CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

MANJARI PRASHAR

THE CAREER AGENCY OF INDIAN MANAGERIAL WOMEN: A CULTURE-CENTRED APPROACH

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

PhD
Academic Year: 2016 - 2017

Supervisor: Dr. Deirdre Anderson
Professor Sue Vinnicombe
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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to develop a culturally-sensitive model of women's career agency. Adopting a qualitative research method, analyzing semi-structured interviews with 36 managerial women in India this study provides a *culture-centred model of career agency and a culture-centred framework for the analysis of career agency*. The model highlights how managerial women's career agency interacts with the enabling and constraining aspects of the context in which their careers unfold. This study broadens our understanding of women's career agency by revealing the dynamic relationship between the context and the individual as emergent 'agentic bonds' shifting over time and in relation to each other. Career agency is conceptualized as a process of emergent agentic bonds within a temporal-relational context. This study identifies five agentic bonds; fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration through which individual assert agency in their careers.

The study makes three contributions. First, a theoretical contribution introducing a career-centred model of career agency. This model identifies the construct of 'agentic bonds', to distinguish the ways in which individual's bond with the collective to develop career intentions and actions. This new construct facilitates a culturally sensitive view of career agency as a contextually dependent process, extending Stage theories of careers beyond Individual agency. In addition, a sub-contribution of a culture-centred framework for the analysis of agency in women's careers, operationalizing and disaggregating career agency permits a liminal/hybrid/fluid view of agency and extends the theory of culture-centred approach to careers. Second, an empirical contribution reconciling and resolving the struggle to identify the career agency of Indian managerial women. Third, a practical contribution with a culturally-sensitive approach to career coaching embedded in a temporal-relational view of career agency, facilitated by the concept of 'agentic bonds'. The study responds to the call for cultural sensitivity in careers research and practice.

Keywords: Agentic bonds, temporal-relational context, subaltern agency, individual agency, collective agency

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I will begin with my gratitude to the 36 respondents in my study. This would have been impossible without their availability and willingness to share intimate life stories. Each interview was fascinating and every woman's experience transformed me in some way. Through your stories, I developed a meaningful connection with Indian managerial women and an understanding of the paradoxes in contemporary Indian society.

Gathering the interviews was fascinating but then analysing them was daunting. I am indebted to my supervisors, Dr. Deirdre Anderson and Prof. Sue Vinnicombe for their invaluable guidance in teaching me how to handle the data and make something of it. I cannot thank you enough for teaching and encouraging me throughout this journey. You gave me the precious gift of sharing your time and your experience.

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All the learning and writing still needed to be put into correct templates, in the correct format and produced into a final thesis document. The staff at Cranfield, particularly Debbie Bramwell and the IT training group were immensely helpful

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal Interest

I am an Indian woman who has lived in five countries and worked in the banking and IT sectors in India, Canada, the United States, France and the United Kingdom. More recently, I have been working as a cross-cultural trainer and executive coach focusing on women's leadership development in multinational corporations (MNCs).

Although I had not realised it then, but in 2010, there was a significant inflection point in my career; a consulting assignment that would inadvertently invite me to search for the meaning of this cross-cultural life I have led. I was asked to deliver a training programme for Indian women engineers by a European client. To customize my work, I decided to review the research on Indian women to learn a little more about their career experiences. I was shocked to discover that there were only a handful of papers in scholarly journals on the topic of Indian managerial women and their career experiences. The disappointment of how little was known about women from my country of birth revealed a gap that I became motivated to address. From the start of my career until the completion of this research I have sensed that something was lacking in our understanding of the careers of women from varied cultural backgrounds. It seemed to me that the extant literature assumed that women across the globe experienced their careers in similar ways and women's career intervention programmes could be standardized across the regional offices of multinational organizations. Yet my personal experience as a professional and as a coach working with women from varied backgrounds led me to believe that cultural differences might play a role in career experiences. I began to wonder if the many human resource initiatives aimed at increasing the number of women in the workplace were delivering programmes based on research that had ignored so many women in the first place. I decided to explore the career experiences of Indian managerial women as a doctoral researcher.

1.2 The practical problem

My lived experience led me to believe that management studies and practices had ignored the cultural context in which women's careers unfold. On a practical level, I wish to contribute to the profession of executive coaching and career development in Multinational corporations (MNCs). MNCs engage coaches for women's career development to help increase the number of women in senior management across their global offices (O'Neil et al., 2015). The predominant approaches to women's career coaching are based on career theories primarily developed in the US and Western Europe. Although the need for culturally sensitive approaches in career counselling has been identified (Savickas et al., 2009), little has been done to develop culturally sensitive models of women's careers. A career coach's key aim is to stimulate the agentic functioning of individuals in their career development (Chen, 2006). To stimulate agentic functioning, career coaches assist individuals to reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and challenges. The reflections aim to resolve problems by matching the individual's needs to those of the context (Savickas et al., 2009). In an increasingly globalized work environment, a culturally sensitive view of career agency will provide an effective and considerate approach to addressing the variations and nuances underlying the advancement of women's careers in a range of cultural contexts. Career coaches require awareness and guidance to adapt interventions and approaches in order to work with women from any context and be capable of assisting reflection and stimulating agentic functioning in relation to the women's cultural context (Savickas et al., 2009). Hence, my motivation to develop a culturally sensitive model of women's career agency stems from my profession as an executive coach and personal experience as an Indian managerial woman who has worked and lived in India and elsewhere.

1.3 The purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to develop a culturally-sensitive model of women's career agency. In focusing on Indian managerial women, working in India, this study responds to the call for cultural sensitivity in career research and practice

with more research into non-Western contexts (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009; Hewlett & Rashid, 2011; Jonsen et al., 2011; Mitra, 2015; Woodhams et al., 2015). By drawing on findings from 36 interviews conducted with women in India in 2014-2015, this study will broaden women's career theories with a culturally sensitive understanding of career agency.

1.4 The research question

This study seeks to overcome the shortcomings of the Stage theories of women's careers with a culture-centred approach. Stage theories show that women's careers shift over time depending on circumstances in their wider life context (O'Neil et al., 2008). These theories suggest that women have three stages, starting at the beginning of their working career and finishing in their late career. Stage theories have time boundaries and assume a development of family relationships associated with each period. Stage theories describe the shifts, identify the career phase, age group and family structures typical of each stage but they do not show how the shifts are triggered and make assumptions on the cultural norms around each of the stages. Literature on Stage theories suggests that the assumptions around stage, age and family structure are based on the context in which they were developed and this limits their explanatory power in other contexts.

Stage theories were developed mainly in the US and are culturally constrained. The shortcomings of Stage theories imply that most women's working lives start off at the 'early career' when women are young, single and individualistic, shifting to 'mid-career' when they are older, married and with children, and shifting again in 'late career' when they are ageing and facing an 'empty nest' in their family lives. In Stage theories, the start and end points of careers are assumed to be early career and late career. However, research shows that careers are shaped by career intentions initially set in the past before the career started and carried forward by projective imaginations of the future career, which is yet to come. Hence, the 'temporal' stages underlying Stage theories are truncated. Additionally, Stage theories assume individual agency underlying career decisions. Careers are said to move from being relationally self-focused

to other-focused over time. The explanation for the shift is an age/stage connection and women making choices between work life and family life based on shifting demands. A culture-centred approach would suggest that the age/stage connection cannot be generalized across cultures and relationally career development is not entirely focused on self or others. Rather, career-agency is a liminal/hybrid/fluid form of agency, shaped by the collective. The collective is represented by societal and familial norms which can vary between cultures. Hence the 'relational' assumptions of Stage theories are not culturally sensitive. Therefore, this study questions the temporal and relational assumptions of Stage theories. Temporal and relational contexts impact on career agency, which drives career development. Career agency shapes and is shaped by the temporal-relational context of the career.

The literature review in Chapter 2 shows that the context of Indian managerial women is not well explained by Stage theories and the knowledge of Indian women's career agency remains fragmented. The research question (RQ) and sub questions that follow are:

RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

In this study, these questions are addressed with a culture-centred framework developed to disaggregate career agency into temporality, properties and modes of agency and fragmentation. When analysed through the culture-centred lens, the data on Indian women's careers in this study reveals that career agency is shaped by the interaction of the individual and the collective and this shifts over time. The individual/collective interaction is reflected by the new construct of 'emergent agentic bonds'. Emergent agentic bonds capture the temporal and relational mechanisms underlying the shifts in career development.

1.5 Defining key concepts

The study focuses on the concept of 'culture-centred career agency'. A culture-centred perspective highlights that culture, structure and agency are dynamically composed by each other. Culture and structure jointly reflect the context in which women's careers unfold. Culture is relationally formed as a dynamic web of shared meaning continuously constructed, reified and challenged through communication and macro-discourses in local contexts (Mitra, 2015). Whereas culture is the intersubjective aspect of context, residing in the shared consciousness as ideal, subjective and discursive, structures are the material, objective and extra-discursive aspects of the context (Porpora, 2013). Structures are systems of organizing that constrain and enable human agency (Mitra, 2015). Together they are both a medium and an outcome of agency. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) in their seminal paper which reviews the theories of agency and define it as "*the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the 'temporal-relational' (my emphasis) context of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations*" *(p.970)*. In their conceptualization, the structures are comprised of the cultural context, social-structural context and the social-psychological context. The cultural context includes the symbolic patterns, structures and formations which constrain and enable action by structuring actors' understanding of the world. The social-structural context includes network patterns of social ties that enable and constrain action. The social-psychological context encompasses the flows of emotional energy and durable structures of attachments and emotional solidarity that enable and constrain action. They conceive agency as both temporal in nature composed of a past, present and future, and relational in nature, as an intersubjective process by which individuals hold to one's own and to another's viewpoint simultaneously. In this study, I operationalise and distinguish between 'temporality' as the actor's perception of the flow of time and 'relationality' as the actor's perception of the perspective of others and how this may align with or differ from their own. For analytical purposes, I categorise

temporality and relationality as analytically separate while recognizing the empirical interconnectedness implied by the 'temporal-relational' context (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In more simplified terms, to be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2006). Agency is the ability of individuals and groups to make sense of their environment and act accordingly (Mitra, 2015). Culture and structure precede agency; people develop from the cultural and structural context and then act back upon culture and structure over time to either transform them or maintain them (Porpora, 2013).

The wider understanding of culture, structure and agency forms a basis for conceptualizing 'career agency' as formed by the joint forces of intention and action and is the essential mechanism by which people make careers happen (Chen, 2006). It is a process of work-related social engagement, informed by past experiences and future possibilities, through which an individual invests in his or her career (Tams & Arthur, 2010). From a culture-centred perspective, career agency is lliminal and hybridized, continuously shifting between the individual and the collective but never quite resting fully in one or the other (Mitra, 2015). Therefore, I define **career agency as the 'temporal-relational' process through which individual careers are developed.**

1.6 Overview of the contribution

With a critical realist paradigm and a culture-centred approach to career agency, this study responds to the above questions with the following contributions to knowledge:

1. A theoretical contribution that broaden women's career theories with a culture-centred model of career agency. This model introduces the construct of 'shifting agentic bonds', facilitating a temporal-relational perspective of career agency as a contextually dependent process. This new construct for the first time injects cultural sensitivity into understanding career agency, extending our knowledge beyond 'individual agency'. The model is developed with a culture-centred

framework of career agency, which is a theoretical sub-contribution. The culture-centred framework for the analysis of agency in women's careers, for the first time operationalizes and disaggregates career agency to permit a liminal/hybrid/fluid view of agency. This framework accesses the relational and temporal mechanisms of career agency. In this way, by facilitating an analysis of contextually varied forms of career agency, this contribution moves theory beyond the limited assumptions of the contexts in which they were tested.

2. An empirical contribution: a rich study of the careers of Indian managerial women, revealing a contextually relevant process of career agency.

3. A practical contribution: a culturally-sensitive approach to career coaching rooted in a relational and temporal view of career agency.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured around six chapters. Following the introduction, the key Chapters are: Chapter 2: literature review; Chapter 3: literature on the context of Indian managerial women; Chapter 4: methodology; Chapter 5: findings; Chapter 6: culture-centred model of career agency; Chapter 7: case studies of the agentic process; and Chapter 8: concludes with a discussion and contribution.

In Chapter 2, I begin by critically analysing the literature on Stage theories of women's careers to demonstrate that these theories and frameworks do not provide sufficient explanatory power in diverse contexts, which I identify as gaps in the literature. Then, I discuss the literature around agency and context in career theory, followed by a discussion of the culture-centred approach to careers to explore ways in which the gaps can be addressed, with consideration of the cultural context. Finally, I discuss the literature selected through a retroductive process to develop the culture-centred analytical framework of women's career agency.

In Chapter 3, I present a detailed analysis of the societal, familial, organizational and personal factors that form the landscape for Indian women's careers. I

demonstrate that Indian managerial women receive mixed messages from modernizing and traditional influences and find ways to negotiate their careers through the complexities in their context.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology for this study. I summarise my world view and the aligned philosophical perspective of critical realism as well as my insider/outsider stance as a researcher. I discuss the narrative interview approach to data collection. Then, I outline the abductive and retroductive methods applied to data analysis and development of the culture-centred framework of career agency and finally, the quality standards applied to this study.

Chapters 5-7 present the findings of the study. In Chapter 5, I discuss the biographical data and the findings based on the culture-centred framework presented in Chapter 2 and operationalised in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 continues with the findings, by presenting concepts and abstractions emerging from the data. These concepts and abstractions are formulated into the culture-centred model of career agency. This model demonstrates the shifting temporal-relational nature of career agency. Chapter 7 validates this model by reviewing four case studies and demonstrates that the model explains the variations in career agency in each case study.

In Chapter 8, I revert to the literature review and establish the position of my findings within the extant literature. I discuss the findings in relation to the RQ and SQs, to demonstrate the fluid nature of career agency and synthesise the fragmented findings around Indian women's career agency. I discuss the theoretical, empirical and practical contributions of the findings, followed by the wider applications of this research and then the limitations of the research, as well as suggestions for future research, are presented. Finally, I review the aims of the study and outline my personal learning from the research process.

1.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has highlighted my personal interest in the topic as well as the practical issue being addressed. I have elaborated the purpose, developed the

research question, defined the key concepts and highlighted the contributions of the study. In addition, this chapter provides an outline of the structure of this document.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with Section 2.1, with a review of literature which highlights the debate between individual agency and social determinism in career theories. The objective of this section is to examine the literature which leads to the definition of career agency as a temporal and relational process. With this definition, I develop a critical assessment of career theories. In Section 2.2, a critical analysis of the literature on the Stage theories of women's careers demonstrates the ways in which these theories fail to explain the career agency of women in diverse cultural contexts. This section outlines the temporal and relational limitations of career theory, and thereby demonstrates the need to broaden our understanding of career agency. In Section 2.3, I discuss the ways in which a culture-centred approach to careers can overcome the shortcomings of the Stage theories. I review the literature which facilitated the development of a culture-centred framework of career agency. The framework presented in Section 2.4 is used for the data analysis and the model development in this study. In Section 2.5, I iterate the research gap arising from the literature and the research questions.

2.1 Career Agency in career theory

In this section, I aim to define career agency to facilitate the critical assessment of Stage theories of women's careers presented in section 2.2. Career agency as a concept is rarely defined in career theory which has its roots primarily in psychology and sociology. The debates in career theory refer to the tensions between notions of individual agency and social determinism (Moore et al., 2007). Individual agency, a perspective dominant in the vocational psychology literature, is based on the idea that each person discovers their own capacities and matches them to a suitable occupation. In contrast, social determinism takes account of the ways in which social systems limit and/or enable the opportunities available to people and therefore shape potential career options. Additionally, scholars posit that individual agency and social determinism are not independent of each other (Moore et al., 2007).

The debate between agency and structure has been categorised as a philosophical debate between duality and dualism in the study of agency and structure. Duality considers agency and structure as merged with each other and does not strive to separate them. Dualism, on the other hand treats them as separate entities (Dany et al., 2003; Duberley et al., 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010; Cuzzocrea & Lyon, 2011). Careers literature suggests a middle road, with an integrative approach to understanding career agency (Duberley et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2011; Dany, 2014). An integrative approach cautions against focusing too much on either agency or social structures in career theories, as this may lead to a reductionist understanding and fail to account for the dynamic interaction between the two. Interactional considerations have emerged in recent career theories and consequently career agency is increasingly conceptualized as interdependent and being in communion with the others, rather than an individualistic dimension (Svejonova et al., 2010; Tams & Arthur, 2010).

Contextual factors within which individual careers develop are integral to understanding careers. A holistic methodological approach to studying women's careers has been suggested to account for contextual factors. In proposing the gender–organization–system perspective, Fagenson (1990) recognized the simultaneous interaction between the person, the organization and society. This perspective suggests that the limited advancement of women in organizations is due to the joint influence of the individual and the context. Researchers recognize that the careers of women are influenced by internal and external factors (Duffy & Dik, 2009). Internal factors include the individual's values, interests and skills; external factors include cultural factors and structures around gender and family (Duffy & Dik, 2009). While internal factors are personal they are influenced by family and society. External factors are not restricted to, but include family expectations and needs, life circumstances, spiritual and religious factors, and social service motivation. External factors interact with internal factors to varying degrees (Duffy & Dik, 2009). The theoretical separation between internal and external factors is contested, yet the need to analyse the dynamic interaction between them is widely supported

(Dany et al., 2003; Duberley et al., 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010; Cuzzocrea & Lyon, 2011).

Agency continues to be debated in 'new career theories'. An investigation of changing career patterns across four generations shows that shifts in generational norms correspond with shifts in career paths from traditional organizational careers to a 'new career' model characterised by increased individual agency, flexibility of career paths and greater mobility (Lyons et al., 2015). There is a concern that the degree of individual agency may be overstated by the new careers literature (Inkson et al., 2012). Additionally, literature on flexible working focuses on individual strategies to manage conflict or achieve balance within their contextual constraints. The consequences of the theoretical and practical focus on the individual has raised a concern that work-life balance discourses might have intensified the pressure to strive to be a flawlessly balanced human being and these pressures are gendered (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015). The dynamic interaction between agency and structure is discounted. The individual is assessed as separate from and acting upon structures in search of work-life balance.

The dynamic interaction of agency and structure is captured by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) who define agency as "*the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the 'temporal-relational' (my emphasis) context of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations*" *(p.970)*. In their conceptualization, structures enable and constrain action, and structures include: the cultural context such as symbolic patterns, structuring actors' understanding of the world; the social-structural context involving the network patterns of social ties; and the social-psychological context directing the flows of emotional energy, attachments and emotional solidarity. My review of the literature shows that to be relevant in a range of contexts career theories need to address the cultural influences on women's careers. Cultural influences will be present in the external structures, enabling and constraining careers as well

as in personal internalised beliefs and attitudes. With the concept of 'temporal-relational' context as the context in which careers unfold, we can examine the interplay of the structural and personal factors within a cultural context.

