult, a bit possessive over Kiruben” but “he never took anyone's part”, and “now she's become so important to our lives”. Mrs. Naidoo mentioned that her patience means that she tends to “think more of others than my own marriage” and “it's also through Kiruben and the way I've grown up”. He “used to always assure me, and I've noticed that we've grown so close to each other, my mother-in-law and myself”. Although “we do go out in the afternoon, but in the evening we make sure we're back, because she's a bit fragile”. Mrs. Naidoo has developed her identity as a daughter-in-law, who places the needs of her mother-in-law ahead of her own needs. This has resulted from her husband’s influence, accompanied by her upbringing within the cultural context, which jointly

moulds her identity as a specific kind of wife, and a specific kind of daughter-in-law. This indicates a defining influence of her outer world on her inner world.

…It is important for me to focus primarily on my immediate family, which requires time and attention, before focusing on extended family members, unless there is a crisis, which warrants my immediate attention… Co-researchers Bhatnagar and Rajadhyaksha (2001) found that many women who live in traditional extended families are responsible for the care of older family members. Consequently, there seems to be no precise "empty nest" stage as postulated by Western theorists. It is vital that new theories emerge, which will help to understand the richness of the experiences of different families in different societies. The post-structuralist view questions the foundation of belief systems, and offers multiple realities, none of which captures the absolute truth.

Mrs. Naidoo felt supported by both her husband and mother-in-law when she was working, and "Rajan was just a year", but "Kiruben used to be at home in the afternoons", so "I didn't have a thing to worry about". She also felt supported by her husband during different times in her life, like when their eldest daughter left home, she was able to "confide" in him. Thereafter, when their second eldest son left home, she was disappointed but her husband has "always been by my side to see how things are going ha, ha, and if anything troubles me, then I should go to him, and say, okay tell me what to do". It seems that her submissiveness, which is evident in her identity as a daughter has also been generalized to her identity as a wife, since it is important for her to follow what she is told. She then cried as she shared that it's important for her to "spoil Kiruben, because he's had a difficult childhood". Spoiling him entails sorting out his clothes and taking care of him… *My husband prefers taking care of himself, which has allowed me the time to follow my own interests, which will continue in the future, even after our children have left home*... Co-researcher Seymour (1999) found that there is a dominant cultural discourse, which gives precedence to husbands over wives, and a woman's role primarily includes child care and the preparation of food.

Mrs. Naidoo explained that her mother-in-law is their "responsibility", and "this has been our, like karma[44] to be with her", and "I think this is my, my duty towards my husband, and my love for him". There is interplay between the world of religion and her inner world. She is presently making sense of the past life that she has lived with her mother-in-law as causally related to some past deed which she performed. She also believes that it is her "duty" towards her husband to take care of his mother, which is an expression of "love" for him. This displays the inextricable link between her identity as a wife and her identity as a daughter-in-law... *I also believe in karma, because every choice and action has a resulting reaction, in other words, you shall reap what you sow. This principle guides me to live my life in a responsible way, accompanied by an increased awareness of the consequences of my thoughts, emotions and actions*...

When an artist combines the colours green and blue, the colour yellow emerges. Similarly, if Mrs. Naidoo's identity as a wife, in the context of her relationship with her husband is green, and her identity as a daughter-in-law, in the context of her relationship with her mother-in-law is blue, then the inextricable link between both these identities, in the context of her joint relationship with both her husband and mother-in-law, can produce yellow, as a third identity.

BEING AN "AMMAH"

Mrs. Naidoo's identity as a mother is constructed within the context of her relationship with each of her three children. There are different nuances to each of these relationships based on the unfolding of events between the past and the present.

She sequenced the birth of her children, "I got married, and then after a year we had a daughter, Veeba", then "I had a boy, and he was born after three years", and "after seven years Rishi was born, and he brought our family even closer. I started working close to home". Veeba was the first child to leave home. Mrs. Naidoo related that when

[44] "Karma" is a word of Sanskrit origin, which suggests that all action causes a reaction that determines one's fate.

Veeba got married and left home, she “missed her” and “I lost a friend, because I could confide in her”, and “she's, was a good listener”. It seems that things have changed in the mother-daughter relationship, between the past and the present. However, Mrs. Naidoo’s “contentment” at work helped her to deal with this, and she “got used to it” over time... *Both my son and daughter are caring listeners, which means that even after they leave home, I will still be able to share my future experiences with them*... Mrs. Naidoo was also able to “confide” in her husband after her daughter left home. Therefore, the change in her identity as a mother also created a change in her identity as a wife. Furthermore, it seems that in the context of her changing relationship with her daughter, before and after she left home, Mrs. Naidoo has constructed her present identity as a mother in a less intimate way.

Her son, Rajan was the next child to leave home. She disappointedly mentioned that he got married, and “secured a flat for himself”, and “we got a shock, because we thought he's going to stay with us”. It is important to be aware of the influence of culture on her expectation of her son living at home, and the impact of her outer world on the construction of meaning in her inner world is prominent. Perhaps this expectation was also tied to the way she and her husband lived with her mother-in-law for many years, which reveals the significance of past influence on present meaning. In the context of her relationship with Rajan it seems that she has constructed her identity as a disappointed mother.

Her youngest son, Rishi, was the last one to leave home. After he got married, “they moved to a flat” and she missed “him much more than the other two, because he used to like to be with us all the time”. Her tone became intensely lively as she reminisced about how he “used to play” with her. Then after “about a year” he and his wife moved into an adjacent apartment, “We find so much of joy, because we see them every day, and he's here for us, and he does everything for us, and he comes and he looks in my fridge and sees what I've made, and he fills it up. He wants to buy clothing for me, give me money, you know, he's like that. He's close to me...his wife is sort of also accepting that, because he's the kind of son, who comes home”. Mrs. Naidoo cooks for them,

which helps to keep him even closer, “If I make that food and I give it to you, and you eat it, it makes me feel so happy. So I’m not doing it because I want your attention, but I feel you my son”. Thus, food plays a vital role in creating a mother-son connection. In the context of her relationship with Rishi she has constructed her identity as a very connected mother, defined by past and present closeness.

...I do not have an expectation of my children living with me indefinitely, because it will be exciting for them to also have their own homes. However, the frequency of the interactions would be important to me, either personally or telephonically, because it will allow the sharing of our past relationship to continue in the future... Co-researchers Clemens and Axelson (1985), as well as Hagestad, Smyer and Stierman (1984) found that parents’ marriage, progress and development may be negatively affected in a home with adult children. The presence of the adult child may also be a sign that certain negative factors may be present in the marriage, but are not being given attention due to the distraction of parental roles.

Mrs. Naidoo has doubts about her future identity as a mother, “I always feel that as we get older I don't know if they will look after us, like how we look after my mother-in-law”. Her past experience as a daughter-in-law strongly influences her present and future identity as a mother. As her narrative progressed, there was a sense of sadness, anger, and disappointment, “like when we go out, we call the children and tell them come with us”, but “if they want to go out, they want to go on their own”. So “they must just go on their own, and let them be happy and do whatever they want to”, and “we must be able to change”, because “things will change”. And “I want to prepare myself as much as possible, so I can handle it, and I like to be independent”. She explained her independence as “you do your own thing, you don't feel like a burden”, and just “to be alone”. She equates being “alone” with being “independent”, and perceives this as a way of protecting herself from her future anticipated changes... *In terms of my future identity as a mother, I believe that I will share a close relationship with both my son and daughter, as they mature and as I gradually get more wrinkled. This future scenario is*

related to my past experience of my relationship with them, and the past and the future have found a meeting place on this page, in the present moment...

Mrs. Naidoo's narrative voice determines the focal point and blurred details of her identity as a mother, like an artist, who paints certain details in the background, whilst others are drawn boldly in the foreground.

BECOMING A "PARTHIE"

Mrs. Naidoo's identity as a grandmother has been bestowed upon her by her three children. However, in the context of her relationship with Rishi's baby girl, she has constructed a grandmother identity, which is mutually nurturing to both her and her granddaughter.

She has "five" grandchildren, "two boys, and three girls". She helps to take care of Rishi's baby daughter during the day while both the parents are at work, "this one is special, because she's next door", and "I'm looking at her to make me happy", and "like with this little one now, I'm seeing so many things that I never see with my own children". Thus, her past experience with her children has a vital influence on the construction of her present identity as a grandmother, which allows her to re-capture certain experiences which she has lost with her children, "I just feel like she's a new life for me, new, new things". The intimacy of her relationship with Rishi also plays an important role in her cherished relationship with his baby daughter.