As discussed in Chapter 4, I take a critical realist approach in this study. The critical realist view of structure and agency is processual, such that structure precedes agency, people develop from their structural and cultural contexts, and then they act back upon the contexts to either transform or maintain them. Critical realism requires me to take the position of analytical dualism between structure and agency. Without analytical dualism, and separation of agency from context, the dynamic process between them becomes blurred and this prevents an exploration of the underlying mechanism of the career development process. However, taking agency as a separate concept is challenging when the analytical disaggregation of the various dimensions of agency is rarely made in career theory (Tomlinson et al., 2013). Such a distinction can help to reveal the dynamic nature of agency, and broaden theories on careers. Career theories have thus far taken an integrated view of career agency, conceptualizing it in three ways; (i) as the mechanism by which people make careers happen, arising from the joint forces of intention and action (Chen, 2006); (ii) as a process of work-related social engagement, informed by past experiences and future possibilities, through which an individual develops their career (Tams & Arthur, 2010); and (iii) as lliminal and hybridized, continuously shifting between the individual and the collective but never quite resting fully in one or the other (Mitra, 2015). Despite stressing that agency is a mechanism, a process and continuously shifting, these theories do not operationalize the construct of career agency and do not identify its characteristics in empirical terms to permit the analytical distinction between agency and context required for a critical realist analysis.

From the perspective of career counselling and career guidance, Chen (2006) reviews the notion of human agency in a broad life-career context. He provides a rationale for applying the agency construct to career development citing evidence from the literature, showing that agency can be simplified and

understood as *"what one thinks and how one acts"* (Chen, 2006, p.133). He suggests the key function of career development practitioners is to facilitate human agency to fulfil its potential to generate new ways of doing things and bring positive change in one's life-career development. Although he acknowledges that career development practitioners typically use agentic functioning, he points out that they rarely articulate it. Hence, Chen (2006) calls on career researchers to work to incorporate human agency into career literature and facilitate the application of the agency construct in theory and practice. Career agency has been expressed as an intention to invest in one's own career independently of the structural challenges (Tams & Arthur, 2010). Theories of agency would predict that intentions will be supported by a proactive plan (Bandura, 2006). Yet, the connections between agentic activities such as intention, action, proactive planning and contextual factors have not been identified. In this paper, I address the interaction of structure and agency within a cultural context and over time with the concept of 'temporal-relational' process. **I define career agency as the 'temporal-relational' process through which individual careers are developed over time.**

Although Stage theories do not specifically define career agency, they address the shifts in women's careers over time. Stage theories address shifts in career agency by establishing shifts in the 'locus of control' (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) and 'parameters' that shape career decisions (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005); both concepts imply an agentic quality in women's careers over time.

2.2 Stage theories of women's careers

Building on my definition and stance on career agency, in this section I present a critical analysis of the Stage theories of women's careers. Women's careers shift over time depending on circumstances in their larger life context (O'Neil et al., 2008). With a focus on the temporal and relational aspects of women's lives, Stage theories seek to explain the shifts in women's careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Stage theories are rooted in the life stage developmental frameworks advanced in career theory by Super (1980). This framework established that career development occurs along a set of

phases over a life-span during which individuals continually implement and revise self-concepts. Early Stage theories of careers were critiqued for being framed around the phases of men's lives and ignoring the focus of relationality in women's lives. (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003; Sullivan & Baruch 2009). Subsequent Stage theories of women's careers set out to address this shortcoming and predict patterns of women's careers and explain why women opt out of careers by considering the relational aspects of their lives. These theories show distinct phases in women's careers over time (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). O'Neil & Bilimoria (2005) proposed an age-linked model with three phases of career development. The first phase is 'idealistic achievement' typically during the ages of 24-35 years, when women feel in charge of their careers and take proactive steps with an individualistic perspective. The second phase is 'pragmatic endurance' during the ages of 36-45 years, when women take a relational view of their careers and make career decisions around multiple responsibilities outside the workplace. The third phase is 're-inventive contribution' during the ages of 46-60 years, when women focus on making a meaningful contribution at work as well as a need for recognition, respect and living an integrated life.

Similarly, Mainiero & Sullivan (2005), demonstrate shifting patterns in women's careers as an explanation for women opting out of the workforce before reaching senior managerial levels. They suggest the ABC model of kaleidoscope careers to explain the relational side of women's careers, with three parameters by which women decide on a career decision that will best fit their lives; they illustrate the parameters as:

"Authenticity: Can I be myself in the midst of all of this and still be authentic?

Balance: If I make this career decision, can I balance the parts of my life well so that there can be a coherent whole?

Challenge: Will I be sufficiently challenged if I accept this career option?" (pp. 113-114)

The model suggests that women's career parameters therefore shift over time. Each parameter takes a primary role in specific stages while the others recede into the background. In their early career, women focus on 'achievement', in mid-career on 'balance' and in late career on 'authenticity'. As balance takes on a primary focus for women in mid-career, they suggest that when women cannot find the necessary level of balance the likelihood of opting out of the workforce increases. The stages resonate quite closely with O'Neil & Bilimoria's (2005) phases. In both cases the women shift from a focus on individual needs in their early career to a greater concern for external factors such as family needs in mid-career. In both models, late careers are characterised by a desire to reconcile the internal and external drivers.

Stage theories reference the underlying mechanisms of shifts in careers as 'career locus' (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) and 'parameters' that shape career decisions (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). These references suggest that women's engagement with their careers shifts over time. The shift over time is based on the increasing needs from their families as they age and engage in family life. Therefore, these shifts are linked to shifts in time and in relationships. Stage theories emphasise the temporal and relational nature of women's lives and demonstrate that women adjust their careers over time to factor in the needs of families (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). The combination of time and relationships as the context in which women make career decisions aligns with the concept of the 'temporal-relational context' in theories of agency. Agency is the engagement of actors in temporal-relational contexts to reproduce or transform structures in response to problems posed by changing circumstances (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Stage theories demonstrate that women's career decisions start with a greater focus on self and are internally directed in the early phases of their careers, typically before they are faced with the needs of families and children. This shifts to an increased focus on others and more externally directed career decisions in the mid phase of their careers, when the needs of family and children become relevant in their decisions (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). The

likelihood of opting-out in middle-age is tied to the increased stresses of managing work and family demands at that stage of life. Finally, in the later stages, women are shown to seek balance and integrate self needs with the needs of others, when the needs of family and children are likely to decline.

However, Stage theories stop short of elaborating on the nature of women's career agency within the shifting temporal-relational context. Stage theories describe the shifts and show the way in which women invest in their careers changes over time. However, these theories fail to describe the ways women's career agency is shaped by the relational and temporal context, which in turn will be shaped by the cultural and structural context. The transnational validity of Stage theories is questionable due to two shortcomings (Savickas et al., 2009). Firstly, Stage theories take a truncated view of temporality. They address careers from the early-career phase which is assumed to be the point at which the individual undertakes their first job and stops when careers stop. Yet career intentions are established well before the career starts, and these intentions are likely to influence career advancement over time.

Secondly, the assumptions around relationality do not factor in how societal and familial relationships shape women's careers. Stage theories assume political stability and an advanced economy context supportive of linear career paths and focus entirely on the micro-level relational stages of women's lives. Stage theories highlight a shift from self-focus to other focuses in women's careers based on age/stage connections, which are assumed to be based on the cultures in which the theories were initially tested (Savickas et al., 2009).

It could be argued, therefore, that Stage theories are implicitly frozen in the temporality and relationality of their origins, and fail to address variations in temporal-relational norms in a range of cultural contexts. The temporal and relational limitations are critically analysed below.

2.2.1 Temporal Limitations

In this section I will discuss the importance of assessing careers with a view on pre-career intentionality, future career possibilities and cultural variations in

norms around family commitment over time. By neglecting to analyze how pre-career intentionality, future career projections and the rhythm of family life shape careers, Stage theories truncate an analysis of career agency. They address careers from the early-career phase which is assumed to be the point at which the individual undertakes their first job. This assumption is problematic as studies have shown the career intentions are established well before the career starts, and these intentions are likely to influence career advancement over time. Parental influences that are likely to impact on career intentions and career preparation in the 'pre-career' stages have been ignored. Intentionality is a key aspect of career agency (Bandura, 2006; Chen, 2006) and therefore without an explicit consideration of pre-career intentionality, a key aspect of the development of career agency is ignored. Additionally, future-career projections will influence how career actions are assessed in the present. Cultural values can impact on the long-term orientation of individuals (House et al., 2004) leading to variations in how the future is accounted for in the current career. This omission is particularly problematic in cultures where filial duty, duties to children, and social cohesion can be lifelong and do not change as the individual becomes older.

Despite the focus on stages of family life, Stage theories of women's careers have not analysed the potential roots of career intentions as they have not considered pre-career stages or parental influence on career intentions through the stages. Career intentions form a vital component of career agency, defined in career counselling literature as a combination of intention and action (Chen, 2006). Agency is linked through the individual's past experiences, present considerations and future possibilities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Hence, although an essential aspect of career decisions, intentions formed in the past have largely been ignored in Stage theories. Rather, career intentions have been assumed to start with the first job. Instead, perceptions of organizational barriers have been shown to shape the career intentions of pre-career women (Ezzedeen et al., 2015); their study of female undergraduate business students in Canada showed that perceptions of organizational obstacles to work-life balance resulted in restricting career choices to favour either the work OR the

non-work domain before the career had started (Ezzedeen et al., 2015). The focus groups included a multi-cultural sample of women. The researchers concluded that the children of immigrants felt pressured "to do right by their parents" and had a sense of indebtedness or financial obligations to families which 'hindered career agency' (Ezzedeen et al., 2015, pp. 361-362). Theories of human agency show that intentionality and proactive planning are linked (Bandura, 2006). Therefore, the way an individual's intentions are established before the career begins will impact on the career going forward. In pre-career stages, in early childhood and youth, individuals are most likely to be influenced by parents; however, parent/child relational norms are likely to vary between cultures.

In China, the Confucian tradition emphasizes parents' role in their children's educational choices and career-planning, and children follow their parents' advice, guidance and wishes (Liu et al., 2014). Parental influence on career choice intentions among undergraduate students in the Hospitality and Tourism management studies in China found that students whose parents have lower incomes might be influenced by their parents' salary level and parental influence on career intentions to improve their families' living standards and social status. In contrast, students whose parents have higher incomes and better education are influenced by the emotional and physical support of their parents and view parental involvement from the pre-career stage as vital in their career choice process (Wong & Liu, 2010). Similarly, in India, studies have shown that women's career choices are expressed as being 'in fusion' with parental choices, where individuals hardly distinguish their choice from that of their parents, particularly at the pre-career stage of their lives (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). These studies from Canada, China and India highlight the significance of the absence of pre-career intentions of the Stage theories of women's careers. Intentions are a critical property of career agency (Bandura, 2006; Chen, 2006) and the past is an essential aspect of the temporality of agency.

Similarly, theories of agency suggest that projections and imaginations about future possibilities will impact on career agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The career experiences of Chinese self-initiated repatriates after their return to China, show that career decisions during their time overseas was based on the long-term impact their careers would have on society. Grounded in Chinese cultural values, the expatriates made career decisions abroad with a projected view of their future return to China. They considered the value of their career decisions on making their children proud, even when they did not have children, contributing to China's economic success and emphasizing a harmonious work environment once they returned (Guo et al., 2013). This is an example of the temporal and relational aspects of family life and career decisions.

Temporality in women's careers is further illustrated by the finding that Indian women's parental role commitment increases over time. Children in India do not tend to leave home in their late teens and are likely to continue living with their parents once they enter the workforce. Therefore, the 'empty nest' stage, is not a common reality in India and adult development theories underlying Stage theories do not align with the rhythm of family life in the Indian context (Rajadhyaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000). Stage theories assume that women in the late career phase experience an 'empty nest', with their children having left home. According to Stage theory, women can transfer energy from parental roles to professional roles in the later phase of their careers. However, Indian women's lives are likely to require energy for the parental role over a longer period than envisaged in the Stage theories. To ensure that careers are understood holistically, pre-career intentionality, future career projections and cultural norms around family commitment over time must be addressed.

2.2.2 Relational limitations

By overlooking how the cultural relational norms around society and family shape careers, Stage theories assume relationality is based on the cultures in which the theories were initially tested. This assumption prevents a culturally sensitive view of women's careers. The omission of 'how' societal factors shape women's careers, can be particularly limiting in contexts said to be in a state of

rapid economic and social change. Stage theories assume political stability and an advanced economy supportive of linear career paths and focus entirely on the micro-level relational stages of women's lives (Savickas et al., 2009). By failing to elaborate on 'how' families shape career agency and by assuming an age/stage connection based on adult development theories, Stage theories fail to address culturally embedded relational norms and instead are developed on an inherent assumption of individual agency. As discussed below the two limitations of relationality in Stage theories are: (i) Stage theories do not apply in varying market and political conditions when cultural relational norms might be shifting, and (ii) Stage theories may not have validity in cultural contexts where agency is of a hybrid nature. These are discussed in more depth below.

Firstly, the external environment is not explicitly addressed in the Stage theories and is therefore implicitly assumed to be the same as the context in which these theories were initially developed. With a review of the literature on careers from a cross-cultural perspective, Tams & Arthur (2010) argue that the relationship between economic, political, social, and cultural contexts and careers is both iterative and dynamic. Stage theories on the other hand were developed and tested in advanced economies in relatively stable societal contexts that promoted linear careers. The applicability of these theories in varying market and political conditions is therefore questionable (Savickas et al., 2009). An individual's career development will be shaped by more than the individual's characteristics; political and economic conditions are bound to have an impact. In Turkey, Kemalist principles of secularism were more effective in producing gender equality ideology than the legal framework that is applied in the US and UK, leading to an increase in professional employment for women in Turkey. However, the gains may be lost as neo-liberal economic reforms dilute the equality discourse. Macro social factors, such as dominant political ideology, dominant gender order and social values, can combine to create an enabling environment for women's careers (Özbilgin & Healy, 2004). Khapova & Korotov (2007) analysed the meaning of the various attributes of careers originating in Western theory over three decades in Russia, from the Soviet period, through the transition to market economy, to the Russia of today. In their study, they

demonstrated that Russians moved from believing that having a career was not a concern for most people, that everyone, including women, had a job, and it was punishable by law not to work, to building careers that improve lifestyles, and finally choosing careers with rapid promotions to match the pace of economic growth in the country. They conclude that the meanings ascribed to career attributes are dynamic, depending on the prevailing social, political and economic context in which they are embedded. Gender did not necessarily influence these career dynamics directly. A study from China shows that the shift from a planned economy to a market economy enables individuals to choose careers and demands career-planning skills. However, the cultural dependence on parents for decisions, means that young people entering the workforce in the new economy are ill prepared to make career decisions independently in the new economy and struggle to manage the early stages of their careers (Liu et al., 2014).

Career studies from India show that gender roles are being shaped in the transition to recent neo-liberal economic reforms. Socially, modernity and tradition co-exist and send conflicting messages to managerial women, simultaneously permitting modern versions of human capital to enter the workforce while requiring traditional commitment to extended family and requirement to remain within the bounds of the family home. The emotional support for managerial women in India is fractured, torn between modernity and tradition. Researchers assess the impact of the changing economic conditions in the emerging economy of India and refer to the 'new Indian woman', emerging from the 'new middle class', a product of the 'new economy' (Ghosh & Roy, 1997; Hapke, 2013). Indian managerial women are seen to belong to the category of 'new Indian woman' and expected to modernise by being 'appropriately Indian' (Radhakrishnan, 2009). Indian managerial women therefore are expected to pursue careers outside the home without compromising family duties and family cohesion. Several researchers analyze the double-edged position of Indian women, present in the home and outside the home simultaneously. They conclude that careers must not come at the cost of being sufficiently attentive to extended family and the home, to avoid societal

and familial sanctions (Lau, 2006, 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2009; Thappan, 2004). These studies from Turkey, Soviet Union, China and India demonstrate that the prevailing economic and political conditions, especially in times of change need to be factored into women's career theories. Due to the disregard for the shifting political, economic environments, in which much of female careers is enacted, the Stage theories cannot be easily applied to much of the global female talent pool.

Secondly, Stage theories predict a shift in the women's locus of control from internal/self-focus in the early stages of career to an external/other-focus in later stages (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Stage theories predict an increase in the likelihood of women opting out at mid-life and having a renewed energy for careers in later life stages. They connect these stages to family life, with a focus on the demands of childcare. However, the fundamental assumption of predictability of the stages in careers and the transnational validity is questioned by the literature on career counselling (Savickas et al., 2009). The primary explanation for shifts in stages are age-based life transitions implied by Western adult development theories. Yet, adult development theories are not found to be generalizable to women nor to the emergence of non-linear career paths (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). In the context of varying age/life stage cultural norms, and when career paths have interruptions, then setting career stages against age and life stages has been shown to be problematic. Although career development theories seek to go beyond adult development theories (Moore et al., 2007, p. 14), they still inherently carry a Western cultural assumption of age and life stages for each gender (Savickas et al., 2009). Stage theories fail to explain how and why many managerial women in India do not opt out in mid-career. In a comparative study of Indian and American women, although both groups described the burdens of trying to balance work and life in their career experiences, this burden rarely led to a turnover intention with the Indian women, whereas the same issues resulted in turnover intentions in over 50% of the American women (Adya, 2008). The predictions of the Stage theories of careers are questioned by research in the Indian context as well as research on boundaryless and shared careers.

Boundaryless career theories have introduced the notion of interdependence in agency (Tams & Arthur, 2010) and theories of shared careers have introduced the notion of agency in communion (Svejenova et al., 2010). These theories demonstrate that career agency may be a hybrid, both internal/self-focused and external/other-focused at the same time. The hybrid concept of agency highlights weaknesses in the career Stage theories which, despite stressing the relational aspects of women's careers, fail to investigate the relational dynamics and the possibility of hybrid agency in the shifting of women's career stages. Literature from the Arab Middle East and India demonstrates that career agency is not clearly individual in those contexts. Afiouni & Karam's (2014) study of the careers of female academics from eight countries in the Arab Middle East indicates that women's career agency is a process characterised by the interaction of an individual's agency and her context. They highlight that cultural considerations need to be accounted for by including the local macro-level structures, which they refer to as localized realities. Misalignment of mandated structures results in tensions, and the desire to reconcile these tensions triggers agentic activity. Differences around women's professional and gender-based roles and responsibilities within a given culture result in an agentic process in the individual.