Just as an artist often makes new discoveries in the process of painting, Mrs. Naidoo has also discovered "new things" along the way, in her identity as a grandmother.

The context of Mrs. Naidoo's relationship with Rishi is defined by intimacy, which creates tension in her relationship with his wife.

Her relationship with Rishi's wife is complex, "maybe he doesn't want to show her that he's showing us too much attention", and "I don't want him to show me too much attention, ha, ha", because "I don't want her to get upset", and "I got to be weary what I speak, because she gets the wrong impression". Consequently, "from December, I felt a bit down, and I felt very upset and I felt hurt", because "I can't speak what I want to, I've got to watch myself". Mrs. Naidoo's mother-in-law identity, in the context of her relationship with Rishi's wife is stressful and hurtful, because she needs to constantly observe herself, and behave in an approving manner. Thus, her identity as a mother-in-law is powerfully regulating her identity as a mother. The baby helps her to deal with the "frustration" that she experiences, which implies that her grandmother identity helps her to cope with her turbulent identity as a mother-in-law. In terms of her relationship with her eldest daughter-in-law, Mrs. Naidoo doesn't have "a day of problems".

There was a tone of hopefulness for a better future relationship with her youngest daughter-in-law, "it seems that she's appreciating it", which may lead to the development of a different future identity as a mother-in-law. Continuing tradition is crucial to Mrs. Naidoo, "the daughters-in-law will learn like I learnt from my mother-in-law". The influence of the past on the anticipated future is clearly apparent. At the end of her narrative, she said, "I could tell you much more about my life than what I had written down", because "I can trust you ", but "I wouldn't want my daughter-in-law to hear what I said, ha, ha". This reveals how the same narrative account may be sequenced and narrated differently, for different listeners, in the construction of the narrated identities.

An artist paints some brush strokes calmly, while others are painted erratically. Similarly, Mrs. Naidoo's identity as a mother-in-law, in the context of her relationship with her eldest daughter-in-law is constructed calmly, while her identity as a mother-in-

law, in the context of her relationship with her youngest daughter-in-law is constructed erratically.

Conclusion

I provided Mrs. Naidoo with the feedback of my interpretation of her narrative, and discussed any similarities or differences that surfaced between her personal account and mine. She was curious about my personal differences, which I further elaborated for the sake of clarity. She expressed that it was comforting to share personal aspects of her life in a confidential context. She also mentioned that she has discontinued cooking daily for her son and his wife because she wants them to “do their own thing”. She was excited to tell me that her relationship with her youngest daughter-in-law has improved subsequent to our previous meeting. I learnt that experiences in time are not static, but shifting in a dynamic way. I also realized the importance of patience when listening to her, because she initially spoke very softly. However, she increased the volume as she felt more comfortable. Her narrative account provided an interesting understanding of the constitutive effect of culture, and revealed how culture influenced the telling of her narrative. However, she also had the option of what to include, and exclude. Next I will introduce Mr. Khan and relate his narrative of the empty nest experience.

CHAPTER 9
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Narrative of Mr. Khan
"The Ebb and Flow of Existence"

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Mr. Khan's narrative. He is married to Mrs. Zara Khan. They have two children. Their eldest son Ziad got married and left home with his wife when he was 23 years old. The youngest son, Reshad, got married and stayed at home with his first wife. Subsequently Reshad and his wife got divorced, and he remarried his second wife, and stayed with Mr. Khan and Mrs. Khan for one-and-a-half years, before they left home. He was 28 years old when he left home. Mr. Khan is a grandfather to Ziad's two daughters. Mr. Khan comes from an extended family, and his father died a few years ago. He also comes from a background of friends and influential community members. At the time of the research all the children had left the Khan household.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH ANSWER

The research question is, "How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?" Mr. Khan's experience of the empty nest is that initially "eh, it was difficult, but they left home with my blessing" and "you adjust to it". The busyness of his work life also helped with the adjustment because he works "long hours". Furthermore, when both his sons lived at home he had more "responsibility", whereas now that they have left, he is enjoying a welcome sense of freedom. Interestingly, the empty nest has not felt that empty because he spends a great deal of his leisure time with his sons.

Mr. Khan's narrative reveals the unfolding of six narrative lines, accompanied by six identities: "Baajee"[45], "Dhanee"[46], "Hahra"[47], "Poyro"[48]; "Khoam"[49] and "Daadaa"[50]. He

[45] "Baajee" is a Muslim word for "father".

constructed a very dominant father identity with a magnified focus on the father-son relationship. I will provide a description of his identities, and the interplay between them, within an Indian, Muslim context. The ebb and flow of the ocean is a reflection of the ebb and flow of Mr. Khan's life. At times the ocean is serene, and at other times it is threatening. This fluctuation of the tides is determined by external factors, such as the time of day and the position of the moon. Similarly, the outer world has a significant impact on the ebb and flow of his inner world.

I will first describe his common identity as a father to both his sons, before describing his distinct identity as a father, in the context of his relationship with Ziad, his eldest son, followed by his distinct identity as a father, in the context of his relationship with Reshad, his youngest son.

BEING A "BAAJEE"

Mr. Khan's relationship with both his sons is defined by intimacy, although there are different emotional tides linked to his experience of each relationship. He has constructed his identity as a Muslim father who follows an alternate narrative.

He began by emphasizing the closeness of the relationships in his immediate family, "I was very close to my children, they, they, they, they were everything in my life, both, both the boys. They very close themselves", and "we still have a very, very, close relationship with them". In terms of the shared closeness of the family, he stated, "it's every person in that family that plays his part to make it work". Mr. Khan has been very involved in his role as a father, both in the past and the present. It was important for him to make me aware at the outset, of the closeness of his family, which he repeatedly emphasized throughout his narrative.

46 "Dhanee" is a Muslim word for "husband".
47 "Hahra" is a Muslim word for "father- in-law".
48 "Poyro" is a Muslim word for "son".
49 "Khoam" is a Muslim word for "social" or "society".
50 "Daadaa" is a Muslim word for "grandfather".

Mr. Khan reminisced about the distant past, about when he became a father at the young age of “twenty one”, and described how he “grew up with them” and “I learnt how to become a man with my children”. His identity as a young father helped him to create a close bond with both his sons, and to construct his changing identity as a man... *In my relationship with my children, I learnt about the value of patience, the magic of simplicity, and the humility to allow myself to learn from them. I also realized that there is so much that becomes visible, by the process of slowing down and observing quietly. I am curious about the new learning, which will become apparent in the future*... Co-researchers Becvar and Becvar (1982) found that different members within a family system influence each other in a circular way. Thus, just as parents influence their children, children also influence their parents.

Mr. Khan explained that he and his wife “had worked very, very hard,” and “it wasn't easy” because “by the time we had left my dad's place, virtually our relationship was severed. And I think, my kids understood this”, and knew “that the best place in the world to be in was with mummy and daddy”. He emphasized that his relationship with his sons is “very different to normal father son relationships”, because “I could discuss anything and everything with them”. Thus, he described his relationship with his sons as being rare. It was relevant for him to inform me of his identity as an atypical Muslim father. The conflict in the extended family may have led to the creation of a strong boundary in the immediate family, which helped to keep the family “very, very close”.

Then he described his past relationship with his sons, “we were real outdoor boys” and did “road running” and “hiking”. He proudly stated, “Our relationship is so solid, and when I'm with them I'm in my element”, and his relationship with them, “unlike most Indian families is a very open one”. He often suggested that he lives his life differently to Indian cultural expectations, which implies an inconsistency between his outer and inner world. He then elaborated on his future picture, “my relationship with them is becoming stronger and stronger” and “sometimes, I'll phone Ziad three or four times in a day”. Although time is a changing variable between the past, present and future, the closeness of his relationship with both his sons has been constant over time. Mr. Khan

has constructed his identity as a father to both of them in an intimate way, defined by the sharing of his time and himself.

The first to leave the Khan residence was his eldest son Ziad when he got married. Mr. Khan described his relationship with him, “Ziad has been always there, hmm, a wonderful kid, what, what else must I say, he's, he's, he's a pillar of strength for me”, and “he’s a peoples' person, typical old Indian habits, you know, if you come to my house, you must eat and go”, and he maintains a very “good relationship with the extended family”. At “one stage” Ziad moved overseas for “three years”, but “there wasn’t a single day that we didn’t talk to him”. At times it was “two or three times in a day”, because he is the type of person, who “had to be aware of everything”, which may have contributed to the frequent interaction. Mr. Khan said, “It’s not easy let going, you know, to let go off your children, but, but you got to be practical”. Mr. Khan has constructed his past and present identity as a father, who feels strongly supported by his eldest son, and the frequent contact perhaps also allows him to stay connected, without having to “let go”. His relationship with Ziad creates a serene influence upon his inner world - like the calm ebb and flow of the waves upon the seashore on a sunny day.

The second and youngest child to leave the Khan residence was Reshad. He lived at home after his first marriage, which ended in divorce. He remarried his second wife, stayed at home for “one year and six months”, before leaving home. Mr. Khan stated that Reshad was a “wonderful kid”, who was the most “pampered”. Since he is the youngest one, everyone was very “protective” of him. He explained, “As life went on, you know, we saw more money, so we could do a lot more for him”, whereas “when Ziad was a kid, we couldn't do all those things”. His identity as a father is constructed differently in his relationships with his sons, as a father who provided better financially, versus a father who was unable to provide sufficiently.

Then he suddenly and awkwardly mentioned, “we had a very nasty experience with him, he got divorced”, which was “the most traumatic time” and “we felt insecure” as a result

of “social pressures”. This indicates that his threatening outer world created chaos within his inner world, which had a detrimental effect on the harmonious ebb and flow of his existence. There were “very prominent” community leaders and people involved in the “divorce case”, and they were “saying things about my son that was not right”. His son’s divorce and the related events had a strong impact on his identity as a father, “I started listening to him more” and “I found my son's reasoning to be more level headed than all these high and mighty people that actually lay down rules in the community as such”. He defined his relationship with his son, as being “more like friends”.

In the context of his dual relationship with Reshad and the Muslim community, Mr. Khan constructed his identity as an empathetic friend and father who respected his son’s perspective. This in turn influenced his relationship with the community in a negative manner, since there was a polarization between his perception of his son being “right”, and the community being “wrong”. Perhaps this experience may also have led to the strengthening of the family boundary, which helps to keep Mr Khan’s family members close and intact. There is a circular relationship between his identity as a father and his social identity because his son’s divorce negatively affected his relationship with the community, which in turn, positively reinforced his relationship with his son.

Mr. Khan further elaborated that after Reshad got married to his second wife, both of them lived at home for “one year and six months”, and “though he was working and all that, hmm, I was still the breadwinner and I provided”... *As a mother, I also provide different things to my children, and they also provide support in various ways. When they leave home, this will invariably change to some extent, due to the physical distance. I wonder what the effect of this change will be on them and me...* Co-researchers Commuri and Gentry (2000), as well as Lindridge and Hogg (2006) found that in Eastern culture there is no specified time to leave home, which creates a very different family structure and dynamics. Some married couples live with the husband’s family, before and after having children, which provides mutual support. Contrarily, Haley (1980) found that in Western culture, when adult children prolong their stay in the parental home there may be disequilibrium or “enmeshment” within the family system.

From a post-structuralist perspective, it is vital to understand how language and related metaphors create certain prescribed meanings in peoples' lives. It is necessary to be aware of how a professional culture engages with understanding relationships, and whether that discourse allows a space for alternative descriptions.

Mr. Khan mentioned that there was "one occasion, where Reshad met up with an accident, coming from Johannesburg, and he broke his shoulder, and that to us was very, very traumatic. And I feel it's better now, that they live on their own. He's four minutes away from work". Thus, his traumatic experience of Reshad's accident helped him to perceive his son leaving home from a practical perspective, and he created this meaning by reconstructing his past experience in the present... *My son has been travelling to the University of the Witwatersrand for five years, and I have witnessed the toll that it has taken on him. Thus, from a practical perspective I can understand if he chooses to move to Johannesburg in the future due to work purposes. However, from an emotional position, I will miss him incredibly*...

Mr. Khan stated, that now that Reshad "is on his own, there's a definite difference", because now "he's no more my boy" but an adult. There was a change in Mr. Khan's identity from being a father to an adult son, who was dependent on him, to becoming a father to an adult son, who is independent. This had a powerful influence on the redefinition of their relationship in an adult to adult manner. Mr. Khan said, "I'm very happy, that they moved" and "I'm fortunate, that they visit us often", and "we meet sometimes, up to two, three times in a week". The separation, accompanied by regular visits, is important to him. Mr. Khan shared a lot more about his relationship with his youngest son compared to his eldest son, in relation to the construction of meaning and his narrated identity as a father... *My son and daughter still live at home, but I am also experiencing a change in our interaction with each other, as we have all grown older, which will certainly continue in the future*. *At times, I have tried to picture this future change in my mind...* Co-researchers Carter and McGoldrick (1989), as well as Glick (1977) state that there are definite changes during the different stages in a family's development.

Mr. Khan attached present meaning to his perception of the empty nest, and linked it to his past experience, “today’s young people, they want to be independent”, and “they have aspirations, and they have needs”, and “you must give them that leverage to do as they feel, unlike in the old days, I mean if you lived in your dad's house, he set the rules”. He referred to his past restrictive relationship with his father in order to explain his present permissive relationship with his sons. Interestingly, at different stages in his narrative Mr. Khan made slight references to his relationship with his father before sharing more, which was like the powerful spray of sea water experienced every now and then in the ocean wind. His identity as a son is a powerful catalyst for the construction of his identity as a father.

Mr. Khan constructed his past identity as a father who strongly felt the need to support his youngest son from the threatening community. However, the construction of his present identity as a father is defined by trust in his son’s adult abilities. His relationship with Reshad impacts strongly upon his inner world - like the erratic ebb and flow of the waves upon the sea shore on a stormy day.

BEING A “DHANEE”

Mr. Khan’s identity as a husband changed over time, as a result of the changing context, before and after their children left home.

He praised his wife, “I think the backbone of our family was always Zara”, and her relationship with the sons and their wives is special, in “very few families would you find this type of thing”. He again reiterated that his family is different, and he seemed to be implying that his family shares closeness, which other families lack. Mr. Khan has constructed his identity as a husband who gives power and credit to his wife for holding the family together. He said, “When the kids are around you, you don't worry of yourself”, but now that they have left, “we’re looking after one another”.

Thus, when his sons lived at home, he focused more on his identity as a father, which in turn created a lesser focus on his identity as a husband, whereas now he is more in tune with his wife. There is also a sense of self-neglect related to his identity as a father, because “you don't worry of yourself”... *My awareness of the dominant discourse that emphasizes the maternal role has helped me not to undermine my marital role*... Co-researchers Aryee and Luk (1996) state that the traditional Indian concept of marriage as a permanent institution, rather than a “contract”, may make it easier for Indian couples to undermine their marital roles, as their parental roles assume greater importance.

Presently, Mr. Khan is sharing his daily routine with his wife, “we’re enjoying it, we need that for ourselves also. I think we owe it to one another”. He then excitedly described discovering new facets of his partner, “About two years ago, we went on a holiday for the first time in our lives, on our own” and “we were like two teenagers, ha, ha. I never saw my wife like that before”. Thus, the empty nest led to connecting with each other in a more youthful and playful way. He is also more committed to his marriage, “We’re in that part of our lives now, you know, you want to be there for one another”. During different stages in his narrative, he asked his wife questions to verify his perspective. For example, “when we’re sitting there alone, and I fall asleep and all that, do you miss the kids a lot?” This demonstrated his empathy and respect for her perspective.

Mr. Khan’s identity as a husband became more prominent in the foreground of his narrative, as his identity as a father receded into the background.

Mr. Khan's identity as a father has an influence on the construction of his identity as a father-in-law. The closeness shared with his sons is also extended to embrace their wives.

He described his relationship with his daughters-in-law, "I always considered them as, as being my, my daughters. I never had girls in my home and it was a nice addition." He once again emphasized the family intimacy, "Both of us have a very, very close relationship with the two daughters-in-law as well". There is intimate frequent contact with both the sons and their wives, "There isn't a single day in our lives that goes by, where we don't talk to them", and "when we have free time, we share meals together, we, eh, we go to the movies together".

However, Mr. Khan shared his negative experience as a father-in-law with Reshad's first wife, before the divorce, "He's got a wonderful wife that will look after him, first marriage wasn't like that....something was lacking", and "I said no" to them, although "they wanted to move", in order "to protect him". He seems to have been overly involved in Reshad's first marriage, and he also exercised control by not allowing them the freedom to live separately. He rationalized this, "You're living in my home, and you're behaving like this, what are you going to do, when you on your own". Paradoxically, living with her husband in his father's home, could have been the very reason for her specific behaviour... *In terms of my potential future identity as a mother-in-law, it is important for me to respect and accept my children's decisions regarding their relationships*. *I would also nurture and develop my relationship with their partners*... Co-researchers Mancini and Blieszner (1989), as well as Okimoto and Steqall (1987) found that when both child and parent are adults, there is confusion regarding role definition, often resulting in the adult child feeling disempowered. Co-researchers Heer, Hodge and Felson (1985) further mention that conflict may arise due to the experience of a "cluttered nest".