Studies on the 'respectable femininity' requirement of women in South Asia illustrate these tensions and the shifts in the self/other focus in career agency over career stages. Norms of respectability impact on the career agency of highly skilled Sri Lankan women differently at different career stages. Women in early and mid-career stages are subjected to higher moral expectations of propriety and therefore network cautiously as extensive contact with male acquaintances would not be socially tolerated. Scholars argue that women are disadvantaged in social capital when they are left out of male-dominated networks (Cabrera, 2007); however, this study shows that the women restricted themselves from social networks because of concerns about respectability. However, the older women in the sample in later stages of their careers were exempt from the prevailing codes of good conduct for women. In contrast to respondents in early and mid-career, none of the women in late career talked

about having to engage in the kind of navigating and negotiating described by the women in the early and mid-career stages. So, older women were free to network with men and develop social capital in the pursuit of career advancement, as rules of moral behaviour apply mainly to younger women in Sri Lankan organizations. Hence the agentic activity of older women was more individual and self-focused than that of the younger women in this study (Fernando & Cohen, 2014). This contrasts with the Stage theories that predict the opposite, i.e. a shift to other-focused career actions later in life.

In a qualitative study of non-managerial employees in six organizations in England, Bosley et al. (2009) find that individual careers are shaped by others in a variety of ways, which they identify in a typology of career shapers. They go further by concluding that the others who shape careers are themselves shaped by the larger social structures. Therefore, the external, social environment will have a role to play in individual's career progress regardless of their geographic location and the contextual factors will be mediated by the family. Similarly, the influence of the social context and of the expectations of families is shown to be present in Indian women's agentic characteristics, leading researchers to term the career of agency of Indian managerial women as interactional agency (Bulbeck, 2010), constrained agency (Shenoy-Packer, 2014) and nuanced agency (Uppalury & Racherla, 2014). These studies spanning America, India, The Arab Middle East and the UK demonstrate the limitations of the individual agency assumptions of the Stage theories and highlight the need to understand 'how' career agency is shaped by society and others.

The importance of cultural influences on the external and internal factors is largely ignored. The value of the cultural context is highlighted by Afiouni & Karam's (2014) study from the Middle East which indicates that women's career agency is a process. They highlight that cultural considerations need to be accounted for by including the local macro-level structures, which they refer to as localized realities. Misalignment of mandated structures within a context results in tensions. Women's professional and gender based roles are likely to vary by cultural context and will lead to differences in the agentic process.

In this section, with its analysis of women's careers in non-Western contexts, I have shown that the temporal and relational limitations of Stage theories fail to address the mechanisms and processes of 'how' women's careers shift over time. To overcome these limitations, I take a culture-centred approach in this study, as discussed in the next section.

2.3 Culture-centred approach to careers

Culture which impacts the external, structural environment as well as the internalised beliefs of the Individual is largely ignored and assumed to be Western-centric in Stage theories of women's careers. The temporal and relational limitations of Stage theories were discussed in Chapter 2.2.1 and Chapter 2.2.2. To overcome the limitations, a culturally sensitive approach is needed. The stated goal of Mitra's (2015) culture-centred approach (CCA) is to engage and transform conventional career concepts that silence the voices of women from non-Western contexts (Mitra, 2015). CCA, is rooted in postcolonial theory and addresses the weaknesses in women's career theories with implicit Western biases built into theory. It suggests that an analysis of the triad of culture, structure and agency is required to examine careers in diverse contexts. CCA seeks to identify the shifts and interplay between structure and action in career negotiations (Mitra, 2015). A culture-centred approach conceptualizes career as a form of cultural practice and impacts on career studies in four ways. First it de-normalizes practices and artefacts of dominant careers, such as linear advancement, by recognizing the cultural enactments of careers. Second, CCA accounts for the dialectical relationship between objective conditions, such as salary and hours worked, and the subjective meanings of work. Third the individual/collective binary of career agency is replaced by a hybridized and liminal understanding of agency. Fourth, the CCA stresses engaging with subaltern actors. With this approach, culture represents a "*dynamic web of shared meaning continuously constructed, reified and challenged through communication in local contexts as participants draw from circulating macro-discourses*". Structure is defined as the "*systems of organizing that constrain and enable human agency*", and lastly agency refers

to the "*ability of the individuals and groups to make sense of their environment and act accordingly*" (Mitra, 2015, p.1822). The CCA framework, in keeping with its postcolonial approach, pays attention to subaltern agency originally reflected as colonizer/colonized relationships and subsequently reflected as power relationships between groups. CCA focuses on understanding how historic power positions have influenced the expression of career agency of the less powerful segments of society. A culture-centred approach focuses on analyzing groups in lower positions of power, referred to as 'subalterns'.

2.3.1 Subaltern agency and multinational corporations

In this section I discuss the career agency of subalterns and establish that, given the hybrid/liminal/fluid nature of subaltern agency, it can be missed or miscategorised in career theories that focus on individual agency or take a rigid dualistic view of agency. Culture-centred career theories will deliberately account for the hybrid/liminal/fluid nature of career agency of those who do not belong to the dominant group. As my study analyses the career narratives of Indian managerial women in multinational corporations, I discuss literature relevant to MNCs in a range of cultural contexts and argue for the subaltern position of Indian managerial women.

Subalterns are segments of society who are outside the hegemonic power structure. The position of managers in subsidiaries of Multinational corporations (MNCs) can be reflective of a subaltern position, depending on the relationship and history of the countries in which they are based. A qualitative study assessing the impact of institutional changes in Bolivia over a 10-year period within the headquarters of a Brazilian energy MNC and its subsidiaries in Bolivia demonstrates that postcolonial relationships are possible between two nations that do not share a colonial past. They show that Brazil was chosen by Bolivia as the new 'colonizer' when it granted Brazil oil exploration rights in 1936, after nationalizing it away from an American entity. In return for access to the Atlantic Ocean, landlocked Bolivia granted exclusive drilling rights to Brazil. The researchers in this study carried out two sets of interviews, first in 2005 and then in 2015 and 2016. During this period, Bolivia had undergone anti-

colonialist nationalizing of oil and gas and returned control of natural resources to the indigenous people of Bolivia and away from Brazil. However, the cultural impact of earlier power structures endured within the Brazilian headquarters and Bolivian subsidiaries. Interviews before and after the transfer of MNC controls to Bolivians, demonstrated that the Bolivian managers continued to behave as subalterns, taking an inferior and child-like position in need of protection from Brazilian manager even after the transfer of power (Wanderley & Celano, 2017). Therefore, the impact of the historical power structures endured well after power was handed over. The subaltern position, which had been established in the colonizing period, did not immediately change when agreements transferring ownership were signed. In that way, within an MNC context, Brazilian managers continued to exert power over the Bolivian managers.

In another qualitative study, with interviews conducted at a Tunisian company, Yousfi (2013) found that Western trained managers discussed how they modernized their company through the implementation of a US management model. The managers seemed to have internalised the discourse of modernization and expressed how they used the US management model to overcome the 'dysfunctional' family-based organizational system and simultaneously detached themselves from the French organizational model as a form of resistance to a previous colonizing power. Although the Tunisian managers expressed belief in the American model they modified it in response to resistance from local workers. Therefore, Yousfi (2013) highlights that although the Tunisian managers resisted their subaltern position in relation to French management practices, they might be less aware of their subaltern position in relation to American practices. They were nevertheless demonstrating hybridity seen in colonized people, who find ways to merge hegemonic influences with indigenous cultural frameworks to function within the colonizing power structures and within norms of indigenous culture (Bhabha, 2004).

I argue that Indian managers, despite seemingly being in a position of power within their society, can be seen in a subaltern position in the global context of MNCs. Historical shifts of domination and subordination led Indian managers first to emulate European managerial behaviours in their MNCs and then to embrace American models of professional behaviour (Srinivas, 2013). Hence Indian managers shifted from a race-defined process of emulation linked to the colonial past to the emerging universal ideals of neutral analysis and scientific method linked to American management approaches (Srinivas, 2013, p.1666). Mimicry and emulation are notable aspects of post-colonial and subaltern subjects. Mimicry represents a subconscious and ironic compromise of the colonized, to be more recognizable within the dominant discourses of the colonizers; the colonized imitate the recognizable behaviours. The seeming alignment with the dominant culture facilitates an appearance of normalizing and reduces the risks of belonging to the subjugated classes. However, the mimicries, which are at times imitations and at times emulation, do not reflect the individual's authentic identity and hopes. The acts of mimicry only camouflage the differences between the individual and the dominant cultural norms (Bhabha, 2004). Hence, Indian managers, as post-colonial subjects, reliant on Western norms of managerial behaviour, are likely to mimic behaviours, which might camouflage an authentic subjectivity. Indian managers continue to face cultural domination within the organizational context of MNCs without necessarily continuing to represent a social class that is powerless and the cultural domination in the MNC context might be camouflaged by mimicry.

Findings in MNCs which interpret the behaviours and discussions of subordinate classes without a view on mimicry, will contribute to further domination and will not move closer to the authentic identity and experience of the subjects. This highlights the importance of familiarity with cultural codes and circulating discourses in the population of interest. Although cultural domination is likely to impact on both male and female managers, Özkazanç-Pan (2012) shows that the female post-colonial subject is *"doubly subjugated by the colonizers and indigenous patriarchy"* (p.967). Seremani & Clegg (2015) further point out that the sites occupied by subalterns, especially subaltern

women, offer little scope for the expression of an authentic subjectivity, due to the privileging of Western terms and concepts in research and practice.

The importance of taking a culture-centred approach is especially significant when analysing women in the MNC social context. Due to their privileging of American business practices, subsidiaries of Western MNCs are likely to foster the conditions for mimicry and emulation described by Bhabha (2004). The Indian perspective may differ from Western approaches to social relationships in professional life. Chen et al. (2015) in their study of the financial services sector of India, found that Indian businesses legitimize and enact the importance of particularistic ties between people, in exact opposition to Western MNCs, which focus on universalistic ties. Yet Indian businesses participate fully and contribute to the modern-day globalized economy. Chen et al. (2015) conclude that it would be erroneous to assume that modernizing in Eastern societies automatically implies Westernizing of behaviours and norms. They show that norms around social relationships and, more specifically, the unique ways in which Indian managers blend traditional and contemporary institutions to develop professional networks and transfer information, vary significantly between local organizations and MNCs. When studying Indian managerial women in MNCs it becomes critical to take a culture-centred view on the nuances of their social relationships and how that shapes career agency. Yet career agency remains under-explored in career theories, especially women's career theories, hence these theories fail to explain the shifts in women's career agency over time in a range of cultural contexts.

2.4 Culture-centred framework of career agency

Career agency has been defined as the temporal and relational engagements women make to invest in their career (Tams & Arthur, 2010). Therefore, career agency is shaped by a combination of contextual, individual and relational factors shifting over time. Stage theories of women's careers fail to address the interplay of these factors over time and do not elaborate the concept of career agency in their frameworks. Recent research on women in varying contexts has demonstrated the value and the need for developing culturally adapted

concepts of career agency. The literature reveals cross-cultural gaps in career theories. Our understanding of career agency remains fragmented, highlighting the need for more work in a range of contexts (Bulbeck, 2010; Afiouni & Karam, 2014; Shenoy-Packer, 2014; Uppalury & Racherla, 2014; Woodhams et al., 2015). The next section lays out the literature that disaggregates career agency based on the CCA (Mitra, 2015) and facilitates the analytical framework applied in this study.

In the search for authentic subjectivity in careers, Mitra (2015) suggests viewing career as a cultural practice. His approach to studying careers identifies the need for: (1) recognition of the untidy connections between culture, structure and agency centred on communication through the circulating career scripts; (2) conceptualization of a hybridized career agency, shifting across individual and collective; (3) deconstruction of career agency which is complex and fragmented; and (4) exploration of the ways in which career agency is constructed and constrained (p.1827).

A culture-centred perspective of career agency is defined by CCA (Mitra, 2015) as processual, liminal, hybrid and fluid, and therefore requires a disaggregated view of agency. However, the CCA framework (Mitra, 2015) does not elaborate an operationalized framework to disaggregate components of agency in narrative data.

The literature that supports the development of this framework is discussed below.

2.4.1 Temporality

An individual's career is set within the individual's broader life context and is enacted over time. Stage theories of women's careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) while focusing on career stages which shift in relation to broader life changes, allude to the significance of temporality in careers. Women's career decisions are based on shifting relational demands and shifting patterns over time. Temporality in career agency has emerged more explicitly in recent studies of careers. A study by Lee et al. (2011)

suggests that individuals construct careers over time through their own understanding of their broader context, which consists of "*entangled strands of work, personal, family and community life.*" (p.1546). These studies not only show the limitations of individual agency in explaining career agency, their findings suggest the value of exploring agency as a process of communion over time with the environment to explain contemporary career experiences. The connections between agency and time were explored in Emirbayer & Mische's (1998) theoretical paper. They argued that the agentic aspects of social action are best understood when situated within the flow of time. They answer the question, which is the title of their paper, "What is Agency?" with the following quote: "*We define it as the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments - the temporal-relational contexts of action - which through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations*" (p.970). They refer to the chordal triad of agency being composed of: 1) the iterational element, the selective reiteration of past patterns, thought and action; 2) the projective element, the imaginative generation of future possibilities in relation to the actors' hopes, fears and desires for the future; and 3) the practical-evaluative element, the capacity of actors to make practical judgements and choices for the present based on their demands, dilemmas and ambiguities materializing at the present time.

Hence, agency is informed by the past as it has a previous experience and a habitual aspect, but is also oriented towards the future as alternative options are imagined and the present, which is a represented by the capacity to understand the perceived options available at the current time. This notion of temporality supports the conceptualization of career agency as a process which seeks to align work with life over time. Process models are event-driven and examine transformation through temporally diffused events (Van de Ven, 2007). A process model examines how the outcomes unfold over time and the factors which account for its evolution, to identify the generative mechanisms underlying shifts. The inclusion of temporality in the analytical framework of this study, therefore permits a processual view of career agency.

2.4.2 Properties and modes of agency

In keeping with the culture-centred approach, which encourages the deconstruction of career agency (Mitra, 2015), Bandura's (2006) theory on human agency facilitates unpacking, operationalizing and categorising aspects of agency in data. In support of the liminality, hybridity and fluidity of agency in the culture-centred approach suggested by Mitra (2015), Bandura (2006) acknowledges *"Most human pursuits involve other participating agents, so there is no absolute agency."* (p.164). Notably, regarding the broader aim of this study to be culturally sensitive, Bandura (2006) relates these modes of agency to cross-cultural contexts with the following: *"It is widely claimed that Western theories lack generalizability to non-Western cultures. In truth, however, the relative weight given to individual, proxy, and collective agency varies cross-culturally and across spheres of life, but one needs all forms of agency to make it through the day, regardless of where one happens to live."* (p.174). Hence, there is a need for further exploration of women's career agency in cross-cultural contexts.

Bandura's (2006) framework disaggregates and expands the simplified framework focusing on intention and action in career agency (Chen, 2006) with four core properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. The four properties of agency identified by Bandura (2006) are: intentionality, which includes expressions of determination and commitment; forethought, which encompasses career-plans; self-reactiveness, which refers to tactics and actions; and lastly, self-reflection, which is expressed as self-analysis and meanings ascribed to career pursuits.

Finally , the relational aspects of individual and collective agency in the culture-centred conceptualizing career agency as liminal/hybrid and fluid is facilitated by Bandura's (2006) identification of three modes of agency, which are: personal agency exercised as individuals bringing their own influence to bear on their environment; proxy agency enacted through a socially mediated form to influence others to act on their behalf; and collective agency, which is an interdependent mode of agency where commitment, knowledge and skills are

pooled with others for shared goals and attainment. The inclusion of the properties and modes of agency in the analytical framework of this study thereby facilitate the examination of the fluidity of agency in data, and avoid rigid dualistic perspectives of agency.

2.4.3 Narrative fragmentation

A culture-centred approach recognizes that career agency is fragmented and complex, and deconstructing fragmentation may shed light on agentic constraints (Mitra, 2105). Agency is defined as the engagement of actors in temporal-relational contexts to reproduce or transform structures in response to problems posed by changing circumstances (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Challenges, discontinuities, and tensions in the women's stories are frequently indicative of problems and challenges. Humle & Pedersen (2015) advance a practical approach to analysing such events, which leads to incoherence, which they refer to as fragmentation within career stories. Adding to Mitra's (2015) argument that careers are cultural practices, Humle & Pedersen (2015) show that career stories are social practices. The stories are negotiated, retold, edited and performed by the storyteller in an ongoing process, permitting the expression of tensions, discontinuities and editing. The storytellers tend not distinguish between life stories and work stories, as individual or organizational stories, rather they define the story work as a relational process between individuals and organizations. Rather than focus on coherence in stories, characterised by the chronological organization of stories, Humle & Pedersen (2015) argue for focusing on fragmentation, partial presence of coherence, or absence of coherence in work stories, to reveal the driving forces behind career agency. They developed the typology of fragmentation as discontinuities; tensions; editing. The first type of fragmentation is discontinuity, defined as unresolved dilemmas. Discontinuities are ambiguities and complexities, which means that stories are not told in a logical order, shifting in tense from simple past, present and future tenses, instead they lack coherence and shift back and forth between tenses; in work stories these could be reflected as ambiguity between achievement and failure as well as measures of job goals. The second

type of fragmentation is created by tensions, resulting from multiple and diverse perspectives, as though several stories were being told at the same time; in work stories, these are often reflected as tensions between work life and home life. The third type of fragmentation is editing, highlighting the reflexive agency of the storyteller. This is a way for the teller to assemble, rearrange, and revise the story to cope with discontinuities and create partial coherence through linkages, gaps, and slippages. For example, storytellers might connect everyday practices and challenges to work dreams to edit discontinuity. The storyteller might say that although he or she is underpaid, the joy of working with her team connects with her dreams of helping people and thereby edits the discontinuity of salary disappointment by linking it to the fulfilment of a dream. Similarly, hopes that things will be different in the future will reflect a gap in how and why things will be different. These omissions or slips appear as parallel stories with unlinked events and reflect a fragmented portrait of everyday life. The inclusion of fragmentation in the analytical framework of this study permits a view of the constraints of career agency. Temporality and relationality in agency are revealed in the data as a response to problems and challenges.

In conclusion, a culturally sensitive approach to women's careers requires a disaggregation of career agency into the following components: temporality, modes, properties and fragmentation. The aim of this disaggregation is to view the liminal/hybrid/fluid characteristic of agency, to facilitate an assessment of career agency as present in parts and shifting in time. Each component addresses the individual as well as their context and seeks to reveal the ways in which they are interacting. These components will form the analytical framework for this study represented in Figure 1.