In terms of the sequencing of events, Mr. Khan's negative past experience with Reshad's first wife may have played a significant role in the construction of his present identity, as a more connected father-in-law with his other daughters-in-law.

BEING A "POYRO"

In the context of a controlling relationship with his father, Mr. Khan constructed a conflicted son identity, marked by pain.

He shared his painful past experience, "When I left my dad's place, I was virtually thrown out. It was very difficult for me, to, to digest". His experience of his father is that of an authoritarian parent, "Indian parents generally, I'm the father and he's the son, if I say this, he must listen", so he was "very, very strict" but "I'm not like that". This reveals the impact of his outer world on his inner world in the construction of his identity, as a specific kind of father. However, although it is important for him to be different to his father, ironically, in his relationship with Reshad and his first wife, Mr. Khan also displayed a sense of being domineering, by disallowing them to live separately. He described his father as, "a wonderful father, but if I sat in his presence, I couldn't cross my leg, it would be a sign of disrespect. Eh, I had to count my words, when I spoke to him". There is a contradiction between his description of his father as being "wonderful", versus his experience of him as being "very strict".

Mr. Khan said, it was crucial for him "to, to, to, to change that. I didn't want to have a relationship with my children, like I had with my dad". His identity as a son has a defining impact on his identity as a father. Thus, he created a "totally different" relationship with his sons accompanied by reciprocal support, "I would talk with my boys" and "when we made peace with the family, Ziad was very instrumental in that. My late father never met my son, until he was seven years old, but once he met him, he couldn't do without him, ha, ha". Thus, the relationships "improved" over time, and "my late father, towards the end, he was very close with us"... *My relationship with my father was restricted in some ways by prescriptive norms, thus, it was important for me to*

question these norms, in order to have a different relationship with my children... Co-researcher Bateson (1979) states that parents and children engage in a dynamic process of mutual influence, which defines the specific characteristics of the different stages of the relationship. Input into such a system may be amplified into change, or counteracted to maintain stability.

Mr. Khan's identity as a son reveals ambivalence as a result of a fracture in his past relationship with his father. Nonetheless, this changed and there was a sense of closure before his father died, which created a change in Mr. Khan's identity from being a distant son to becoming a "close" son. Just as the frantic ocean tends to settle after a tsunami, Mr. Khan also experienced the calm after the storm in his relationship with his father.

BEING IN A "KHOAM"

Mr. Khan's identity as a father to Reshad immensely impacted his social identity, which went through a significant transformation.

During Reshad's divorce, he was disappointed with community members and friends that he knew for a "lifetime". He angrily stated, "I picked up the rot" of the community leaders, who are supposed to be the "custodians of this society" and whom we follow "blindly". As a result, "I just severed my relationship with that part of my life, I just cut it off totally". His outer world had a powerful influence on his inner world, since his community was very involved in his son's personal experience of divorce. In relation to both his identity as a son, in his relationship with his father, and his social identity, he mentioned that he "severed" problematic relationships. This seems to have been his way of coping with difficult situations.

The event of his son's divorce led to Mr. Khan feeling unfairly treated by his community, which precipitated a disconnection between himself and his community.

Mr. Khan's identity as a grandfather was bestowed upon him by Ziad, and the intimacy of his relationship with his son and daughter-in-law is further extended to encompass their two daughters.

He spoke ecstatically about being a grandfather, "It's wonderful, wonderful. I've got no words to express how I feel about the babies", and "I sit with them for hours on end". He said, "it's a lovely, lovely addition to the family, we've never had daughters like I said, and we've got two little girls in the family". He continued to share his future picture of teaching them the Muslim culture, "I'd like proper old fashioned, straightforward Indian values in those kids", like "to keep ties with all the elders in the family", because if the family foundation is "not strong, you never build a good community."

Interestingly, although he refers to himself and his immediate family as being different to the typical Muslim family, in terms of his identity as a grandfather, these typical values are important to him. He further explained, "There's a Muslim saying from the "time of the prophet, heaven lies at the feet of your mother'", and "I'd like to see those kids revere their mothers." Religion and culture have a very powerful influence on the construction of his identity as a grandfather, and it is important for him to perpetuate his religion and culture, so that there is continuity in his family between past, present and future tradition.

Just as the ocean reflects the magnificence of nature, his identity as a grandfather also reflects the magnificence of his relationship with his two granddaughters.

Conclusion

I provided Mr. Khan with the feedback of my interpretation of his narrative, and discussed any similarities or differences that surfaced between his personal narrative, and my personal narrative. He explained that the research process has been very interesting for him, because it allowed him to "reconstruct" his experiences, which provided new meaning. I was pleasantly surprised as I heard him using the very same word, which I often encountered in narrative literature! He mentioned that the interview process helped him to express his feelings, which were locked in some ways, and the feedback session allowed him to make the relevant connections regarding the different experiences in his life, as he listened from a different position. I discovered the joy of what I learnt about narratives in my personal experience of it, which further increased my passion for narrative psychology.

Towards the end of my feedback session, I also engaged as a psychologist and not just as a researcher, because there was conflict between Mr. Khan and his wife in relation to his social identity. She wanted him to let go of his "anger" in relation to the community, and he repeatedly emphasized that he was not willing to do so, and that the word is not "anger", but "bitterness". I realized that the description of a subjective experience transcends its factual honesty. I also asked him to elaborate upon his meaning of the word "bitterness", and he explained that he felt unheard by his community in his attempts to explain his son's perspective, regarding the divorce. It appears that the "bitterness" has an important protective function of creating a barrier that separates himself and his family from his community, which is perceived as "threatening". At the end of our meeting, I reassured both him and his wife of professional assistance at no cost, if required. I will next introduce Mrs. Khan and relate her narrative of the empty nest experience.

CHAPTER 10
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Narrative of Mrs. Khan
"Pearls on the String of Time"

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the narrative of Mrs. Khan, who is married to Mr. Yusuf Khan. Mrs. Khan lived with her in-laws for one-and-a-half years, before moving to her own house. As mentioned in Chapter 9, they have two children. Their eldest son Ziad got married and left home with his wife, when he was 23 years old. The youngest son Reshad got married and stayed at home with his first wife. Reshad and his wife were divorced, and he remarried his second wife, and stayed with Mr. Khan and Mrs. Khan for one-and-a-half years, before they left home. He was 28 years old when he left home. Mrs. Khan has also recently become a grandmother. At the time of the research all the children had left the Khan household.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH ANSWER

The research question is, "How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?" For Mrs. Khan, the empty nest was accompanied by a sense of freedom and has been a positive experience. She prefers her sons and their wives living away from her home, because she enjoys "quality time" versus "quantity time", and her personal "space" is very important to her. She redefined her experience of the empty nest as a "lonely" nest, rather than an "empty" nest, and her loneliness is associated with her husband working long hours on certain days, which means that she has "alone suppers".

Mrs. Khan's narrative reveals the development of four identities: "Vahu"[51], "Ma"[52], "Beyri"[53] and "Hahu".[54] She has constructed a dominant daughter-in-law identity, which has significant ramifications upon her other identities, and also strongly influences her experience of the empty nest. I will provide a description of her identities, and the interplay between them, within an Indian, Muslim context.

The events in her life are like different pearls interlinked on the string of time: tarnished pearls; precious pearls; shiny pearls; and polished pearls. This metaphor represents the four narrative lines, accompanied by the development of her four narrated identities.

BECOMING A "VAHU"

Mrs. Khan's identity as a daughter-in-law has been constructed in the context of a problematic relationship with her in-laws. The tarnished pearls on the string of time are a symbol of her painfully tainted daughter-in-law identity.

She began her narrative by creating a link between her sons leaving home and her past experience as a daughter-in-law, "I always wanted them to be on their own, because I had left my in-laws", after "living with them for one-and-a-half years". She elaborated on her experience of living with them, "It wasn't very pleasant", because "we were a very noisy, happy family, very friendly with our parents, and when I got married it was a totally different experience." Furthermore, "I was only eighteen years when I got married, and that had a very, very great effect, and impact on my life", and "I wished that I would have it different with my kids."