Disaggregating career agency			
Temporality of agency	Properties of agency	Modes of agency	Narrative fragmentation
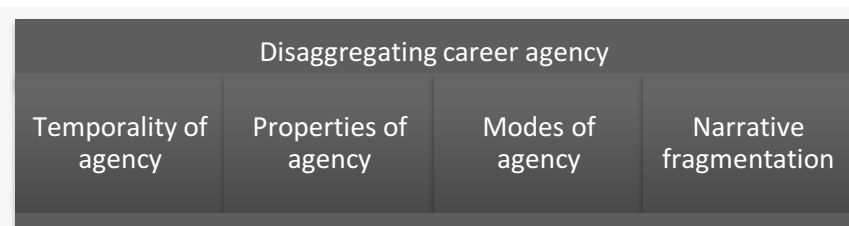
Figure 1 Culture-centred framework of career agency

2.5 The research gap and research question

The literature review in Chapter 2.2 on Stage theories of women's careers shows the emphasis on the temporal and relational nature of women's lives. These theories divide up women's careers into three core stages: early career, mid-career and late career. They stress that family responsibilities, particularly in the mid-career phase of life, impact on women's careers. Age and stage are related in these theories and the likelihood of opting-out at middle-age is tied to the challenges women face in managing work and family demands. The literature underscores the shift from self-focused, internally-directed career decisions to other-focused, externally-directed career decisions made by women over time, suggesting individual agency in reconciling work life with family life (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). A review of the literature from diverse contexts shows that Stage theories fail to explain women's careers in many non-Western and some Western contexts. The review indicates that (i) temporal influences of pre-career intentions and future careers projections and (ii) relational influences of society and family need to be included in a culturally sensitive model of women's careers.

Stage theories omit an explicit consideration of pre-career and future career influences as well as societal factors and the influence of others. Stage theories are therefore temporally and relationally truncated and anchored implicitly in the historical, cultural and structural context in which they were tested. Hence, there is scope for further analysis on the process by which the women exercise agency and take actions to further their careers in a range of contexts where temporal-relational norms might vary. This review of the literature indicates the need for broadening women's career theories with further research to develop a culturally sensitive understanding of career agency. This study seeks to overcome the shortcomings of the Stage theories of women's careers with a culture-centred approach applied to the context of Indian managerial women. Indian managerial offers an economic context that is in flux and culturally varied

from the Western context in which Stage theories were developed. The research question (RQ) which addresses the shortcomings of Stage theories with a culturally sensitive approach to the careers therefore is:

RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

I will address these questions within the proposed culture-centred framework which disaggregates career agency into temporality, properties and modes of agency and fragmentation.

2.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I began with a critical analysis of the Stage theories of women's careers to demonstrate the ways in which these theories fail to explain the temporal and relational shifts in the careers of women in diverse cultural contexts. Then I reviewed the literature on agency and context to establish that there is a dynamic interaction between the two. Next, I discussed the culture-centred approach I used to overcome the shortcomings of the Stage theories. Subsequently, I defined and disaggregated career agency to develop a culturally sensitive framework of career agency to facilitate the data analysis and model development in this study. Finally, I iterated the research question for this study. In the next chapter I will discuss the context in which the study was conducted, by reviewing the literature on the careers of Indian managerial women.

3 THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN MANAGERIAL WOMEN

In Chapter 2, Literature review I argued that career agency is shaped by the context. Therefore, investigating the context is a necessary precursor to analyzing career agency. In this Chapter, I begin with the wider research problem in management studies, then I discuss the contextual landscape of Indian managerial women's careers, to identify the paradoxes they face and highlight the empirical gap in knowledge around Indian managerial women's career agency.

3.1 The wider research problem

The practical objective of the study is to develop a culturally sensitive approach in career coaching. The need for cultural sensitivity is supported by a review of management literature which indicates that the applicability of mainstream management theories to varied contexts is questionable (Tams & Arthur, 2007; Woodhams et al., 2015). This is especially true in the case of literature on careers, which are highly subjective and contextual (Mayerhofer et al., 2007; Leung, 2008). The problem with management literature is that "*90% of organizational behaviour literature reflects U.S. based research and theory*" (House et al., 2004, p.xxv). In 2015 only 18% of the *Academy of Management* members were based in institutions outside North America and Europe and only 8% of the papers accepted for publication in the journal were from Asia, exclusively from Hong Kong, China and Singapore (Barkema et al., 2015). Asian economies, including India have experienced a relatively high degree of political and economic volatility. Deep-rooted cultural values and traditions have been a source of stability during a time of economic expansion and market liberalization. The ways in which organizations merge cultural values of collectivism, power-distance, and high-context communication styles with management practices rooted in American values or individualism, egalitarianism and low-context communication, can no longer be ignored. The exclusion of studies from a range of cultures is an empirical problem in management research.

This exclusion is exacerbated in the case of women, when they are included there is a tendency to generalize gender across cultures. Non-Western women should be analysed as unique subjects and researchers suggest the need for post-colonial feminist approaches for the analysis of non-Western people and contexts (Calas & Smircich, 2009; Özkazanç-Pan, 2012). Liddle and Rai (1998) go as far as saying that Western feminism may inhibit a robust comparative feminist discourse as their analysis shows that Western feminism may not be considering the conditions faced by women in non-Western contexts. Liddle and Rai (1998) conclude that women's oppression in India is assessed as more of an issue of "*Indianness*" or "*otherness*" and not necessarily of patriarchy, focusing more on the "*pathology*" of Indian culture detached from the problem of masculinity (p.515). Hence, the attempts and struggles of Indian women against oppression are rarely given voice in academic writing, particularly in management literature. By failing to recognize women's careers within their own contextual realities, corporations, entering new markets may transfer diversity policies and career advancement initiatives of their home country to different environments. Thereby, they risk transferring home country weaknesses by overlooking host country characteristics (Hewlett & Rashid, 2011; Jonsen et al., 2011). There is a need to broaden career concepts to develop culturally sensitive theories that can be applied in a wider range of contexts.

Cultural sensitivity requires an engagement with the context and an appreciation for the layers of reality and complexity in which women's careers unfold. As one of the most rapidly growing economies and as the second most populous nation in the world, India is a rising global power. About 14% of the world's workforce is in India and 40% of the 14 million students enrolled annually in tertiary education are women (Hewlett & Rashid, 2011, p.100). Women make up about one-third of India's total labour force, with 85% of those women in the agricultural or informal sector (Vindhya, 2015). India ranks 87 out of 144 countries in the World Economic Forum's (2016) Global Gender Gap Report. According to the Catalyst *Quick Take* report (2017), women held 19.0% of senior leadership roles in 2016 and they estimate that women held only 7.7% of board seats in 2015. A Nielsen survey (2011) showed that 87% of Indian

women say they feel stressed and overworked most of the time, highest among the 21 countries surveyed. Indian women entered managerial ranks in the 1980s (Nath, 2000).

In the early 1990s the Indian economy was liberalized and opened to global trade. Since then the Indian social structure, including attitudes towards women in the workplace, has been in a state of flux. Today, Indian organizations function within a culture shifting between traditional patriarchal structures and market-driven, modern organizations. Their talent pools, including women, must thrive in this push and pull of modernity and tradition being played out as gender role expectations in both the family and the workplace. Context sensitive research needs to grapple with the conflicting and layered realities faced by Indian women as they contend with their unique structural and cultural environments.

In line with the culture-centred approach presented in Chapter 2.4, I specifically engage with studies that focus on Indian women. I respond to the research community's suggestions (Özbilgin & Healy, 2004; Khapova & Korotov, 2007; Xian & Woodhams, 2008; Afiouni & Karam, 2014; Mitra, 2015; Woodhams et al. 2015) for further research on careers in different contexts. My approach to the literature review was broad enough to capture the contextual elements and specific enough to pay attention to the concerns of Indian managerial women. I focused primarily on empirical research conducted in India on Indian women. Looking at research between 1980-2016, I located 39 studies, thus meeting my research quality standards shown in Appendix D. I concluded that the lack of quality research on this topic highlights the gap in the literature and problematizes our current understanding of women's careers by having so far simply ignored, silenced and disregarded the voices of managerial women in India.

Scholars suggest that a culturally sensitive approach requires researchers to socially and historically embed their findings and seek the negotiated agentic process of individuals within the context at multiple levels (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009; Mitra, 2015). This study seeks to discover the career agency of Indian

managerial women. Career agency has been conceptualized Chapter 1.5 as the 'temporal-relational' process through which individual careers are developed. Therefore, a broad understanding of the temporal-relational context in which Indian women's careers unfold is needed.

With regard to women's careers, the culturally sensitive approach is facilitated by the gender-organisation-system (GOS) research framework developed by Fagenson (1990), and used by Omar & Davidson (2001) and Yugondi & Benson (2005), which addresses women's careers by analysing societal, familial, organizational and personal forces in their context. These broad categories do not reside in a specific context but nevertheless provide a holistic approach to analysing the forces surrounding women's careers as: societal, familial, organizational, and personal. The key elements that emerged from the literature describing these forces are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 The forces that characterise the career experiences of Indian managerial women

3.2 Societal forces in Indian women's careers

The societal forces are highlighted in Figure 3 and discussed below.
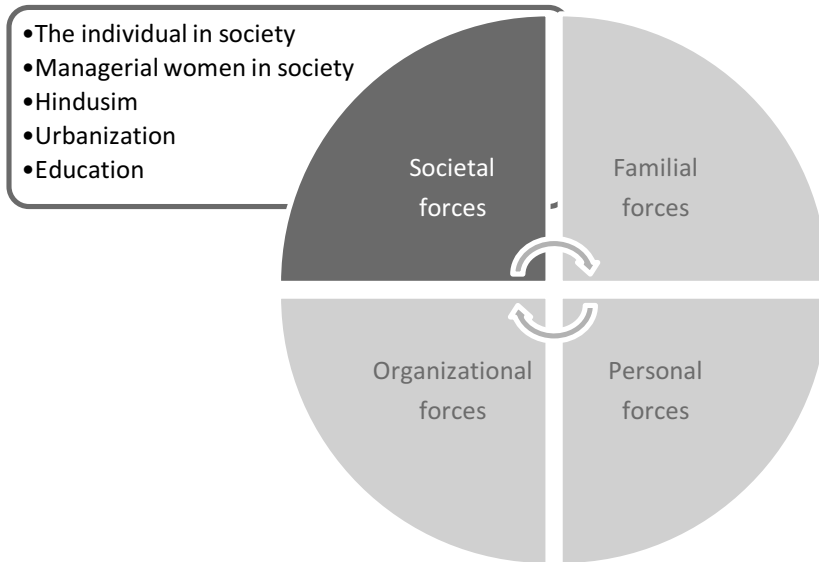
Figure 3 Societal forces in Indian women's careers

3.2.1 The Individual in society

The tensions, debates and dilemmas around the changing cultural standards are rife in the Indian media and urban society, with varying positions on whether traditional and modern India are happily co-existing or violently clashing. However, in India, neither modernity nor tradition completely erase each other, instead they co-exist (Mohanty, 2014). Most notably, the notion of individual well-being in India is not aligned with the neoliberal frames of reference in most Western literature. Notions of rights, agency, freedom, capital, happiness that define the individual in Western society are not mirrored in Indian society. Rather, the collective remains present in all these concepts. Despite modernization, globalization, and activism towards individual rights, structures from the past continue to inform the discourse and dialogue of urban India today. Indians perceive their well-being in terms of doing what is right based on the standards passed down to them from their families and communities. Maintaining family honour and family cohesion is often still perceived as more important than material success, and family connections are a measure of an

individual's societal value. Well-being in India continues to make sense only in relation to the historically situated structures of persons and their relations in the Indian world (Clark-Decès & Smith, 2017).

3.2.2 Managerial women in society

Managerial women are likely to belong to the middle class and are one of the most visibly representative groups of the nation's progression and cultural change (Radhakrishnan, 2009). The "new Indian woman" is described as a member of the "new middle class", a product of the "new economy" emerging from the neo-liberal reforms and the economic impact of globalization and urbanization (Ghosh & Roy, 1997; Hapke, 2013). The middle class is defined by the three key characteristics developed in Waldrop's (2012) summary of academic writings from the 1960s to the early 1990s. Firstly, the middle class is viewed as part of the ruling dominant class(es) and is divided into the rural, landholding middle class and urban, educated middle class. Secondly, the cultural values of the emerging middle class have characteristics in common with the colonial middle class and the Hindus who belonged to this class were primarily from the high castes. Lastly, the middle class has a relatively high level of cultural capital, allowing them to take advantage of the neo-liberal reforms and thereby increase their economic capital (Waldrop, 2012).

Taking the above characteristics into account, the middle class in this review is defined as follows: Firstly, this social group does not rely on ownership of property for economic survival; rather they are urban and educated. Secondly, although this class may appear "new", a core group may be rooted in the colonial era through their past generations and therefore have experience in maintaining their hierarchical position.

Scholars (Seth, 1999; Radhakrishnan, 2011) suggest that although the caste system is widespread in India, caste status is increasingly being converted into socio-economic status. About 20% of India's population were considered to belong to the middle class in 1999 (Seth, 1999, p.2510); this has grown to an estimated 25% (Mustafi, 2013). Although most of the middle class, particularly the educated, comes from the upper castes (Dhruvarajan, 1996;

Radhakrishnan, 2009), access to the middle class is slowly opening to other castes, especially in the urban context. "*By forming themselves into larger horizontal social groups, members of different castes now compete for entry into the middle class*" (Seth, 1999, p.2502). Lastly, the group's cultural capital is important and will have greater relevance than caste to understanding women's careers. As the middle-class are not landholders, they tap into resources such as education and occupational skills for survival. They engage in the new economy both as producers and consumers. Therefore, this class benefits from prominence, employment and consumption in the new Indian economy. They define new cultural standards that produce and disseminate emerging and acceptable ideologies (Dhawan, 2010).

Middle class ideologies of women's roles dominate television programmes, even though most Indian women do not belong to this social class (Misra & Roychowdhury, 1997). In these programmes, women who chose a public/professional life are often faced with the dilemma of choosing personal power and material gain at the expense of friends and family. There is a frequent representation of women in search of economic independence and self-expression as arrogant and rude, with disastrous effects on their families and children. On the positive side, professional women are shown as courageous and determined. They are also shown struggling with dilemmas arising from these opposing states. The resolutions to the dilemmas usually illustrate a new patriarchal bargain in which the right to pursue careers needs to be balanced within traditional requirements through the institutions of marriage and family. Thapan (2004) reviewed content, analysed advertising and interviewed women who read or have glanced through one of the leading women's magazines – *Femina*. The content and advertising portrays an "*educated, upwardly-mobile, status conscious, economically independent, capable of taking decisions for the family, modern, urban and consciously middle-class.*" (p.440). These women seem to have the choice of consuming beauty and leisure products as well as developing culinary skills, mothering competencies, housekeeping abilities, while working hard to "*keep her man*" (p.440). Therefore, the media reviewed in these papers indicates that modernity

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provides great privileges of freedom and choice to women; however, given women's central role of "*preserver and nurturer*" (p.442), their choices should be made such that traditional respectability and family honour are upheld. Media narratives do not seem to permit the newness of the Indian woman to come at a cost to marriage and family (Thapan, 2004).

As a group, Indian women are often held up as a symbol of the evolving nation, a mixing of new, liberalized, globalized and modernized India with the traditional, family focused, pious, ancient India. (Lau, 2006; 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2009). According to Radhakrishnan (2011), *the new Indian woman may in fact be more aptly labelled appropriately Indian woman,* due to the need for this woman to retain sufficient "*Indianness*" while embracing a sufficient degree of modernity to be appropriate both in the private and public spheres of society. Thapan's (2001) study looked at the construction of gender identities in middle class India; she concluded that the view of the new Indian women includes a more visible and public view of women in the workplace, both within new spheres of work and traditionally male professions, such as the military, police, and banking). Compared to previous generations, today's middle class women are expected to have a professional life and be more present in the public sphere than women of previous generations (Thapan, 2001; Dhawan, 2010). The literature review provided interesting insight into social structures and macro discourses in Hinduism, urbanization, education and labour force participation. These are presented below.

3.2.3 Hinduism

Hinduism has ancient Dravidian roots, and is believed to have worshipped female goddesses (Dhruvarajan, 1996; Hewlett & Rashid, 2011). Dravidian religious beliefs may have provided greater gender equality than the Hinduism of today, which evolved after Aryan invasions. The invading Aryans brought with them Sanskrit traditions with greater social hierarchy and merged their male gods into a wider Hindu pantheon of gods (Dhruvarajan, 1996; Hewlett & Rashid, 2011). In recent history, globalization and economic progress has brought increased secularization with varying impacts on different segments of

the society. Middle class women in professional positions are most likely to be Hindu. In addition, Hinduism, though not the religion of all Indians, has a strong cultural influence on the modern, middle class society (Radhakrishnan, 2009). These women, with their place in the privileged position of modern India, are permitted a version of Hinduism free of overt gender discrimination such as "*sati*", widow burning, and "*pativratya*", husband worship (Mitter 1991; Dhruvarajan, 1996).

This reformed interpretation has been revealed through fieldwork spanning several years by Western researchers such as Donner (2008) and Mitter (1991), both of whom embedded themselves in the urban middle class, and therefore had an insider/outsider view. They concur that there is a strong presence of an underlying, self-perpetuating, taken-for-granted notion of innate gender difference that raises the women's moral role above men. Although the modern version allows women to interact with the wider society, and to expect a certain amount of physical, financial and emotional support from the spouse and in-laws (Mitter 1991; Donner, 2008), the societal discourse around women's primary responsibility remains that of the spiritual preservation of the home and well-being of the family, including in-laws. Dravidian mother goddesses, with divine power and energy are still present in the psyche of many Indians. This may be the source of a certain conceptualization of feminine strength. "*From time immemorial, the male gods gave over their weapons, implements, and energies to the goddesses in willing abdication. Women have proudly borne the burden since*" (Mitter, 1991, p.107). In this quote Mitter (1991) refers to Hindu mythology in which all the principle male gods overcome by a situation, look to the primary goddess of Hinduism for support and to create a force of combined strength they yield all their weapons and strengths to her. This power is referred to as Shakti and it includes the power to endure pain and be disciplined for the sake of husband and family. This strength is widely believed to provide women with an innate strength to overcome life's obstacles (Dhruvarajan, 1996; Hapke, 2013). Radhakrishnan's (2011) ethnographic study of the information technology (IT) sector finds that in contemporary India, there is a drive to be in control of modernizing while maintaining Indianness. Hence, ideas of god and

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family piety are fused with consumption and materialism. Hinduism is being re-worked in contemporary discourse to allow for some changes while remaining traditionally rooted in family life.

3.2.4 Urbanization

Urbanization is increasing and brings mixed benefits for Indian women. Ramachandran (2011), conducted an extensive analysis of regional data and concluded, "*that simple generalizations on the likelihood of gender disparities reducing in urban areas do not hold true in the Indian context, whether considering indicators of survival or empowerment.*" (p.382). According to the Indian census report: the rural/urban distribution in 2011 was 68.84%/31.16% with the level of urbanization up from 27.81% in 2001 (Chandramouli, 2011, p.5). Dhruvarajan (1996), Ghosh & Roy (1997), Lau (2010), and Hapke (2013), imply that despite material progress, cultural influences and family ideology mediate women's access to social status and equality. Women continue to be socialized to view their professional work as subordinate to that of their spouse and conceive it as an extension of housework (Dhruvarajan, 1996; Ghosh & Roy, 1997). Therefore, it appears that urbanization will not necessarily lead to increased gender equality and positive results for women's advancement in the labour market, as further illustrated by the education and labour force participation sections below.

3.2.5 Education

Maslak & Singhal (2008), Bulbeck (2010) and Waldrop (2012) show that the educated middle class has valued education, even for women, since the colonial era. They indicate that although this education initially served the purpose of establishing status to acquire a suitable husband by learning to be an efficient homemaker and companion, it was offered in some form to children of both sexes. Scholars posit that higher education results in a greater sense of independence and challenging of gender roles, which can increase family conflict (Maslak & Singhal, 2008; Waldrop, 2012). Husain & Sarkar (2011), applying econometric analysis to findings from a national survey, observe that that despite the gender disparities at lower education levels in rural areas,

gender disparity does reduce at higher education levels in urban areas but it does not reverse and is skewed in favour of upper caste Hindus and those from households either headed by a woman or where the head is highly educated. Sundaram & Vanneman (2008) find that due to a queuing effect, girls' literacy begins to narrow only once all the boys are literate, suggesting again that the education of males is given higher priority than the education of girls.

3.2.6 Labour force participation

Increased urbanization and economic progress does not guarantee an increase in women's labour force participation, as might be expected. Ghosh & Roy (1997) and Hapke (2013) show that the state of Kerala provides an interesting paradox for women's studies. Kerala has achieved the nation's most favourable gender indicators, with a more balanced sex ratio, higher life expectancy, literacy rates and age at marriage for women than the rest of the nation. However, Ghosh & Roy (1997) as well as Hapke (2013) show that Kerala also has one of the lowest labour force participations and one of the highest rates of violence against women. Maslak & Singhal (2008) and Waldrop, (2012) indicate that in some cultural contexts as household income increases, women's income and their careers can be seen to have less utility in improving family status, and therefore, family ideology may become less supportive of women's careers, causing women to withdraw from the labour force.

Sundaram & Vanneman (2008) conclude that human capital and feminist empowerment theories, which predict that increased labour force participation by women increases education for girls and lowers gender inequalities in education, do not hold entirely true in the Indian context. Using national census data across 409 Indian districts, they find a puzzling trend that girls have lower literacy rates compared to boys in districts where there are a greater number of women in the labour force. They did not test for the causes; however, their analysis leads them to speculate on the explanation that areas with a greater number of women in the labour force may also have a greater number of girls in the workforce, or girls are taking care of their working mother's household duties and are therefore unable to attend educational institutions.

3.3 Familial forces in Indian women's careers

The familial forces are highlighted in Figure 4 and discussed below.
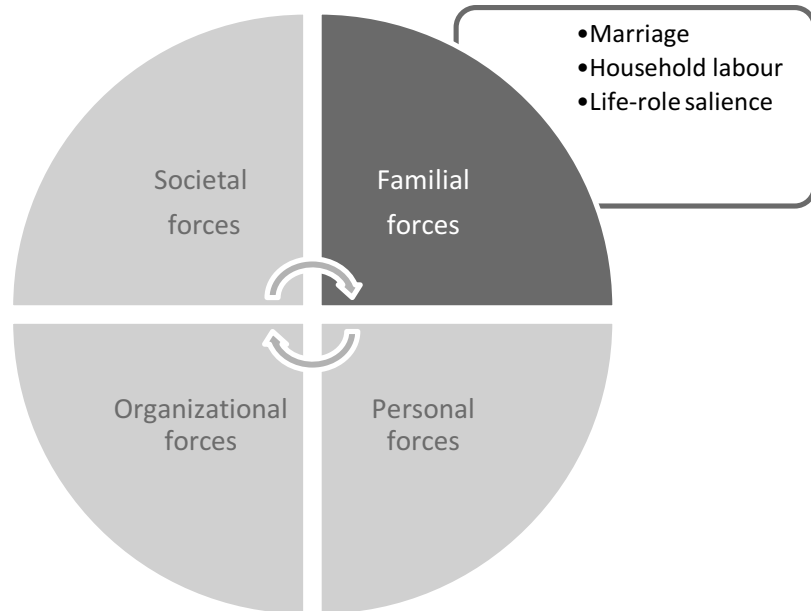
Figure 4 Familial forces in Indian women's careers

The larger social discourse presented above seems to oblige middle class women to maintain cultural capital, i.e. be appropriate and acceptable through the institutions of marriage and family (Dhawan, 2010). Radhakrishnan (2011) suggests that the new capitalist version of Indianness "*might be importantly constituted through the domestic sphere of the family*" (p.15). Thapan (2001) concludes "*The transitory space created by modernity opens up her career options and perhaps provides her with a host of opportunities to which she did not earlier have access, but her rootedness in a tradition that glorifies the family and relationships with the family inhibits her complete immersion in the external world*" (p.366). Hapke (2013) suggests theoretical directions for study of gender in South Asia and underpins Thapan's (2001) findings by stressing the need to understand varying family structures and ideologies. She reinforces the notion of the family as a constitutive element of patriarchy reflecting gender relations in a sociocultural context. In India, gender ideology stresses the importance of women's primary responsibility towards nurturing and caring for the family. This

applies even in the case of wage earning women, as their wage-earning role is considered secondary to that of their husband (Dhruvarajan, 1996; Ghosh & Roy, 1997). As cited in Maslak & Singhal (2008), Chaterjee (1988) found that men in urban areas supported women's employment as a means of advancing the family's economic and social status. Family structures and discourses emerged around the themes of marriage, household labour and life-role salience.

3.3.1 Marriage

It is still relatively rare in India for women of any social background to remain unmarried. The mean age of first marriage in urban India in 2004 was 21.8 years (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2007) and only 10% of females in urban India between the ages of 25-29 were never married (Goswami, 2012). Dhawan's (2010) interviews with middle class women show that even when they have professional lives, gender discrimination in marriage was interpreted as personal rather than political or societal, therefore preventing it from being subjected to social scrutiny. According to Dhawan (2010, p.56) "*the successful corporate woman makes a choice not to question the hegemony of the institution of marriage, as it continues to prevail as the legitimate structure of family in practice*". Her conclusion is supported by a quantitative study by Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha (2001), using life-role salience scales with dual career couples in India, who find that the hegemony of marriage was not questioned by both genders throughout their life stages. Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha (2001) also concluded that seemingly significant material shifts, such as the decrease in the traditional Indian joint-family living structures after marriage, are not clear indications of a break from the past. They find that this shift tends to be a superficial arrangement. Women are expected to continue to care for their husband, children and extended family as they would in a traditional Indian joint family, even if they are not living under the same roof. Therefore, a modern concept such as the nuclear family does not necessarily change the married women's primary role to care for husband, children and extended family.

3.3.2 Household labour

Verma & Larson (2001) in their quantitative study of 100 families in an urban centre in the north of India, found that employed mothers spent 21.4% of their time on family work, while employed fathers spent 4.5% of their time doing family work. Their findings show that the division of labour in urban middle class households matched quite closely that of traditional rural families. The largest proportion (11.6%) of the women's household labour time was spent on food preparation within the home, while most of the men's time was spent on household chores outside the home. However, some of the women in this study did not regard their household work as being oppressive. They did not experience it as outside their control; they felt that they did it by choice and did not have particularly negative feelings when undertaking most of their tasks. The women justified their husband's resistance to housework by his long working hours or other responsibilities. Dhawan (2010) as well as Verma & Larson (2001) show that domestic help is prevalent in middle class households. The presence of full-time or part-time domestic help eases the household labour burden for married women; however, the time they spend on household labour still exceeds that of their husbands. Desai et al. (2011) support this view. They concluded that one of the major predictors of distress in the life of a working woman is the non-participation of their husband in household labour. In their study, only 34% of the husbands extended voluntary assistance, 22% would help occasionally, while others did not offer any support at all. Bharat's (1995) quantitative study contrasting sex-role perception among couples in dual career and single career (male only) households from traditional and less traditional regions of India found that working and non-working women from all regions accorded low priority to the husband's role in domestic chores.

3.3.3 Life-Role Salience

Career development theories (Moore et al., 2007, p.14) are based on adult development theories, which recognize differences in the way men and women develop through their life. Rajadhyaksha & Bhatnagar (2000) found that adult development theories did not fully apply in the Indian context. They tested the

basic predictions of adult development theories by testing propositions on the extent to which professional men and women will find work and family roles rewarding and satisfying across their life cycles. Their results indicated that attitudes towards the work role did not vary with life stages, but did vary by gender. Reward value and commitment to work was greater for men and it stayed that way throughout the lifespan, while women's commitment to family role is greater and remains salient throughout their lifespan. Family role was further divided into parental, marital and homemaker roles. Although women continued to have a higher commitment overall, both genders indicated an increase in the parental role commitment, and a decrease in marital role commitment and stable homemaker role commitment over the lifespan. According to Rajadhyaksha & Bhatnagar (2000), Western studies on career development predict an increase in women's work involvement in midlife, once women's parenting obligations have declined. In the Indian context, it appears that career commitment remains steady, while parental role commitment increases by appropriating energy from the marital role. They infer that perhaps the marital bond is taken for granted as Indian conceptualization of marriage is of a stable and permanent institution, therefore not requiring regular attention. Whereas the parental role commitment increases as children in India do not tend to leave home in their late teens and even employed children are likely to live at home, as such the empty nest stage is not a common reality.

Dhawan (2010), Verma & Larson (2001) and Mukhopadhyay (1998) found that working mothers did not experience greater anxiety or role conflict than non-working mothers and concluded that working mothers cope with higher workload by hiring outside help for housework and with help from other female family members who are encouraged to help by Indian cultural norms. Sandhu & Mehta (2006) also found that marital status did not have a significant impact on work-family conflict. These conclusions, however, vary when compared to a study by Aziz (2004), which looked at women in ten different IT organizations in New Delhi. He analysed stressors based on marital status and education levels and found that level of education did not significantly impact on stress. However, marital status did result in differences in levels of stress. Married

women reported greater conflict in inter role distance, which is the conflict between organizational and non-organizational roles. They faced higher role expectation conflict, i.e. conflicting demands from significant others who have expectations from the role. They also faced role overload to a greater degree than unmarried women, therefore feeling that more is expected of them than they can cope with. They reported greater feelings of personal and resource inadequacy as compared to unmarried women. This implies that the married women more often felt that they lacked the necessary knowledge, skills or preparation and did not have sufficient resources available to them to carry out their work and family duties effectively. This may be especially pronounced in the IT industry as newer technologies and global contacts require continuous learning and engagement with changes occurring faster than other industries. The above findings may partially explain a recent Nielsen survey (2011) showing that 87% of Indian women say they feel stressed and overworked most of the time, the highest among the 21 countries surveyed, and followed by 74% of Mexican women and 69% of Russian women (p.5).

Desai et al. (2011) investigated the role of marital satisfaction and personal effectiveness in determining job satisfaction and psychological well-being of working women. Her findings compared the results of office-based employed women, home-based employed women, and non-employed women (homemakers). The office-based employed women expressed a greater feeling of role overload and work-family conflict than home-based employed women.

Aryee et al. (2005) studied work-family and family-work facilitation as well as conflict. They found that in a society such as India, family roles take precedence over work roles. Therefore, job involvement reduces the family-work conflict as it is considered instrumental to the performance of the family role by ensuring the material well-being of the family. Therefore, the boundary between work roles and family roles is not very distinct. Professional work is not seen as inherently in conflict with family life, therefore job involvement is experienced as beneficial to the family. Although this is more so for men than for women, it contributes to facilitation for women as well. Baral & Bhargava (2011) found that

emotional support from family helps an employee invest more time and energy at work and avail developmental opportunities leading to increased satisfaction, and that the affective experience transfers to family domain and augments work-life enrichment.

3.4 Organizational forces in Indian women's careers

The organizational forces are highlighted in Figure 5 and discussed below.
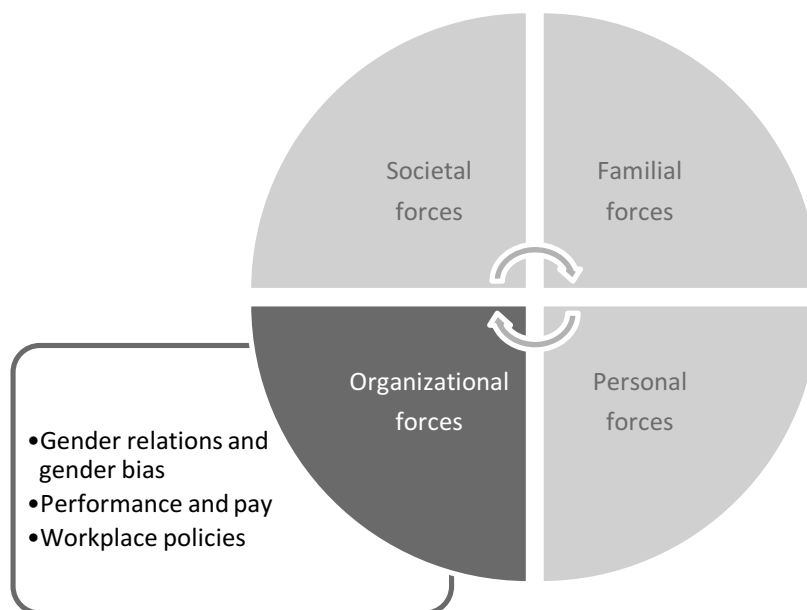
Figure 5 Organizational forces in Indian women's careers

Even industries with a high proportion of women, such as the software industry, with a 45% female workforce, find women clustered at the lower end of the organizational hierarchies and remaining in domestic positions (Budhwar et al., 2005, p.187). Further to this Anand (2002) cited in Budhwar et al. (2005) found that a high percentage of women that had graduated from one of India's premier academic institutions, the Indian Institute of Management, did not pursue a career at all. This review of the literature suggests that gender relations and gender bias, performance and pay, as well as workplace policies may play distinctive roles in women's careers.

3.4.1 Gender relations and gender bias

Budhwar et al.'s (2005) study indicates that gender relations are an added source of stress for women seeking advancement, as they believe that men do not mind having women subordinates but do not like having women bosses. The women in the study felt that dealing with the male ego, particularly with older men was difficult. Other studies indicated that Indian women did not perceive a significant gender bias in their organizations. They felt that it was up to them to work harder than men and pursue their goals by knowing their own strengths. For example, Adya (2008) shows American women perceived discrimination to a greater degree than Indian women. The Indian respondents considered it necessary to be more proactive and aggressive, and therefore less feminine, to adapt to organizational expectations. Also, Nath (2000) found that even when attitudes of senior managers and clients "*tended towards paternalism*" (p.49), the Indian women in her study saw it positively and described it as nurturing and protective. Few studies have explored the question of inclusiveness in informal networks; however, Budhwar et al. (2005) and Gupta et al. (1998) indicate that the women acknowledged feeling left out of informal networks and lacking awareness of organizational politics. These authors raise an interesting cultural point about the discomfort that women and men face being in a mixed-sex workplace. Many Indians in managerial positions today grew up in a context where outside of family such interactions were limited, with single-sex schools and formal or informal gender divisions in social gatherings. The authors conclude that there could be a lack of understanding and awareness of appropriate professional behaviour limiting open interaction. This indicates that women may be missing out on opportunities to gain knowledge and enhance their skills by interacting with their male colleagues and vice versa.

3.4.2 Performance and pay

Two qualitative studies based on interviews with managerial women by Nath (2000) in a range of industries and Adya (2008) in the IT industry found that the respondents in their research considered their organizations to be woman-

friendly and that there was no unequal treatment in performance evaluation and pay. These perceptions of Indian women clearly contradict the findings of the World Economic Forum's gender gap report (2016) who rank India as having one of the lowest gender parity, which includes pay parity, among the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) economies. Gupta et al. (1998), found that the women in a wide range of industries in their study believed they were paid less and had to work harder. Radhakrishnan (2011) concluded that the ethic of meritocracy is strong in the new Indian corporate culture. Men and women in the more modern industries, such as IT, express this ideology in a similar way. Their discourse seems to indicate that they believe that in the "new" India hard work will be equally rewarded. This is further expressed as a positive reflection upon the progress of the nation. Therefore, it is possible that affirmative action concepts that require an acceptance of gender inequality are not readily supported, as that would undermine the prevailing discourse of meritocracy based on equality.

3.4.3 Work place policies

Haq's (2012) analysis of the literature shows that India's approach to diversity focuses on "*reservation quotas*" aimed at increasing the representation of three groups: scheduled castes (low caste Hindus), scheduled tribes (tribal communities with varied religious/spiritual beliefs) and other backward classes (Muslims and other religious groups). These groups were defined in the 1950 Constitution of Independent India. Public sector organizations and local governments have been required by law to fulfil certain quota requirements for these groups; however, there is no such requirement for private sector organizations. The arrival of MNCs has led to debates over establishing reservation quotas for women and persons with disabilities. Haq (2012) further demonstrates that MNCs tend to run their diversity programmes based on ethnocentric assumptions, and may not consider local diversity norms.

The Indian Federal Government has resisted enforcing gender-based quotas in the private sector but has asked industry to consider voluntary affirmative action. The various chambers of commerce have opposed the reservation

quotas and instead encourage their members to adopt voluntary measures through codes of conduct and reports of affirmative action initiatives. In their interviews aimed at exploring the diversity mindset in private and public Indian organizations to understand the concept of diversity as understood by the participants. They found a clear distinction between the public and private sectors, such that the private sector was mainly focused on women, while the former focused on the three groups named in the Indian Constitution.

MNC subsidiaries reported being concerned exclusively with increasing the number of women for business reasons and for reporting to their parent company. MNC subsidiaries "*vehemently protective of the meritocracy approach*" show some resistance to affirmative action policies (Haq, 2012, p.908). Thus, the organizations appear to track and report the number of women in management, but they do not appear to have a deliberate plan to recruit, retain and promote women. Thus, the initiatives and agreements may vary between organizations, as formal policies or informal arrangements. Palanivel & Sinthuja (2012) found that informal arrangements and managerial discretion were more effective and important in establishing a work-family balance. The lack of formal policies on work-life balance may have a negative impact on women's career experiences. The study by Baral & Bhargava, (2011) shows that work-life balance practices in organizations increase the enrichment of work-life balance for both genders but is stronger for women than for men.

The contextual forces presented above demonstrate that the career discourses circulating in the Indian context require women to adhere to the cultural requirements of marriage and family, while supporting and encouraging professional advancement outside the home. This, combined with the fusion of family choice and personal choice as well as organizational structures that do not value gender-based career initiatives, leads us to view the careers of Indian managerial women as a relatively collective concept. Although the collective and individual were difficult to separate in the literature, the next section presents several forces that were more personal in nature, albeit always in interaction with the collective.