She cried as she related, "I was just three months from giving birth, when we left my, my mother-in-law's house. So, so those were difficult years", and "to cope with that rejection was very difficult". Her narrative reflects how she responded to her past and how she

51 "Vahu" is a Muslim word for "daughter-in-law".
52 "Ma" is Muslim word for "mother".
53 "Beyri" is a Muslim word for "wife".
54 "Hahu" is a Muslim word for "mother-in-law".

intended to live in the future... *I have an amicable relationship with my in-laws, and have experienced their support during different times in my life. I think, living separately from the outset, also contributed to a healthier relationship*... Co-researcher Seymour (1999) found that the Indian patrifocal family ideology emphasizes, that it is mainly the wife's responsibility to adapt to a new marriage.

Mrs. Khan felt totally unsupported by her in-laws during a vulnerable time in her life. Consequently, it became very important to "prove" that she "will", and "can make it on her own". Her difficult experience at a tender age, of the disparity between her family and her in-laws family, compounded by their rejection of her, played a very important role in the meaning that she attached to the empty nest. She wanted to ensure a better relationship with her sons and their wives, and believed that this was attainable if they lived on their "own". The sequencing of the abovementioned events is highly relevant in understanding an isolated event, such as the empty nest, since the past, present and future exists in a continuous way.

She then drew a comparison between her identity as a daughter-in-law, in the context of her relationship with her mother-in-law, and her identity as a mother-in-law, in the context of her relationship with her daughters-in-law. Her daughters-in-law "feel comfortable" to interact with her, which is a very strong contrast to her relationship with her mother-in-law, because she was "terrified" of her. She explained, "In the typical old Indian homes, you would be sort of so terrified, because you can't voice your opinion" as a daughter-in-law, but now "the girls are educated, they've got minds of their own". The stifling influence of her outer world on her inner world is prominent, and in the act of narrating her experience, a sense of self is also being created... *I do not always follow the Indian norms of what is expected of me as a daughter-in-law, but follow certain norms that are congruent with my thoughts, feelings and actions...* Co-researcher Seymour (1999) states that within the patrifocal family system, young Indian girls are raised to be obedient, self-sacrificing, modest, nurturing, hardworking, and home loving. They are also encouraged to marry at an early age, so that they can be moulded more easily.

At present Mrs. Khan's relationship with her in-laws has improved, "If anything was happening they would come to me", like family functions or "Eid[55]", and "I'll just go in there, and just take charge". This change in her relationship with her in-laws, from the past to the present, may have an influence on her future identity as a daughter-in-law. She said, "Today I have proven to everybody, what type of a person I am." Based on her past experience with her in-laws, it has been important for her to portray herself as a competent and independent person.

The construction of Mrs. Khan's identity as a daughter-in-law has important ramifications on the construction of her identity as a mother, wife, and mother-in-law.

BEING A "MA"

The construction of Mrs. Khan's identity as a mother to her young sons, before they left home is defined by love and support. The precious pearls on the string of time are a symbol of her identity as a happy and fulfilled mother, both in the past and the present.

She stated, "I think from the onset, I think, that was both our dreams, to rear our kids to the best of our ability, and also to be their friends." Mrs. Khan explained that while her eldest son was very small, "financially we battled a lot" and "I've, I've sacrificed a lot for, for them", and "I would always put the children first". She constructed her identity as a mother, who helped to provide materially for her children, and although this made her happy, it also meant denying herself. She continued, "I then decided, okay I'm going to give Yusuf a hand", so that "we could give them much more", which was "wonderful". Besides, "I only started working, when they were already at a school-going age". Thus, "My time with my kids, while they were growing up, was solely for them"... *I also have a mother and friend aspect in my relationship with both my son and daughter. The mother aspect allows me to nurture and guide them, whereas the friend aspect allows us to have an open conversation, accompanied by mutual input*... Co-researcher Harder (2002) found that parent-child interactions change during the different developmental

[55] "Eid" is an Arabic word for "festivity", which occurs at the end of the fasting month.

stages of a family's life cycle. Furthermore, Mrs. Khan revealed that the financial difficulty also has "an effect on your, your marriage, and eh, I wish I could just do that bit over again". She regrets the impact of her outer world on her inner world. It seems that the financial challenges contributed to her involvement with work, in order to provide for her children, which in turn had a detrimental effect on her marital relationship. Thus, it seems that her identity as a mother negatively influenced her identity as a wife, during this particular stage in time.

As her sons grew older, she felt supported by them, "they would help me with my chores at home", and with work at the shop. She described her relationship with her sons as a "very honest relationship", because "I'm a straightforward person" and "people respect one another for that, instead of putting this big façade on", and "I taught my kids also, don't eh, do anything, if somebody is going to point a finger at you." There appears to be a contradiction because she wants her sons to be honest, but not if it is contrary to someone else's standards. Therefore, it is a conditional honesty. She expressed her loving appreciation of her sons, "I've got the best kids in the world. They, they are truly my pride and joy" and "I actually see myself and Yusuf in them" and "this honesty that I see in them is, is sort of a reflection of our lives". Perhaps the contradiction in her narrative may also be a reflection of the contradiction in their lives. It seems that her sons have incorporated various values and personalities of their parents into their own self-definition.

After her adult sons left home, Mrs. Khan continued to construct her identity as a mother, defined by love and support, but in the midst of distance. There are different nuances in her relationship with both her sons. Her eldest son was the first to leave home, "Ziad from day one, when he got married, he moved" and he is "a very gutsy person". On the other hand, although Reshad had "a very good head", he was "struggling a little financially". Thus, "he wasn't going to make it on his own", and he needed to live at home with his first wife, but the "second time round", he was "on his feet". Thus, in the context of her relationship with Ziad, she constructed her identity as a mother, who is able to trust that her son is brave enough to fend for himself, whereas in

the context of her relationship with Reshad, she constructed her identity as a mother who needed to take care of her son, until he was able to be “on his feet” after his second marriage. She mentioned the advantages of her sons living away from home, “They, they sort of became men, they’re not little boys anymore” and “it’s a very healthy situation, hmm, because you’re not interfering in their lives”, and they have to learn “the hard way, like we did”. Once again, the influence of her past difficult experience as a daughter in-law, on her present construction of meaning as a mother is evident.

She then described her experience of the empty nest, “It was, it is difficult that they’re not here with us today”, but “they visit very often” and “we appreciate one another more”. The frequent love and care expressed by her sons brings “joy and fullness” in her life, and “I’m really, really reaping all the benefits of what we had put into these kids”, so “everything is coming together”. She then hesitantly continued, “Coming to the empty nest, I think we've been so busy, and hmm (long silence), I didn't really have time to think about this empty nest.” Therefore, her busyness related to her work identity disallowed her from thinking of the empty nest, or changes related to her identity as a mother*... Listening to Mrs. Khan stirred my anticipated feelings about my very own empty nest. In the future, when my children leave home, I think that the nature of our relationship after they leave will be an important factor in my experience of the empty nest*... Co-researchers Dennerstein et al. (2002) found that when the last child leaves home and creates an empty nest, it does not impact on the woman’s quality of life in an adverse manner. According to co-researcher Harkins (1978), the only threat to parental well-being may be a child, who has not attained effective independence when expected.

Mrs. Khan compared the empty nest to a potential full nest, “had they been in the house with us, it would be nice, but then again you, you may say the wrong thing, or do the wrong thing, at the wrong time, or something”, so “I’d rather have them, hmm, in their own little nests”. Thus, she prefers her sons and their wives living away from her home, because it allows her the freedom to be true to her own nature, without constantly observing herself, and the consequent effects. Furthermore, “They become wiser

quicker", because they "have to fend for themselves", otherwise "you also get taken for granted".

...At times I wonder what it would be like, if my children decided to live at home with their partners... Co-researchers Settersten (1998), as well as Settersten and Hagestad (1996) state that parents have specific expectations based on social beliefs, regarding when a child should leave the parental home, the reasons for leaving, and the congruence of these aspects with socially, culturally, and personally prescribed norms. Co-researchers Veevers, Gee, and Wister (1996) also share these sentiments. Thus, the pace at which the change occurs plays a vital part in the empty nest experience, which can either be too sudden, too prolonged, or ideal in terms of the family and its members' needs, within a specific culture.

Mrs. Khan said, "I love my kids with all my heart, and I will kill for them, ha, ha. Even if they're still in their own little nest, I'm still protective over them". There is an extreme intensity in her identity as a mother to protect her adult children. Her identity as a mother also embraces her identity as a grandmother, which has been a "wonderful feeling". She mentioned that in the Muslim religion, there is the belief that all people "belong to, to God", therefore, "you need to look after these kids so well, because they're gonna be a reflection of you, when they grow old". The influence of religion on her inner world and child-rearing views is apparent.

The ordered sequencing of the pearls, or events, linked to her identity as a daughter-in-law followed by her identity as a mother is very significant, since the tarnished pearls followed by the precious pearls, add contrast and related meaning to each other.