3.5 Personal forces in Indian women's careers

The personal forces are highlighted in Figure 6 and discussed below.
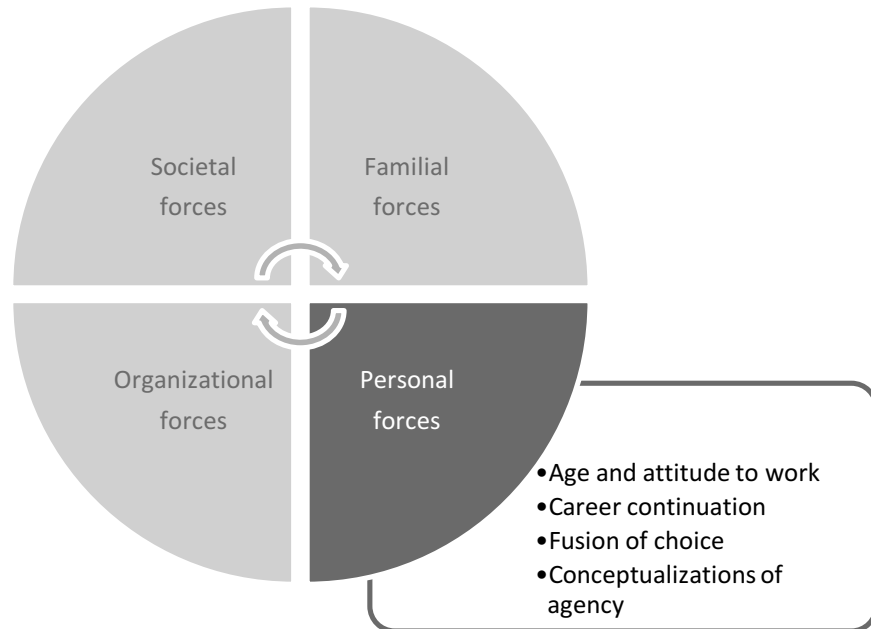
Figure 6 Personal forces in Indian women's careers

In addition to the varying structural and cultural factors presented above, the personal forces which emerged regarding career experiences demonstrated an alignment with the macro-discourses and career scripts by prioritizing family. Paradoxically, although the women show positive attitudes towards work with age, and express a career as central to their lives, their agentic responses seem constrained, nuanced and in interactions with the collective of the family.

3.5.1 Age and attitude to work

Sandhu & Mehta (2007) studied the relationship between personal and organizational characteristics on women's attitudes towards work. They found that most women had a positive attitude towards their work and felt accepted as executives. They concluded that higher positive scores in the private sector might demonstrate women's confidence in their skills and performance levels, as these jobs are generally seen as more demanding than government jobs. Women's attitudes were more positive with age and, again, the authors posit

that with age women felt more respected and recognized in society. There was no correlation between other personal characteristics such as education, marital status, and years of experience in the institution with the attitudes scores. Age is given cultural value in this society and this cultural value contributes to positive career experiences.

3.5.2 Career continuation

Indian's women's goal of continuing in their careers is captured by several constructs in the literature on Indian women, It is assessed as 'work continuity' and 'turnover intention' (Adya, 2008) and 'career persistence' (Nakra 2013). Adya (2008) compares Indian women with American women and claims that both groups found the work-life balance to be a significant burden in their career experiences and satisfaction. However, this burden rarely led to a turnover intention with the Indian women, whereas the same issues resulted in turnover intentions in over 50% of the American women. Desai et al. (2011) found that full-time working women in India were also found to have higher levels of stress than the home-based professional women and homemakers. However, full-time working women have a higher level of self-esteem than all others. In other words, being economically productive on a full-time basis increases the sense of self-worth and could be a possible reason for managerial women continuing to endure the stress of full-time work rather than opt out or become self-employed.

Desai et al. (2011) found that the lack of work-life balance caused a strain on managerial women. Family stress, family conflict and role overload can have negative consequences on women's health, job performance and job satisfaction. Kaila's (2004) qualitative study of 100 women managers in Mumbai, shows that the stresses faced by women include deadline pressures and relational issues. They stated that they found it difficult to deal with people and to manage them. Also, long working hours, competition and keeping up with the latest technology, were sources of tension. Women executives also found internal politics between colleagues demanding. An important additional stress factor for many women at any level is the delicate juggling act that they

perform between work and other responsibilities. The same study shows that these women cope with work challenges by seeking support from their friends, colleagues and spouse, as well as taking a break from work through spiritual activities, such as prayer and yoga. The women managers in this study were mostly satisfied with their jobs. However, some expressed guilt that when they put in time at work, their families felt neglected. To cope with these stresses and challenges, these women managers tried to obtain the full cooperation of their subordinates and to stay on good terms with their superiors. All of them perceived themselves as 'successful managers' (Kaila, 2004, p.151). They felt that the job they are doing is very challenging and responsible, requiring thorough knowledge, high self-confidence and in-depth understanding of the situation. Therefore, they seemed to cope by reminding themselves of the job satisfaction and self-confidence gained from their professional lives along with seeking instrumental and emotional support with their relational skills.

The Indian women in Desai et al.'s (2011) study planned to continue full-time work despite stress and frustration. It seems that although women give careers a relatively lower priority than men, once career intention is established in a women's life it is unlikely to vary and therefore turnover intentions remain low despite stress and frustration from work-life balance and career experience challenges.

3.5.3 Fusion of personal and family choice

Indian women express their career choices as a choice that is fused with the choices of their parents and family. This fusion of choice continues as the career progresses and challenges are encountered and before and after marriage. In dealing with work-family balance of women in the Indian software industry women integrated parental guidance into personal choice (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). The findings of Radhakrishnan (2011) and Dhawan (2010) support this conclusion by finding that family choice is expressed as personal choice, even after marriage. Valk & Srinivasan (2011) imply that the tendency of women in India to express family decisions as personal decisions even when they relate to careers may indicate a lack of boundary between self and family

and is inculcated in childhood. Dhawan (2010) suggests that this fused choice discourse by the women themselves could prevent the examination of the gender-discriminatory structure of marriage. Family needs are expressed as taking priority over work requirements for managerial Indian women and are coded as a unique Indian value (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p.153).

3.6 The career agency of Indian managerial women

Agency of Indian women is conceptualized in different ways, termed as interactional, nuanced and constrained. Individual identity is described by Waldrop (2012) as, "*about being in control of one's own life and decisions relating to oneself, and it is something individuals and groups may have more or less of.*" (p.604). Her narrative of three generations of women in one family indicates that the sense of agency is interactional and has shifted more towards the individual for the current generation of women, as the granddaughter in her study expressed far more control of her own life and decisions than her mother or grandmother. Despite being married and a mother, the granddaughter conceptualized her agency with a greater sense of independence from the family.

The second conceptualization offered by Bulbeck (2010), refers to the collective self and interactional identity. In the theoretical discussion component of her paper she reviews several papers that theorize that Western, modernist thought which views the person as an individual, whereas many Asian cultures conceptualize the person as emerging from relationships to others. In her qualitative study, she goes on to find that there are varying patterns of both interactional and independent self-descriptions. Hence, maturity in Western culture is demonstrated as independence, while Asian cultures see maturity as the enactment of relationships, or interactions with others. Bulbeck (2010) cautions the interpretation of agency from a culturally limited perspective and suggests that analysis on agency should reflect the individualised identity as well as the interactional self. The way in which a woman exercises personal agency within an organization and influences her own career experiences will be linked to both her individualized and interactional identities.

Shenoy-Packer (2014) offers a third conceptualization; her articulation provides some insight into the seeming contradiction in other studies. She enunciates the cultural embeddedness of agency with reference to the collective and family focused Indian context by concluding the following: "*participants exert both agency (constrained) and communion where individuals choose to be in communion or as defined here in harmony with their sociocultural and environmental socialization. Therefore, even though some scholars consider agency and communion as two opposite concepts women struggle to balance, this study found that women exert their self-will in choosing to accept and adapt to their environment, thereby showcasing agency even in communion.*" (p.112). Similarly, Uppalury & Racherla (2014), find nuanced agency in their research on the work-life balance of Indian women executives who negotiated with structures to fit cultural roles while seeking fulfilment in their careers. Radhakrishnan (2011) points to an analogous process by referring to professional Indian women bargaining with patriarchy to be appropriately Indian.

3.7 Conclusions from the literature on Indian managerial women

This review of the literature leads me to conclude that the careers of Indian managerial women are a cultural practice and can be characterised by societal, familial, organizational and personal forces. The resulting landscape for Indian women's careers is paradoxical with a constant tension between the individual and the collective manifesting in four ways: Firstly, there is a social discourse which plays out in middle class families. This requires Indian women to develop cultural capital by balancing the modernizing aspects of professional life with the traditional institutions of marriage and family. A woman's entry into the workplace is facilitated and even encouraged as long as it does not interfere with the maintenance of family connections and fulfilment of culturally embedded gendered responsibilities within the home. Secondly, family ideology determines access to human capital as well as emotional and instrumental support for individual women's careers based on the perceived value of the career to the collective. Middle class families are supportive of the career

through education and more specific instrumental support, such as childcare, if the woman maintains her primary moral responsibilities of nurturing and caring for the broader family unit. The third category is the seemingly blind faith in the discourse of meritocracy in MNCs. This discourse serves the purpose of defining the new Indian economy with the aim of breaking away culturally from the past, which is symbolically identified as hierarchical. The discourse of meritocracy undermines the examination of gender inequalities in the workplace and prevents the formalisation of initiatives supporting women's careers. Lastly, are the personal forces which are based on independent and interactional agency such that family choices become fused with personal choices and impact on career decisions. We see the woman accepting the societal and familial macro-discourses around the primacy of her responsibility to the family while also engaging with the somewhat contradictory ideas around societal progress and professional activity requiring women to behave autonomously in the public sphere.

The literature supports the notion that women's careers are characterised by the larger societal, familial and organizational contexts. The messages from these larger contexts in India are mixed: on the one hand enabling careers through evolving gender ideologies, and on the other hand constraining full integration into public/professional life through traditional gender norms. The mixed messages are a source of tensions as the women contend with differing perspectives about their roles in family and society. Similarly, the findings around agentic responses to the tensions and to career pursuits are fragmented and ill-defined. Indian women's agency is referred to in varying ways: interactional, constrained and nuanced agency. There seems to be a struggle to understand how Indian women exert agency in their cultural context.

This section has set up the context in which the careers of Indian managerial women unfold. The literature has shown that Indian women face tensions due to opposing influences on their careers. Temporally Indian women's careers are influenced by family choices: taking the form of fusion in the pre-career phase and continuing as integration as Indian women do not face the 'empty nest'

phase. Their commitments and duties to children might continue well into the future-career. Relationally the family is prioritized and mediates societal influences to enable or constrain women's careers; women are permitted a career by society as long as they adhere to norms around family cohesion. There is a struggle among researchers of Indian women's careers to understand the shape of Indian women's career agency, revealing a gap in empirical knowledge. This study therefore aims to contribute with a focus on the career agency of Indian managerial women with the following questions; RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has highlighted the contextual factors the surround the careers of Indian managerial women. Societal, familial, organizational and personal forces that form the landscape of Indian women's careers is established to highlight the paradoxes and tensions in their career contexts. With this literature, I identify the empirical gap in literature.

4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will discuss my world view and the ways in which it impacts on my philosophical approach, research stance and research paradigm. I will expand the discussion by explicating the data collection and data analysis methodology. I will also detail the coding structure and process, and outline the process for the development of a culturally sensitive model Indian women's career agency, which account for a postcolonial perspective of career agency. Finally, I will present the criteria for evaluating the quality of research.

4.1 Philosophical assumptions

Developing suitable research methods requires the researcher to establish and express his/her world view. An explicit expression of the researcher's world view and stance towards the phenomenon of interest helps the reader understand the story being told and to connect it to other possible perspectives (Fletcher, 1999).

My world view is influenced by my Indian heritage and the Indian philosophy of *Vedanta*. Vedanta maintains that there is one absolute reality called *Brahman,* an impersonal absolute truth that is experienced by individuals at a personal level. This truth is manifested and experienced by every individual in a unique and diverse way. The individual's soul called the *Atman* is one part of that absolute reality, and is encased deep within empirical and rational layers that appear to be reality. The inevitable destiny of every *Atman* is union with *Brahman*.

The search for truth is limited by the capacities of human reason and individual level of consciousness at any given time and place. The individual's mind, body, intellect and ego-self obscure the soul through delusions about reality called *Maya*. These delusions are akin to veils of ignorance, creating a false sense of separateness and diversity amongst us. These veils or obstructions essentially take the form of duality and polarization in intellectual thought. This sense of separateness is at the root of human suffering. Relief from suffering comes from removing the layers of ignorance and uncovering the veils of obstruction by

ways that require valid knowledge creation through perception, inference, comparison, non-cognition, postulation and testimony (Deutsch & Dalvi, 2004).

I believe in an absolute truth and I believe that the reality we search for in the empirical sense is layered and varied. Knowledge of reality can be acquired from diverse approaches and it is on a deep level generalizable. If the truth we seek helps us to see the suffering caused by separateness, duality and polarization, then we make a small step towards understanding that ultimate absolute truth comes from unveiling how diversity and separateness are created and manifested in our contexts. With this world view I have analysed the patterns, similarities and diversity in the narratives of the research participants.

While I identify with the interviewees to the extent that I share their Indian heritage and familiarity with many of their cultural norms, by no means do I wish to imply that my philosophical perspective automatically represents their perspectives. My motivation is to seek an understanding of how Indian managerial women experience their careers, the satisfaction and challenges they encounter, and the ways in which they maintain their careers. I address Indian managerial women as a separate group for empirical analysis and in that way, I contribute to creating divisions; I do so intentionally for empirical purposes. By studying a specific group in a specific context, I aim for a depth of analysis that reveals the hidden mechanisms at play, exposes the boundaries that create division and reaches out to perceive the unity that resonates within all of us.

My research interest raises questions around structure, culture and agency in the context of Indian managerial women's careers. I argue for the analytic distinction (Archer, 1996) between culture, structure and agency to unpack the elements carefully in the career narratives and ensure that they are understood from the viewpoint of the narrator. Although structure and agency have been the topics of many theoretical arguments (Reed, 2011), the analytical disaggregation of the various dimensions of structure and agency is rarely made in career theory (Tomlinson et al., 2013). Such a distinction can help to

reveal the dynamic nature of structure and agency, and assist in broadening theories on careers.

In line with Mitra's CCA (2015), I aim to understand the dynamic aspects of culture, structure and agency in the career narratives of Indian managerial women. My philosophical stance is that there is a cultural and structural level of reality that the women contend with, interpret and act upon. Assessing my philosophical perspective against the research strategies available requires further exploration of my ontology and epistemology, and stance as a researcher. I present these in the following sections, after which I present the research strategy and discuss the research design for this study.

4.1.1 Ontology

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that asks the question "*Is there an objective reality out there or is it subjective, existing only in our minds?*" (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006, p.12). According to Blaikie (2007) the theories responding to this question fall into two opposing types: realist and idealist. Realist theory assumes that both natural and social phenomena exist independently of human activities; whereas, idealist theory assumes that the phenomenon does not exist out there, it exists in our thoughts, and exists when it is experienced and given meaning (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). In other words, "*humans, unlike things in nature, have culture and live in a world of their shared interpretations*" (Blaikie, 2007, p.17).

Both realist and idealist ontologies can be broken down further; Blaikie (2007) suggests six categories. The first three assume there is a reality "out there" whether it is being observed or not; these are: (i) shallow realist: reality can be observed; (ii) conceptual realist: reality exists independently of human minds and can be known by thought and reason; and (iii) cautious realist: reality is independent and external and cannot be known or perceived by humans. The fourth category, (iv) depth realist, suggests that reality exists in three domains: the empirical domain containing the observable events, the actual domain where events occur whether or not they are observed by anyone, and the real domain consisting of the processes or mechanisms that generate events. This

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suggests the idea of ontological depth, i.e. the idea that there is a reality that exists independently of our knowledge of it. The next category (v) subtle realist, also believes in a reality "out there", but rejects ontological depth. Last is (vi) the idealist ontology, in which reality is what human beings make or construct creatively in their minds.

My personal career experience and in my work as a career coach indicates that careers are enabled and constrained by pre-existing factors or realities as well as socially constructed concepts which vary based on context. The depth realist ontology, with the three domains of reality would be most aligned with my RQ, which explores the reality faced by the women as the structural and cultural elements they contend with, as well as the ways in which they react to those elements, as the agentic actions and beliefs they display as a result. Hence, the depth realist ontology aligns with my view of reality.

4.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge asking, *"what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline"* (Bryman & Bell. 2007, p.15). In the specific terms of social science, the question can be worded as "*how can social reality be known*" Blaikie (2007, p.18). The range of theories responding to these questions lies between positivist and interpretive epistemologies. Hatch & Cunliffe (2006) define positivist epistemology as based on foundational principles, studying organizations as objective entities and applying methods adapted from physical sciences; whereas interpretive epistemology "*assumes that knowledge can be understood from the point of view of the individuals who live and work in a particular culture or organization.*" (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006, p.13).

Blaikie (2007) links epistemology to ontology and suggests that neo-realism*,* which "*accepts that knowledge of structures and mechanisms is always tentative*" (p.24)*,* aligns suitably with the ontology of depth realism. Hence the knowledge of reality is tentative or transitive rather than absolute, constrained by the limited capacity of humans to represent the observable and hidden domains. Our observations and measurements are theory-dependent and

constrained by language, culture and theories. This captures the essence of my concern that the extant literature, which has been limited by its theories and language, might have missed out on the unique aspects of Indian managerial women's careers. Hence, a fresh perspective such as mine will contribute to our understanding and broaden theory. This project will push the envelope of knowledge around career theories beyond its current limits, albeit within its own set of limitations. Hence, neo-realism aligns with my view of acceptable knowledge as tentative, transitive and context dependent.

4.1.3 Researcher's stance

To specify my role and approach in this research, I will clarify my stance towards the subjects and phenomenon of interest. The researcher's stance is reflected in the type of relationship with participants (outsider or insider) and type of knowledge brought into the interaction with the participants (expert or learner). Determining the degree to which the researcher will be immersed in the participants' world and the degree to which the researcher will bring prior knowledge into the field helps makes these choices (Blaikie, 2007). My stance can be characterised by my knowledge of the context and my approach to applying theory in the data analysis.