BEING A "BEYRI"

Mrs. Khan's identity as a wife is closely interlinked with her identity as a mother. Consequently, changes in her identity as a mother invariably created changes in her

identity as a wife. The shiny pearls on the string of time are a symbol of her changing identity as a wife.

She described herself, “I've got, I think, a very strong personality, sometimes try to be a little pushy, but I think, it works for the better for all of us, ha, ha”. It seems that it is necessary for her to be controlling, in order for her family to function better. She elaborated further, “I sometimes overstep Yusuf's authority, only after it's done do I realize I shouldn't have, but it was with good intentions”, and “I'm just a little too overprotective over my kids, but they’re my life.” She seems to be extremely involved in her identity as a mother, which influences her identity as a wife… *During different times, I have experienced being pulled by various factors related to my identity as a mother, which led to an undermining of my identity as a wife. However, I have realized the significance of nurturing both equally*... Co-researcher Harder (2002) found that the parent-child interaction undergoes changes over time.

Mrs. Khan explained her experience of the empty nest in relation to her identity as a wife, “I was always a very independent person”, but “the only time I really feel lonely is when Yusuf is on the late week” and “I'm eating alone”. During these times, she also misses her children not being around to “sit and chat”. Thus, her partner plays an important role in her experience of loneliness, in the absence of her children. Her experience of the empty nest is more pronounced in her identity as a wife, rather than her identity as a mother. She created a present connection with her past experience, “When we grew up”, it was important to “have supper as a family”, and “it’s something I did with my kids”, and “after 50 years, now I must sit and deal with this on my own”. It seems that supper time represents a sense of family togetherness, which means that having supper alone can be “lonely”. She said, “in this last one-and-a-half years, I think it's taking me a bit of time, but eh, I, I think, I hope it's just a phase that I'm, I'm going through” and “that is just one sore point, as far as the empty nest is concerned”. Furthermore, she highlighted the relationship between language and experience, “I think the word is not empty, the word is maybe lonely.” The outer world of family tradition plays an important role in her inner experience of a “lonely” nest.

She continued, “I think it's getting a little better, but it, it, it's gonna take a little time, I think I just need to sort of pull myself together, and face reality to say, listen you know, deal with it. Eh, but I wouldn't say it's getting me depressed, no, no”, and “I think in my life I'm so busy, that I, there’s just no time to get depressed”. Her manner of relating these words revealed a sense of inner struggle relative to her outer world, and raised curiosity about whether the busyness may be a diversion from her loneliness, or perhaps “depressed” feelings. In addition, earlier, she described herself as “independent”, which implies that she may be trying to cope with her loneliness all by herself, in order to live up to her self-definition of being independent.

She then described her marriage, since the children have left home, “it’s actually very nice” because “now, it's our time”. The focus has shifted from the children to her husband, “so it's, it’s bringing us closer, it's also precious time that we’re now spending together”. Changes in her identity as a mother precipitated positive changes in her identity as a wife, who has more time and attention for her husband... *I have also experienced changes in my relationship with my husband as our children have grown older, and there is more time to speak and listen to each other*. *It will be interesting to experience further changes in our relationship, once the children have left home...* Co-researcher Fingerman (as cited in Raup & Myers, 1989) found that once the children left home, parents experienced increased satisfaction and improved relationships.

Mrs. Khan expressed her gratitude, “I'm a very blessed woman with the most wonderful husband in this entire world” and “I can't thank God enough for that”, and “we must just cherish these moments”. She created a link between the present and the past, “We've been through a lot in life”, and “it was a tough journey, but it was a nice trip”. She shared her anticipated future vision, “I can just see it growing stronger”.

Since her children left home, Mrs. Khan has constructed a wife identity, which displays an intimate connection, in the context of her relationship with her husband.

Mrs. Khan's identity as a mother-in-law is very tightly strung with her identity as a daughter-in-law. The polished pearls on the string of time are a symbol of her identity as a mother-in-law, who polished her relationship with her daughters-in-law over time.

She said, "I appreciate the fact, that if their wives wanted to be on their own", because "I was on my own", and just "like they want their space, so do I". The importance of distance is apparent in the construction of her identity as a mother-in-law. In fact, her sons "were little, when I started already shopping for their houses". This unveils the powerful influence of the past in the context of her future relationship with her sons and daughters-in-law... *In the future, if my son desires to marry and live independently with his wife, I would easily accept his choice*... Co-researcher Nuegarten (as cited in De Vries, Kerrick & Oetinger, 2007) suggests that people have a built-in "social clock" that determines expectations for specific life events, and the more ''off time'' an event occurs from what is expected, the more likely it is to be perceived as being negative.

In terms of the sequencing of events, it seems that the importance of Mrs. Khan's sons and their wives living separately became further intensified, "after the nasty experience" with "Reshad's divorce". She described the conflict in her relationship with Reshad's first wife, "there was a clash" over "minor little things", and "I would accept it, because I was much more mature than this girl", and "I didn't want to cause problems". Co-researchers Barnett and Baruch (1985) suggest that if there is turmoil associated with a specific role, a loss of the role, or changes in the role, may be beneficial and desirable.

She clarified her relationship with Reshad's second wife, before they left home to live in their own home, "everyone needs their space, and her upbringing was different from mine" so "you tend to clash", and "I'm very fortunate that it didn't become too ugly before they had left". Interestingly, Mrs. Khan lived with her in-laws for "one year and six months" before living separately, and Reshad and his wife also lived at home for "one year and six months" before living separately. Mrs. Khan experienced a "clash" with

both of his wives, which raises the question of her contribution to the conflict in her relationship with her daughters-in-law. It also appears that her relationship with them became problematic when they lived with her, and perhaps invaded her "space", because her relationship with Reshad's second wife improved once they moved out.

She continued to describe her present relationship with her two daughters-in-law, "It's very nice, that we can be friends". This has a positive effect, because her sons know "that mummy is happy with their wives, and their wives are happy with mummy", which creates "one big happy family". This unity is important to her because "the mother-in-law syndrome is always there, you know, the big bad wolf sort of a thing". There seems to be an internal dialogue, which guides her to be a very different mother-in-law, in terms of her experience of her mother-in-law, perhaps as "the big bad wolf!"

The construction of Mrs. Khan's identity as a mother-in-law is focused on creating a connected and happy family, in the context of respect for each other's space.

Conclusion

I provided Mrs. Khan with the feedback of my interpretation of her narrative, and discussed any similarities or differences that surfaced between her personal narrative and my personal narrative. She was very curious about me as a researcher, and asked various questions related to my approach towards understanding her narrative. She stated that the research process provided an opportunity for her to re-visit and remember her past, but from an observer's perspective, which created a sense of peacefulness in the present. She also mentioned that she has not been that "lonely" since our previous meeting, because her husband has been joining her for supper at home every evening. This revealed that personal experience is relevant within a specific temporal, spatial and social landscape.

Towards the end of my feedback session, I also engaged as a psychologist and not just as a researcher, due to the conflict between Mrs. Khan and her husband in relation to

his social identity. She insisted that he ought to get over his anger in relation to the community, and that he needs to “move on”, just the way she has done. Since I have often engaged in one-one therapy, it was an additional learning experience to apply myself as a psychologist, in the context of a couple. It was interesting to rotate my empathy from one partner to the next, whilst being curious enough to explore each one’s different reality. This created a link between myself as a researcher, and myself as a practitioner. In the following chapter, I will provide the conclusion in terms of a summary of the research findings aimed at answering the research question, as well as an outline of the shortcomings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 11
CONCLUSION

Introduction

As a conclusion, this chapter focuses primarily on providing an integrated summary of the research findings, so that the answer to the research question posed in chapter 1 can become vividly conspicuous. This will be followed by an outline of the shortcomings and recommendations related to this research project.

11.1
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research question of this research projects is: “How do Indian couples experience the empty nest phenomenon?” I interviewed three Indian couples in relation to their experiences of the empty nest transition. The couples’ narratives unveiled the construction and interplay of multiple identities, which unfolded over time. The dynamic interaction of the participant’s inner world and outer world was given importance in the construction of meaning, within an Indian cultural context. The following participants were interviewed: Mr. Kasoor; Mrs. Kasoor; Mr. Naidoo; Mrs. Naidoo; Mr. Khan and Mrs. Khan.