I am familiar with the cultural context as I grew up in India. I am from an urban middle class family based in New Delhi, I did some of my undergraduate studies in India, and most of the women in my family have managerial careers. I have worked as a cross-cultural management consultant for MNCs in the IT and banking industries in India. Therefore, in the data collection stage I entered the context of the participants as much as possible by spending several months in India and interviewing the women in my sample within their cultural and physical environment. I knew that I would be adopting an insider/learner stance. This is a natural position for me due to my connection with India as a Non-resident Indian (NRI), I am culturally an insider and professionally an outsider in the context of this study. Throughout the research process, I had the choice of accessing personal knowledge as the basis of understanding as well as applying professional distance and using research methods as a basis for understanding

(Blaikie, 2007). I reflected on the implications of my dual stance on my research activities. I became aware that I needed to make conscious choices on how to leverage the familiarity of being an insider with the neutrality of being an outsider to maintain reliability in the research process (Merriam et al., 2001; Blaikie, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Therefore, I made explicit choices on when to accept my understanding from an insider perspective and when to probe further from an outsider perspective, deliberately and thoughtfully shifting and moving between the two positions. The ways in which I made these choices is discussed further in Chapter 4.4.2, Interview process.

My stance is also in line with the encouragement given to researchers to take an agentic view of their projects (Barkema et al., 2015). An agentic view means the researcher makes explicit choices based on their individual world view and knowledge advantage about which novel and unique management problems to study and which social concerns to address, rather than be driven by given theoretical gaps in existing paradigms. I sought to ensure that I was hearing the voices of the Indian managerial women and exploring aspects of their career contexts and career agency that might be unique but not yet identified in the extant literature. I realize that it is not possible to conduct research in a purely theory-free manner; however, efforts can be made to be data driven rather than theory dependent. I analysed themes from the literature and data to combine theories in ways that explain the findings. With an agentic approach to theory development, I broaden women's career theories with an infusion of an expanded construct by including the voices and concerns of Indian managerial women.

4.2 Research paradigm

Research strategies need to be placed within philosophical perspectives, referred to as research paradigms, and established by the ontology, epistemology and stance of the researcher (Blaikie, 2007). Research strategies can be based on four sets of fundamental beliefs or paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism, as shown in Table 1

Table 1 Fundamental beliefs in social science (from Wahyuni, 2012, p.70)

Key themes Indian managerial women	Key themes Women's career theories	Unanswered questions	Gaps in career agency framework
Societal forces: Indian women develop cultural capital and strike a patriarchal bargain by balancing the modernizing aspects of professional life with the traditional institutions of marriage and family.	Women balance external factors with internal factors and these factors should be looked at separately	How do macro-discourses on modernity and tradition impact on women's careers? How do women shift between two opposing discourses?	**Cultural factors**
Family forces: Family ideology determines access to human capital, emotional and instrumental support based on the perceived value of the woman's career to the collective.	Family requirements and gender roles are important in women's career decisions	How do women interact with their families to make career decisions?	**Collective mode of agency**
Organizational forces: Discourse on meritocracy in MNCs undermines the examination of gender inequalities in the workplace and prevents formalisation of women's advancement policies.	Women's career patterns are not matched by organizational structures	How do women act within the organizational structures to advance their careers?	**Properties of agentic actions & beliefs**
Personal forces: Family choices are fused with personal choices, while also engaging with the contradictory ideas around societal progress and professional activity requiring autonomy, shifting over time.	Women's careers progress in phases related to life course	How and why do Indian managerial women maintain their careers over time? How do the women reconcile the mixed messages and cope with the tensions?	**Temporality; Fragmentation; Individual mode of agency**

The criteria in Table 1 support Blaikie's (2007) view that critical realism is the research paradigm which combines the depth realist ontology with neo-realism epistemology. Critical realism aligns well with my philosophical perspectives as described in the ontology, epistemology and stance I have discussed in Chapters 4.1 and 4.2.

Critical realism combines ontological realism (objectivism) and epistemological relativism (interpretivism). Critical realism differs from other paradigms with its

view of the world as "*structured, differentiated, stratified and changing*" (Danermark et al., 2002, p.5) and is most commonly associated with Bhaskar (1979, 2008).

Critical realism focuses on mechanisms that generate events, hence seeking to find out what produces events and not just to uncover the events themselves. In critical realism, reality is assumed to be layered in three domains: the real domain is that of the generative mechanisms; the actual domain is that of the events generated by the mechanisms; and the empirical domain is where the events are experienced and become empirically observable facts (Danermark et al., 2002), as shown in Figure 7.

Empirical
Events observed

Actual
Events triggered by generative mechanisms, may or may not be observed

Real
Underlying structure or mechanism that generates events, grasped indirectly through analytical work and theory building
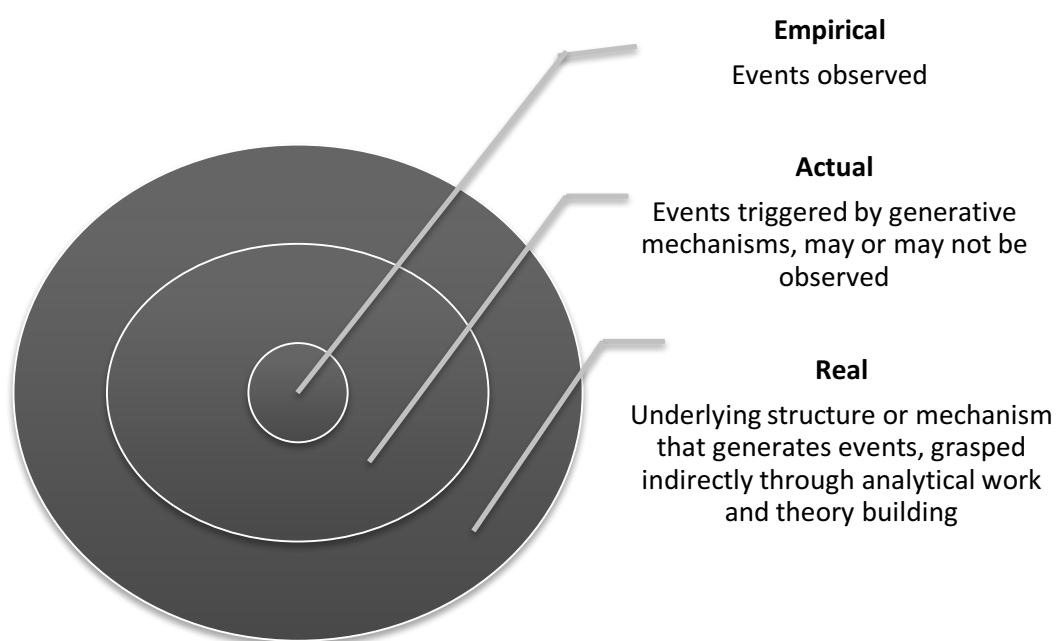
Figure 7 Critical Realism, layers of reality (adapted from Partington 1998, p.13)

Critical realism distinguishes between the unobservable structures that exist independently of human thought and the events that are generated by the structures. This paradigm is critical of "*epistemic fallacy*" (Danermark et al., 2002, p.22) in other approaches to social science that reduce the three domains into one and thereby fail to recognize the difference between what exists and what can be known.

Critical realism's view on social science methodologies is different from the other approaches, which tend to be placed in an either/or polarized duality, such as positivism or hermeneutics; quantitative or qualitative methods; universalism or particularism. Critical realists instead take a both/and approach, permitting the researcher to create something new out of different and irreconcilable perspectives, preserving knowledge from previous perspectives and offering distinct alternatives. Critical realism seeks to explain and describe, rather than predict, by discovering the patterns of events and the underlying mechanisms that create those events (Danermark et al., 2002). The research approach of critical realism encourages the researcher to connect the concrete to the abstract and vice versa.

In addition to ontological and epistemological separation underpinning critical realism, Archer (1982, 1995, 2007), offers the concept of morphogenesis as a realist approach to understanding the interplay of structure and agency, distinguishing it from Giddens' (1979, 1981, 1984) structuration theory, which conceptualizes structure and agency as inseparable. Morphogenesis is based on analytical dualism between structure and agency, whereas structuration theory conflates the two. Analytic dualism, as a term, might be misleading because there is in fact a triple distinction to be made between structure, culture and agency (Porpora, 2013). Culture and structure can be understood as the difference between the ideal and the material, the subjective and the objective, or the discursive and extra-discursive. Essentially, the morphogenetic approach begins with the understanding that structure precedes agency, in that people develop from structural and cultural circumstances, and then they act back upon structure and culture to either transform or maintain them. The elements of time and place are therefore critical. Hence, there is a preference for narrative accounts as a method of understanding social phenomenon (Porpora, 2013).

Several scholars have studied careers with an integrated approach to structure and agency in careers (Dany et al., 2003; Duberley et al., 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010; Cuzzocrea & Lyon, 2011), despite Archer's (1996) warnings against the conflation of structure and agency in such paradigms. When structure and

agency are conflated, the dynamic process between them becomes blurred and this prevents an exploration of the generative mechanisms that trigger events and lead to observed realities. She suggests analytical dualism as a method to avoid conflation of structure and agency. By analysing agency separately from structure, we can perceive the deeper mechanisms at play. Structure pre-dates agency; it is present before the actor comes on the scene. Structure constrains or enables the actor who then acts upon the structure to transform or reproduce it. This interplay of structure and agency happens over time and results in producing new and unique occurrences, referred to as emergence in critical realism (Danermark et al., 2002, p.61). Emergence is the interactive process of internal and external relations over time. Critical realism addresses agency and structure with the concept of emergence. Emergence suggests that social structures do not exist independently of the activities they influence. Social structures form the context in which social interaction and actions take place, and, in parallel, social interactions are within the environment in which structures are transformed (Danermark et al., 2002). Hence, it is in understanding the interplay and process by which structure and agency interact that the depth of reality from generative mechanisms that trigger the events, which lead to empirical and observed realities, is revealed.

The guidelines for social science research provided by critical realism are formulated based on three core arguments. Firstly, generalizations are fundamental for all social science research. Social science practice commonly takes the position that qualitative methods provide specific knowledge, whereas quantitative methods permit generalizations. Secondly, abduction and retroduction are offered as additional modes of data analysis and inference, over and above induction and deduction. These are discussed in Chapter 4.5. Lastly, the aim of social science research is to explain events and processes, rather than to predict (Danermark et al., 2002).

I seek to reach into the various domains of reality and widen our understanding of women's careers, explicitly acknowledging culture, structure and agency in the career narratives of Indian managerial women. Hence, my aim to broaden

existing career theories with a culture-centred perspective will be well served with a critical realist paradigm. The research design discussed in the next section seeks to explore the voices of Indian managerial women and come closer to the authentic subjectivities and contextual influences on career agency.

4.3 Research design

Building on the research paradigm which reflects the researcher's view of reality and knowledge creation, the research project requires internal consistency between the research design elements. Critical realism as a research paradigm can support both qualitative and quantitative research designs. To determine the best fit, one needs to consider the four key elements of a research project: the RQ, prior work, research design and contribution to literature. A set of criteria to determine the methodological fit of research types, based on the state/maturity of prior theory and research suggested by Edmondson & McManus (2007, p.1160), is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Methodological fit by research type (adapted from Edmondson & McManus, 2007, p.1160)

State of Prior Theory & Research	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
Research questions	Open-ended inquiry	Proposed relationships between new and established constructs	Focused questions and/or hypotheses relating to existing constructs
Type of data collected	Qualitative, open-ended data, to be interpreted for meaning	Hybrid, qualitative and quantitative	Quantitative data, focused measures where amount is meaningful
Illustrative methods for collecting data	Interviews, observations, documents & material from the field	Interviews, observations, documents & material from the field	Surveys, interviews or observations, systematically coded
Constructs & measures	New constructs, few formal measures	One or more new constructs &/or new measures	Relying on existing constructs and measures
Goal of data analyses	Identification of patterns	Testing new propositions	Formal hypothesis testing
Data analysis methods	Thematic content coding for evidence of constructs	Content analysis, exploratory statistics and preliminary tests	Statistical inference, statistical analyses
Theoretical contribution	Suggestive theory, invitation for further work	Provisional theory, integrating previous work	Supported theory, adding specificity, mechanisms or boundaries to existing theories

This research project is in a nascent field of research on women's careers in an under-explored context. Therefore, based on Edmondson & McManus (2007) qualitative methods provide the best fit allowing for the development of new constructs from a new field. Additionally, a qualitative, open-ended data collection approach is most suitable, allowing for new constructs and theories to be discovered and developed.

Interviews are a common data gathering method in qualitative research. Typically, qualitative research interviews with individual participants are unstructured or semi-structured. Other forms of interviews, such as structured, tend to be used for quantitative research and interviews spanning extended periods, coupled with participant observations, are used in ethnographies

(Bryman & Bell, 2007). Unstructured interviews usually involve a single question and are similar in character to a conversation. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a list of questions on specific topics. Participants are given leeway and flexibility to answer in their own way and even to ramble or go off at a tangent as these diversions may provide valuable insights into aspects the researcher had not considered. The answers that participants provide in qualitative interviews can also be viewed as stories that might lend themselves to a narrative analysis.

Narrative interviews seem to fall somewhere in between semi-structured and unstructured interviews. They are guided by a few open-ended questions aimed at eliciting narrative data (Bold, 2012, p.95). The interviewees need to know the purpose of the research, so that they can respond to the topic within the narrative; they should be able to recount their narratives with minimal intervention from the researcher. The objective is to encourage the interviewees to "*reconstruct accounts of connections between events and between events and contexts.*" (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.531). The purpose of minimizing interventions is to allow the voice of the subject to come through. The goal is to collect the narrative, which is a story of an individual's experience around a topic, rather than to collect responses to specific questions. The narrative is not an exact record of events, it is the description, explanation and self-definition of individuals based on their memory at a given time and place (Bold, 2012). There are three key features of a narrative: it is chronological, representing sequences of events; meaningful, making sense of past events; and social, as it is produced for a specific audience (Elliott, 2005). The researcher is the audience for the narrative. These elements formed the basis of the data collection and data analysis process. Although critical realism has no uniform stance on interviewing techniques, it does require the interviewer to be informed by an appropriate analytical framework to guide the questions, frame the answers, and suggest probes (Smith & Elger, 2012). Narrative data can be analysed thematically or structurally. Thematic analysis explores what a story is about, while structural analysis explores how a story is composed to reach its communicative objectives (Ayress, 2008).

4.4 Data Collection

I selected a narrative approach to data collection. The data collection was aimed to contextualize and integrate the objective and subjective experiences of individuals in their own words. This study is based on 36 interviews conducted in India from 2014-2015 with women working in MNCs. The sampling method and interview process used to collect data are described below.

4.4.1 Sampling

Sampling methods fall into two broad categories, non-probability and probability sampling. The former is typically applied to qualitative research, whereas, the latter tends to be applied to quantitative research, as shown by the criteria for each given in Table 3.

Table 3 Sampling techniques (adapted from Symon & Cassell, 2012)

Difference	Non-Probability	Probability
Specification of population	Not necessary	Essential
Basis of sample selection	Researcher's judgement	Statistical representation
Basis of generalizing from sample	Can be done theoretically	By statistical representation
Sample size	Relatively small	Relatively large

Non-probability sampling techniques include: (1) convenience sampling based primarily on the researcher's access to participants; (2) snowball sampling, this is also based on access, as it uses the researcher's contacts and accesses their network to widen the reach beyond immediate accessibility; and (3) quota sampling, which is widely used in commercial research, with the aim of producing a sample that is representative of a population (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Symon & Cassell, 2012).

The choice of research participants in qualitative research is dictated by practical concerns of access, personal judgement and inclusion criteria, as we can rarely access a whole population or even gather a representative group (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Symon & Cassell, 2012). In seeking to explore Indian managerial women's careers, I opted for the snowball sampling method. This

method is targeted and voluntary at the same time. I made initial contact with a small group of people whom I knew to have relevant networks in India. I worked with them to access others in their networks who fitted the inclusion criteria: the women were required to have been born, raised and educated in India. They were also required to be in a managerial role in an MNC with a minimum of five years' workforce experience, as a long history of the phenomenon is a key element of process research (Van de Ven, 2007).

I believe these criteria would provide a sample of women with enough work experience to have a career history to speak of and women who were culturally Indian. By selecting women who worked at MNCs, I explored the women's career stories within the specific multinational corporate environment and within the Indian cultural context.

I began identifying research participants through conversations with three personal contacts, two of whom were women. All of them were in managerial positions with MNCs in India. I did not interview the two women due to my close personal relationship with them. I informed all three of my contacts of the aim of the research and the inclusion criteria and asked them to provide potential candidates from their professional networks. The personal contacts provided names of women whom they believed met the criteria. I scanned their lists and looked up the women's public profiles online. Based on my initial review of their professional background, I made a list of those who seemed eligible, based on the inclusion criteria; I then contacted the women from my shortlist and found most of them were quite willing to participate. I began interviewing as soon as I had five women confirmed, and continued setting up interviews in parallel. I took a break after the first 11 interviews to review the data and the interview technique, and broadly validate the data analysis process. I presented the findings as part of my second PhD review. The feedback from my PhD Supervisor and panel validated the approach and I continued to interview until I felt that I was hearing similar stories and that I was reaching saturation in the types of new themes that were emerging.

4.4.2 Interview process

In this study, I used a semi-structured interview method, leaning towards the narrative approach. Hence, the interviews were guided by a protocol, with one open-ended question to start, and probing questions ready to be used if required. There was a focus on exploring the participants' careers temporally within their life context. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was designed to elicit stories of their careers set in the context of their lives and their circumstances at that time. Although a total of 37 women were interviewed, one interview transcript was rejected for analysis as the woman interviewed did not have five years of experience, as set out in my data collection criteria. She was a last-minute replacement for another woman whom I was expecting to interview but was suddenly unable to make it. Hence, 36 interviews were analysed. The women were interviewed in India, in a venue of their choice, by me – a researcher who shares their cultural heritage and ethnicity. The interviews were conducted in New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. The majority elected to be interviewed in their workplace, a few in their home and two in a coffee shop near their workplace.

The interviews were recorded with permission and in agreement with Cranfield University's ethical requirements; a confidentiality statement was read out and verbally agreed to by each participant. Pseudonyms have therefore been used in this thesis. As the interviewer, I activated a chronological narrative production by asking for the women's career story and suggesting a starting position of when they first thought of having a career (Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2005). Accordingly, the main question in the interviews was: *What has been your career journey and how has this journey been impacted by any life circumstances including social, family, organizational and personal factors?* My interventions were minimal, aimed at clarifying or encouraging the interviewee to elaborate or continue if there was distraction, hesitation or a long pause. The interviews lasted from 30-90 minutes with the majority being about 60 minutes long.