11.1.1 The Narrative Findings of Mr. Kasoor

Mr. Kasoor is a 67 year old Hindu man, who has three children, an eldest daughter followed by two sons. In answering the research question from the narrative of Mr. Kasoor, it seems that his experience of the empty nest phenomenon was accentuated by confusion, as his three children grew up and left home. There are different nuances in the context of his relationship with each child over time, which influenced the construction of his changing identity, from being a father to young children, to becoming a father to adult children. However, despite his confusion, his narrative also seems to

be speckled with gains, achieved by the development of six identities: “Baap”, “Sasra”, “Daadaa”, “Dhanee”, “Dharmic” and “Nokar”. These identities are in constant interplay with each other and have been constructed by Mr. Kasoor with the purpose of trying to come to terms with his experience of confusion, associated with his changing identity as a father.

11.1.2 The Narrative Findings of Mrs. Kasoor

Mrs. Kasoor is a 64 year old Hindu woman, who is married to Mr. Kasoor. They share three children, an eldest daughter followed by two sons. In answering the research question from the narrative of Mrs. Kasoor, it seems that she experienced an overwhelming sense of “emptiness”, when her children left home. However, since the intensity of her relationship with each child is starkly different, she also experienced each one leaving the home very differently. Mrs. Kasoor narrated her experiences in terms of the development of four identities: “Ma”, “Samaaj”, “Patnee” and “Daadee”. These identities are in constant interplay with each other, and have been constructed by Mrs. Kasoor with the purpose of discovering new meaning in her life, after her children left home.

11.1.3 The Narrative Findings of Mr. Naidoo

Mr. Naidoo is a 70 year old Tamil man, who has three children, an eldest daughter followed by two sons. In answering the research question from the narrative of Mr. Naidoo, it seems that his experience of the empty nest phenomenon is that the nest has “never been empty”, because his home was always full with the presence of extended and immediate family and community members. Nonetheless, during different stages in his life, as different immediate and extended family members left home, he did experience different levels of “emptiness”. He perceives “the real empty nest” as a potential future picture of the nest without his partner. His narrative is related in terms of the development of six identities: “Maghanand”, “Pehr”, “Khutumb”, “Poorsa”, “Appa” and “Sungum”. It is also important to be cognisant of his intellectual identity, which is

intermittently interwoven with his other identities, throughout his narrative. These identities are in constant interplay with each other, and have been constructed and developed by Mr. Naidoo with the purpose of creating the security of fullness in his life. His intellectual identity has been constructed to create emotional distance, and to gain confirmation for his perspective.

11.1.4 The Narrative Findings of Mrs. Naidoo

Mrs. Naidoo is a 63 year old Tamil woman, who is married to Mr. Naidoo. They share three children, an eldest daughter followed by two sons. In answering the research question from the narrative of Mrs. Naidoo, it seems that her experience of the empty nest phenomenon, as her three children left home was softened by her primary focus on her relationship with her husband, and mother-in-law. Furthermore, after getting married and leaving home, their youngest son and his wife returned to be close to the nest, and moved into an adjacent apartment, which created fullness in the nest. Mrs. Naidoo's narrative is related in terms of the development of five identities: "Manavi", "Marimagal", "Ammah", "Parthie" and "Mhamyiar". These identities are in constant interplay with each other, and have been constructed by Mrs. Naidoo with the purpose of being true to her role descriptions, as a specific kind of Indian woman, as defined by her culture.

11.1.5 The Narrative Findings of Mr. Khan

Mr. Khan is a 53 year old Muslim man, who has two sons**.** In answering the research question from the narrative of Mr. Khan, it seems that his experience of the empty nest phenomenon is that initially it was "difficult", but he adjusted to it. The busyness of his work life also helped with the adjustment. Furthermore, when both his sons lived at home he had more "responsibility", whereas now that they have left, he is enjoying a welcome sense of freedom. Interestingly, the empty nest has not felt that empty, because he spends a great deal of his leisure time with his sons. Mr. Khan's narrative reveals the unfolding of six narrative lines, accompanied by six identities: "Baajee", "Dhanee", "Hahra", "Poyro", "Khoam" and "Daadaa". These identities are in constant

interplay with each other, and have been constructed by Mr. Khan with the purpose of creating a “very close” family.

11.1.6 The Narrative Findings of Mrs. Khan

Mrs. Khan is a 52 year old Muslim woman, who is married to Mr. Khan. They share two sons. In answering the research question from the narrative of Mrs. Khan, it seems that her experience of the empty nest phenomenon has been a positive experience. She prefers her sons and their wives living in their own homes, because she enjoys “quality time” versus “quantity time”, and her personal “space” and freedom is very important to her. She redefined her experience of the empty nest as a “lonely” nest, rather than an “empty” nest, and her loneliness is associated with her husband working long hours on certain days, which means that she has “alone suppers”. Mrs. Khan’s narrative reveals the development of four identities: Vahu”, “Ma”, “Beyri” and “Hahu”. These identities are in constant interplay with each other, and have been constructed by Mrs. Khan with the purpose of creating a very different family from that of her in-laws.

11.2
SHORTCOMINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a researcher, at the conclusion of my interpretation of the narrative findings, I became aware of certain shortcomings in relation to this research project, which raised certain recommendations:

First, the co-participants were drawn from the same Indian area in Laudium. It would be valuable to interview more Indian couples, from different areas, or even Indian immigrants living in Laudium, as this would provide a further understanding of how different individuals constitute themselves in their narratives;

Second, this research project focused specifically on the parents’ voices, regarding the empty nest phenomenon, and did not capture the independent voices of all the family

members (although I heard many voices through the parents' narratives). Thus, it would be enlightening to interview the children about their experiences of leaving home;
Third, future research may also consider interviewing siblings, to discover their experiences when older siblings leave the parental home. Talking to other family members would provide a richer description from a gender and generational perspective;

Fourth, there seems to be a new trend with parents choosing to leave home, in order to work overseas, once their children are independent and able to fend for themselves. This presents an interesting difference to the conventional definition of the empty nest phenomenon. Although I have not addressed this aspect in my research project, future research may consider interviewing children about their experiences of an empty nest, once their parents leave home.

Fifth, families continue to develop, adapt, and change over time. I have only captured a few scenes from the couples' family histories and narratives on daily life. The participants in this research study were only able to construct knowledge from the reconstruction of their experiences to a limited degree, because of time constraints (Lindsay, 2006). On the other hand, a longitudinal approach from a narrative constructionist position would allow further knowledge about family influence processes, and gendered behaviours to surface. This would be achieved by keeping the participants involved in the research process, and having continuous meetings with the participants, as they continue to reflect on their narratives and re-write their narratives (Rossouw, 2003).

Lastly, the difference in the amount of time elapsed since the children left home is an important factor in the empty nest experience. It would also be interesting to understand the narratives of participants, who are still very "new" in their experiences of the empty nest, versus those who had more time to adopt a "reflective" or a retrospective position, as observed in this study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a summary of each participant's narrative findings followed by a brief discussion of some of the shortcomings and recommendations that emerged in this research project. In the next, final chapter, I will provide a post-reflection of myself as the researcher, and how this research has influenced my professional role as a practitioner, and myself as a person, specifically as an Indian mother, subsequent to my relationship with this research project.

CHAPTER 12
POST-REFLECTION

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a post-reflection of myself as the researcher, subsequent to my relationship with this research project, and myself as a person, specifically as an Indian mother, subsequent to my engagement with the Indian couples' narratives of the empty nest experience.

12.1
POST-REFLECTION AS A RESEARCHER

The process of this research project has been a very positive experience. It enhanced my knowledge gained from practitioner training, by providing me with the opportunity to experience the various stages, relevant to the research process. During supervision, I became aware of the differences between the positivist, constructivist and constructionist paradigms. Additionally, I learnt firsthand, about the multi-faceted aspects associated with narrative constructionist research, as I interviewed the three Indian couples about their experiences of the empty nest. I realized the value of doing my own transcriptions, because it provided a very intimate contact with the research material. I became highly aware of the sequencing of experiences in the construction and interplay of narrative identities, accompanied by the subtleties of "how" they were sequenced, by tone and language.

As I interpreted the narratives, I was enlightened by the different patterning of the different narrative lines within each narrative. Although I read about this in literature, my direct personal experience brought it to life. I further discovered that meaning is not necessarily inherent in experience, but is constructed through social discourse. It is generated by the connections the participant makes between aspects of his/her life as lived, and by the explicit connections that I made as a researcher between this

understanding and my interpretation thereof, which is meaning constructed at another level of analysis. Therefore, the actual experience of the participant is different to the narrative of that experience, which in turn is also different to an interpretation of the narrative. The existing truths in personal narratives arise from real experiences in the world – the passions, frustrations, ideas, and conceptual systems that underlie life. My role as a researcher was to write a super-ordinate narrative that encompassed that, since I do not have direct access to another's experience. Instead, there can only be a representation of it, in the form of conversation, text, transcription, and interpretation.

I applied reflexivity before, during, and after the research process, which allowed me to reflect on my influence on the co-creation of the participants' realities, since the joint understanding between the telling and reading of the narrative is crucial. When a narrative is related to another, it also has an influence on the listener. Thus, narratives are both a personal and social product, as a result of the interchange of shared meanings between the speaker and the listener. I also learnt about the significance of research ethics, especially when the participants wanted to be reassured of confidentiality.

My experience of this research project has created a significant link between me as a researcher and me as a practitioner. At the same time, I also learnt about the boundary that separates my role as a researcher from my role as a practitioner. I have attained a better understanding of how to listen, with patience, empathy, curiosity, and a non-expert, and non-critical position, within any interactional context, but especially within a therapy context. This allows for the narrative voice of an individual to be heard and acknowledged. It is also important to listen to the whole narrative, and not just the problematic aspects, as this would create a fragmented perception of another.

Language has an important function in narratives, thus, as a researcher and a practitioner the language of connectedness is vital, for the sake of improved understanding. This position would allow me to grasp what the narrative reveals about the different identities of the narrator, which is constructed by a dialectical process

between history, culture, and the inner world of the individual. I gained important understanding of the existence of multiple realities, hence, any specific narrative that is told is not the full narrative, but rather different narratives are highly relevant in constructing the individual. Thus, there are facets of the self, which are external to a specific narrative. This reveals the possible entry into new spaces, which allow different constructions of the same experience, within a therapy context. Since there are multiple interpretations, it is vital to be open to a different way of understanding. This is achieved not just by asking open-ended questions, but more importantly, by being open and receptive. It is also important to find comfort in the discomfort of different or unexpected narratives.

In terms of the outcome of this research project, the participants explored their experiences for the creation of meaning, and knowledge construction with improved awareness. Thus, the process of telling and reconstructing their experiences created new meaning, which may have future continuity in relation to the discovery process. I also became aware that in terms of the future, there are many different unchartered areas of research focus, in relation to the empty nest phenomenon.

As a researcher, I discovered various sparkling insights hidden like precious gems, waiting to be found in the research process. One of my most precious gems is that the narrative constructionist paradigm is not merely an application of certain ways of thinking, but it is rather an integration of one's self with the experience of narrative, so that the "being" of narrative becomes possible. I strongly experienced this in my weekly interactions with my supervisor, Prof. Human.

12.2
POST-REFLECTION AS A PERSON (INDIAN MOTHER)

The Indian couples' narratives had a significant influence on me, as an Indian mother. The dominant discourse states, that since fathers are less involved in parent-child interaction, mothers experience greater distress when their children leave home,

because they dedicate more time and effort into child rearing. On the contrary, I found that the fathers experienced an array of emotions during the empty nest stage, ranging from confusion to varying levels of emptiness, accompanied by a need to maintain closeness with their children after they left home.

It is also necessary to be cognisant of the dual influence of culture. It plays a powerful role, not only in distinct role differentiation, but also in determining the ways in which men verbalize their emotions of sadness, especially to women. Thus, the Indian men's narratives awakened me to the realization that everything is not what it seems. In other words, simply because men display certain culturally appropriate behaviours, it does not mean that they do not have strong feelings, about their changing parental identity. Consequently, by allowing the fathers' voices to be heard and acknowledged, I have become aware of a different reality.

The process of sharing the similarities and differences between my personal narrative and the participants' narratives was a positive learning experience. I became aware of the diversity of experiences with regard to the empty nest phenomenon, not only in relation to the differences, but also in relation to the similarities. Although certain experiences may be common, the uniqueness of individual experience transcends that which is common. I also became aware that there are multiple ways of perceiving and experiencing the time period, when children leave home. This has helped to open the spaces for me as an Indian mother, when my children leave home. Interestingly, I have discovered that this research project has also been a personal project of better equipping me to deal with my very own empty nest transition in the future.

The Indian couples' narratives have had the effect of normalizing my perception of the empty nest, as an Indian mother. Prior to this research project, and before doing an intensive literature review, I had a simplistic perception of the empty nest stage, as a time of emptiness and loss of purpose, associated with intense feelings of sadness. Now, I perceive it as a time of adjustment, accompanied by mixed emotions, and the

discovery of a new purpose, associated with feelings of excitement. Thus, the empty nest has the potential for fullness.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shared a post-reflection of myself as the researcher, at the end of this research project, and myself as a person, specifically as an Indian mother, after listening to the Indian couples' narratives of the empty nest experience. This research project influenced both my research narrative and my personal narrative, which will jointly influence my future narrative as a psychologist.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION FORM AND CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Denkleiers • Leading Minds • Dikgopolo tša Dihlalefi

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Psychology

SECTION A

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Dear participant,

The following information is important regarding the research project "Indian couples' narratives of the empty nest experience." Once you have read through the information, and are willing to participate in the research project, please complete Section B.

Information: I am currently registered for my MA (Counselling Psychology) degree at the University of Pretoria (UP), where I am required to do a dissertation. I am interested in understanding the experiences of Indian couples regarding the empty nest experience, or when their adult child/children leave home. This is the topic of my dissertation. Prof. Lourens Human from the Department of Psychology at UP is the study leader of my research. The study is qualitative in nature, and in our interview, you will be the storyteller about your own experiences when your adult child/children left home. Each person has a different story to tell, because each one's life experiences are unique, and each one attaches meaning to their own lived

experiences in different ways. The content of the story will focus on your experiences, and this will be linked to your past, and also on how you perceive your future. Feedback on the research will be provided at different stages of the research process. Every attempt will be made to provide an accurate reflection of your story, and this will be verified with you.

Title: The title of the study is: "Indian couples' narratives of the empty nest experience".

Purpose: This interview is conducted for research purposes, and to create an understanding of the experiences of Indian couples when their adult child/children leave home.

Procedures: You will be required to be a storyteller regarding your experiences in an interview, which will last for approximately two hours. The sharing of selected photos may also help with the sharing of your story. The interviewing process will be audio taped, for the purpose of transcribing the interview accurately for analysis. After the interview, I will transcribe the story told, and will meet you to engage in a feedback conversation. At the end of the research process, I will also provide feedback about the outcome of the research. The audio data will be destroyed by deleting the audio recordings after the research process. Ethical considerations and confidentiality will be respected throughout our meetings.

Risks: If you feel overwhelmed by sharing your experiences, appropriate professional concern will be provided. I will discuss it with Prof. Lourens Human, who will guide me accordingly.

Benefits: There are no financial gains for participating in the research, but you may benefit personally in terms of sharing your experiences.

The story told can also assist others going through the experience of an empty nest, and it can assist professionals in understanding the empty nest experience from a different cultural perspective.

Rights: Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from participating at any time and without negative consequences for doing so.

Confidentiality: All information will be treated as confidential. Anonymity will be assured, and the data will be destroyed if you wish to withdraw your participation.

Data: After completion of the research, data will be stored in the Department of Psychology at UP.

Researcher: If any clarity or more detailed information is needed, my contact details are as follows:

Name: Smita Joshi
Cell no.: 0823985336
E-mail: smitaj@telkomsa.net

Researcher:

Name and Surname: Mrs. Smita Joshi

Signed at: Pretoria

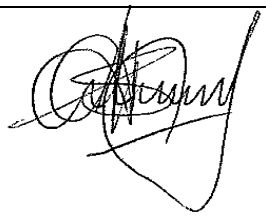
Date: 10 February 2010

Signature:

Supervisor:

Name and Surname: Prof. Lourens Human

Signed at: Pretoria



Date:	10 Februaryry 2010
Signature:	

Head of Department:

Name and Surname:	Prof. Maria Marchett-Mercer
Signed at:	Pretoria
Date:	10 February 2010
Signature:	

SECTION B

RESEARCH CONSENT

I, _____ (Full name and surname of participant) hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand the above-mentioned research information. I hereby agree to participate in the above mentioned research project. I accept and agree with the conditions as stated above.

Name and Surname: _____

Signed at: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Contact Number: _____

Postal Address: _____

_____

_____

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APPENDIX B

EDITING LETTER

Astute Editing and Research

December 2010

To Whom It May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam,

This is to certify that I have fully edited the MA (Psychology, University of Pretoria) thesis of Ms Smita Joshi on “Indian couples’ narratives of the empty nest experience”, and have found the use of language and technical production to be of a good standard.

Yours sincerely,

C.D. Schutte (D Litt et Phil; Member, Professional Editors Group)

Telephone 012-342-3518 Mobile 083-310-1806

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