While conducting the interviews, I slipped into my Indian cultural background by naturally adapting my gestures and language to accommodate and align with the communication style of the interviewees. In reviewing the audio transcripts of the interviews, I realised that in many cases the interviewees referred to culturally specific concepts and looked to me to confirm my understanding of all the unsaid implications. I readily gave that confirmation, if I was confident of my understanding. If I had any doubt, I re-worded my understanding and repeated it back for their confirmation. I felt that too many probing questions on matters that were culturally taken for granted would reduce my credibility as an insider and could result in less openness on their part to tell the full story to avoid going through the diversion of explaining nuanced issues to someone that they perceived as an outsider. I maintained an open, attentive, conversational environment with a focus on their story, in their word. I chose this rather than creating a clinical and diagnostic interaction which would have resulted in a position of outsider, expert, evaluator. I engaged myself as an active listener, rather than relying completely on my interpretation, I applied my skills of an executive coach and a qualitative researcher to include paraphrasing, reflecting, interpreting, summarising, and checking perceptions, throughout the interview process (Ayress 2008).

I was conscious of the importance of researcher reflexivity (Yeo et al., 2014). I noted my assumptions and summarised the key career factors emerging from the interview, immediately after each interview, in a research diary. This was helpful later in the analysis, when I had more distance from the individual and the interview. I reviewed my notes to assess how much my early post interview thoughts differed from the later more distant interpretations and sought to balance my understanding between the two. This minimized the degree to which my bias or prior knowledge might have interfered with interpretation, while ensuring that key aspects of the interview that were salient at the time of the interview were appropriately included. Topics arising in the interviews where I chose to avoid undue interruptions included family structure, family position, regional identification, arranged and love marriage, as these subjects are all culturally loaded. For example, telling me how many siblings there were in their

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family or if their husband was the only son or not, informed me about the level of involvement the family would need from the interviewee and her husband. If a man is the only son, then family duties would be quite demanding on the couple. Nearly all participants voluntarily told me the region of India from which they came. I applied my contextual knowledge to understand the meaning. For example, Hindu women from Kashmir, identified themselves in this way early in the interview. This informed me about the political challenges they had gone through in their youth when migrating from Kashmir to Indian urban centres. Also, by letting me know if their marriages were love marriages or arranged marriages, I was made aware of the degree of flexibility they might have in their daily lives. As an Indian woman, I am aware that women arranged marriages would function within a more defined set of relational boundaries, whereas those in love marriages are likely to interact a little more flexibly. I made a conscious choice to apply my judgement on when to seek clarification, through active listening (Ayress, 2008) and when to acknowledge understanding of the concept, to permit the conversation to flow naturally. I believe as an insider with knowledge of the culture of interviewees the participants we could build a rapport and they could speak more freely about the deeper and sensitive aspects, particularly aspects that concerned the involvement of others in their careers. At the same time, I applied my experience as a career coach and my knowledge of research methods to ensure that I maintained neutrality and professionalism. Therefore, I actively reflected on when to clarify, probe, prompt and when to show reciprocity and familiarity. In addition, I summarised and checked my understanding when there were natural breaks in the flow of conversation and at the end of each interview.

4.5 Data Analysis

Interviews do not simply produce narrative accounts, they can provide insights into events and experiences and form the basis for analysing the related aspects of the layered realities of the social world. There is a dual aspect to the narratives collected. Firstly, the information helps to document the spectrum of experiences and viewpoints by categorising the data in each case. Secondly,

the interviews provide an opportunity for cumulative understanding of the data and for iterative model development, which then can be tested against the cases documented in the first place (Smith & Elger, 2012). A narrative approach to data analysis allows the examination of the interplay of temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin et al., 2007), providing insights both in breadth of diversity and depth of generalizability.

This approach was well suited to my RQs, which required a descriptive understanding of the spectrum of experiences, along with a cumulative explanatory and expanded model. In this study, the data analysis began with thematic coding, focusing broadly on the temporality and sociality within the content (Bold, 2012; Maitlis, 2012). Place was consistent across the sample, as they were all in Indian MNCs. Categories aimed at discovering key themes about the ways in which the women understand their career experiences were established and revised. The analysis was supported with NVivo software, which helped in looking for patterns and variations through constant comparison. Guided by Bazeley (2007), the cycles of analysis were: recorded logging of data movements, memos and categorisation patterns. The data analysis process combined both abduction and retroduction strategies (Blaikie, 2007). An abductive process was used to first understand and organize the findings from an initial set of interviews to develop broad categories. Then a framework for analysis was developed with a retroductive strategy, resulting in a culture-centred framework of women's career agency and a culture-centred model of Indian women's career agency jointly responding to the RQ and SQs.

Abduction starts with the social world of the social actors to discover their constructions of reality, through the knowledge of the actors embedded in their everyday language. Hence the researcher needs to enter the world of the subjects and discover their motives and reasons (Blaikie, 2007). The aim is to describe the actions and the situation. With this approach, I carried out the first phase of data analysis and produced a descriptive understanding of agency in the women's accounts of their careers. Initial rounds of data coding revealed

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connections between relevant career pursuits and events to: (1) others, (2) self, (3) types of actions or beliefs, and (4) time.

To arrive at the final categories which would permit the development of a culture-centred model, a retroductive strategy was utilised. Retroduction relies on iteratively moving from emergent themes to theoretical concepts and back. These themes were refined in subsequent rounds of analysis informed by the data and relevant theoretical concepts. The final aggregate categories evolved into: (1) properties of agency, (2) modes of agency, (3) temporal focus, and (4) fragmentation.

A retroductive research strategy seeks to locate the underlying structures or mechanisms that produce the observed phenomenon. To discover a previously unknown structure, the researcher starts with data, then constructs a hypothetical model of the underlying structure and attempts to establish its existence by observation and experiment (Blaikie, 2007). Facilitated by the theoretical concepts of the culture-centred approach (Mitra, 2015). I investigated the findings to develop culture-centred model responding to the RQ:

RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

> SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

> SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

In keeping with the analytical process described above, I applied an iterative coding approach. This began with identifying five interview transcripts from women who differed in terms of demographics (such as age, marital status, industry). My PhD Supervisor and I independently read through these five transcripts and identified initial themes. We then met to discuss those themes, reviewing and debating similarities and differences and reaching agreement on categories to take forward. I then coded a further six interviews, building on those categories to develop the initial categories of data discussed in Chapter

4.5.1. Following further discussion with my Supervisor, I went on to code another ten interviews before reviewing and revisiting the developing framework, combining some codes, and discarding others. The analysis continued in this way, coding a further batch of ten interviews, followed by a review and adjustment of the framework, and then the final set of five interviews. Throughout this process, I met regularly with my PhD Supervisor to discuss and review the emergent codes and developing framework. The data analysis was presented at the PhD third panel review as well as to my PhD colleagues at regular meetings of Cranfield's International Centre for Women Leaders.

The data were analysed thematically based on audio and written transcripts. Regular and frequent reviews of the matrix coding tables of the coding relationships were generated through NVivo to facilitate understanding the connections and overlaps between codes. The matrix coding tables were not intended to be used as a quantitative measure, rather by looking at the number of cases in the matrix tables generated, I could visualize the intensity of relationships between factors and identify key patterns emerging from the data. This helped me to continually refine the coding structure and categories. As a result of this process I developed a set of initial categories discussed in Chapter 4.5.1 which then evolved into final categories as discussed in Chapters 4.5.2. to 4.5.6.

4.5.1 Initial categories of themes

I began by analysing the first 11 interviews as discussed above in Chapter 4.5. This analysis led me to grouping the data along the broad themes, looking or societal, familial, organizational and personal factors. Although this was an acceptable start in helping me group the data, the result was still highly descriptive. In keeping with the abductive approach, I analysed the meaning behind the words and while reviewing the texts in each of these categories again, I observed the relational nature of the data, which then led me to the initial categories for data as: related to others; related to self; related to career actions and beliefs; related to time; related to challenges.

After discussion with my supervisor and reporting the analysis back to my panel and with their feedback that the design was satisfactory, I continued to analyse data in the remaining interviews. I immersed myself in the data by reading the transcripts and listening to the interviews several times (Ritchie et al., 2014). I shared the emerging categories with my PhD Supervisor, which required me to clarify, assess and distil my understanding and articulation of the patterns I was observing. This helped me to develop a refined understanding of the content and extract the key themes that ran across the interviews. With this process, I categorised the data in the narratives in a meaningful way. I looked for factors to which career data was related in the women's narratives. The initial categories of themes are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Initial categories

Initial category	Description
Related to others (family, society, organization)	Influence or involvement of others plus interdependence and shared goals around career
	Influence or involvement of others in a supportive manner around career, trigger for career action
	Influence or involvement of others in a conflictual manner, or withdrawal of support from career, trigger for career action
Related to self	Individual and personal actions or beliefs about career, low involvement/ influence of others
Related to career actions or beliefs	Thoughts, beliefs about future career, consequences of career actions, career plans
	Expressions of career focus, determination, and desire
	Actions, tactics, behaviours, to attain career goals, advancement, changes, termination, or withdrawal
	Self-examination and assessment of career performance, personal satisfaction, and efficacy
Related to time	In childhood, university years and before first professional job
	Early in their careers and prior to their previous role
	Related to their current role, something that is happening now, habitual actions
	Projections and plans related to the future and next steps
Related to challenges	Expressions of dilemmas, fears, inconsistencies and lack of well-being causing a doubt about ability to carry on in career

With this enhanced set of categories, I felt a more meaningful and analytical structure was emerging from the data; the emerging structure was informed by broad themes from the literature. A view of the women's relationships with others, their motives, types of actions and their understanding of their situation was now coming into focus.

4.5.2 Culture-centred framework for data analysis

To operationalize the culture-centred framework discussed in Chapter 2.4, I undertook a three-step process:

(1) The first step was to obtain a feel for the career data and assess the categories to which the data were related. I developed five broad categories of data from an initial sample of 11 interviews: Related to others; Related to self; Related to career actions and beliefs; Related to time; Related to challenges. After analysing the first 11 interviews, and once the initial categories were saturated with no significant new factors emerging, I reviewed the data within the categories using the matrix coding tools in NVivo. I used the matrix codes to look for the relationships between the codes. I analysed the matrix code data against literature related to the initial categories of information and progressively developed refined categories with steps 2 and 3.

(2) I analysed the literature on career agency to disaggregate career agency based on the theoretical concepts in the literature. I searched for the ways in which career agency had been conceptualized and looked for connections with the categories identified in the first step. This was aimed at facilitating a deeper relational analysis of the data categories I had identified in step 1. I analysed ten interviews separately in two lots and then the final five, reviewing the evolving coding structure at each stage with my PhD Supervisor.

(3) Having identified the theories of agency from the literature in step 2, I developed the proposed culture-centred framework of career agency and applied it to the data in the initial categories in order to develop the final categories.

I shared my NVivo files with my PhD Supervisor at our supervisory meetings. I was regularly challenged by my PhD Supervisor to ensure I was checking for the possibility of new categories throughout the analytical process. My Supervisor frequently asked me to define the boundaries between the

categories, provide examples and explore the exceptions to determine if new categories might be present in the data and might have been missed. These discussions resulted in the culture-centred framework for the analysis of career agency shown in Table 5 and facilitated the model development process.

The evolution from the initial codes to the final codes was an iterative process facilitated by the theories of temporality of agency, properties and modes of agency and narrative fragmentation to disaggregate career agency, outlined in Chapter 2.4. As I analysed the data, I searched for related theories and frameworks in parallel. With a focus on approaches that were broad enough to permit cultural variations, A disaggregated view of career agency allowed me to develop a framework for culturally sensitive analysis of career agency in career narratives. This framework was developed by moving iteratively between data and theory. The final aggregate categories, the related sub-categories and the primary initial categories that were most closely related to each final category are summarised in Figure 8. The result of the process was the development of a culture-centred framework for analysing women's career agency as shown in Table 5

Figure 8 Final categories

An iterative data analysis process resulted in four aggregate categories which were reflected both in data and in theory: temporality; properties of agency; modes of agency; fragmentation. The operational definitions of the theoretical

frameworks which facilitated the development of each of these aggregate categories is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5 Culture-centred framework for analysing career agency

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Temporality of agency	Pre-career	Experienced during childhood or university years, before the first job.
	Past career	Experienced after university from the first job to the previous position, role or organization
	Current career	Experienced in the current position, role and organization
	Future career	Expected or planned career actions or beliefs, assessment of possibilities yet to be experienced
Properties of agency	Intentionality	Expressions of determination and commitment to career
	Self-reactiveness	Tactics and deliberate actions taken towards the career
	Self-reflectiveness	Self-analysis and discussion of the meaning and satisfaction of career pursuits.
	Forethought	Encompassing future career plans and assessment of future options
Modes of agency	Collective	Career related actions and beliefs shared with others and framed as interdependent with others
	Individual	Clearly individualistic focused on the capacity of the self to undertake career actions
Fragmentation (sources)	Family	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originate from family demands, lack of support by family, experiences of discrimination from family
	Organizational	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originate from organizational demands or lack of support, experiences of discrimination from the organization
	Personal	Tensions and incoherence are personal dilemmas and struggles to fulfil opposing roles, trade-offs and compromises are difficult for the individual to assess and emotional discomfort is expressed
	Societal	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originate from the wider social context such as the media and cultural norms being different from the individual's activities and plans

4.5.3 Temporality

This component captured the data categorised as "Related to time." The aggregate category of temporality looked at the time frames and women's life phases in which the data were situated. It was sub-categorised as pre-career, past career, current career and future career, as defined in Table 6.

Table 6 Operational definition of temporality

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Temporality	Pre-career	Experienced during childhood or university years, before the first job.
	Past career	Experienced during the previous position, role or organization
	Current career	Experienced in the current position, role and organization
	Future career	Expected or planned career actions or beliefs, assessment of possibilities yet to be experienced

The connections between agency and time were explored by Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) framework. Agency is informed by past experiences and has a habitual aspect; it focuses on the future as alternative options are projected. Agency also leads to acts in the present through the capacity to understand the past and project the future within the contingencies and options available at that time. Temporality, as suggested by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), emerged naturally as the women narrated their stories as related to the pre-career, past career, current career and future career phases of their lives.

As illustrated in Figure 8, with this view of temporality, I re-assessed the data in the initial category: "related to time". The resulting aggregate category temporality included the sub-categories: pre-career, past career, current career and future career. Expressions related to career influencing data between childhood and university years were coded as pre-career. All information between their first job and previous position were coded as past career. Data related to their current position, regardless of how long they had been in it, were

coded as current career. All data projecting forward and looking ahead were coded as future career.

Actions and beliefs that were expressed as habitual and not clearly within a time boundary were assessed for the point at which the career impact was made and coded accordingly. For example, the following quote was coded into the pre-career category.

"We just went by what our parents told us and fortunately it worked out well, but probably there would have been very many other opportunities if I would have had more exposure, but I am happy with what happened" – Sonia

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In the quote, Sonia explains why she did not attend the university and course of her choice. She says that her father insisted on her studying engineering and staying in same town as her parents. Although this could have impacted on her career throughout her lifespan, it was coded in the pre-career category, as the initial impact (restricted educational choices) and the defining event (father's insistence) happened in the pre-career phase of her life.

4.5.4 Properties of agency

Properties of agency captured the data categorised as "Related to career actions and beliefs". Identification of expressions of agency in the narratives was facilitated by Bandura's (2006) theory of human agency. The properties of agency are essentially the core agentic capabilities of humans to act on their environments. Bandura's (2006) theory unpacks agency into four properties: intentionality, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, and forethought. The operational definitions applied in this study are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Operational definition of properties of agency

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Properties	Intentionality	Expressions of determination and commitment to career
	Self-reactiveness	Tactics and deliberate actions taken towards the career
	Self-reflectiveness	Self-analysis and discussion of the meaning and satisfaction of career pursuits.
	Forethought	Encompassing future career-plans and assessment of future options

By disaggregating agency in this way, I could re-assess the data I had initially coded in "related to career actions and beliefs" (Figure 8) and unpack them to recognize the ways in which the agentic properties were being displayed in the narratives. A temporal perspective of the properties revealed how agentic capabilities were being applied in varying ways over time and how agency in some form was flowing in and out of the narratives.

In my re-assessment of the data I found the information in the initial category labelled: "related to career actions and beliefs" (Figure 8), aligning reasonably well with the four sub-categories proposed by Bandura's (2006) framework: intentionality, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, and forethought. In my analysis, I framed intentionality as including expressions of determination and commitment; forethought as encompassing future career plans and assessment of future career options; self-reactiveness as referring to tactics and deliberate actions towards the career; and lastly, self-reflection as an expression of self-analysis and discussion of the meaning and satisfaction of career pursuits.

I coded data into the category which aligned with my understanding of the key point being made by the narrator. I reviewed the flow of the conversation and the topic being discussed around that quote to determine the salient features of the text. For example, in the quote below Radhika explains that she switched from a large organization to a smaller start-up when she realized that she had

been passed over for a promotion she deserved and that the long hours she would need to put in to move up in that organization were not desirable now that she had a baby. It was initially coded in "related to career actions and beliefs."

"Then when I missed the promotion I realised I need to work harder for the next year, the baby was too small and that's when at some point I realised, okay I've learnt a lot over the last 8.5 years, it's time to move on. It's time to join an organization which is just coming up or just setting up and then whatever expertise that you've gathered over the last 8 years one needs to apply." – Radhika

Although the quote above shows some aspects of forethought in terms of thinking ahead about the demands of moving up her organization, it primarily conveys the action (*moving on*) and pursuits (*join a smaller organization that's coming up*) she undertook to consider the new challenges (*missing a promotion and having a baby*) she faced. Hence, the quote was re-coded in the final analysis into the self-reactiveness category.

4.5.5 Modes of agency

Modes of agency captured the data categorised as "Related to others" and "Related to self". The mode of agency category represents the relational means of exercising agency. Bandura (2006) suggests three modes: personal, collective and proxy, which are blended in varying ways for functioning in daily life. The operational definitions applied in this study are in Table 8.

Table 8 Operational definition of modes of agency

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Modes	Collective	Career related actions and beliefs shared with others and framed as interdependent with others
	Individual	Clearly individualistic focused on the capacity of the self to undertake career actions

I explored the data to determine the nature of the blending and determine when more of one or the other was present in the context of Indian managerial women. I coded data as primarily individual agency when the career related actions and beliefs were framed as independent and clearly individualistic in nature. Individual agency focused on the capacity of the self to undertake career actions. Collective agency was coded as actions and beliefs shared with others and framed as interdependent in nature. Proxy agency is enacted through a socially mediated form to influence others to act on their behalf. Proxy agency was not applied as a category in the analysis, as this concept did not emerge from the data in this study.

The modes of agency reflect the relational nature of agency and demonstrate the degree of interdependence and collaboration with others for acting on behalf of their careers. The data initially coded in two categories: "related to self" (Figure 8) aligned closely with individual agency. For example,

> *"I have always kept very few people close to me so even at the workplace, I am kind of more, you know work-driven, I am very very focused on work goals." – Manvi.*

This quote demonstrates an individualistic expression of career pursuits. Manvi's description of herself as being self-reliant and focused was coded as individual agency.

Data that had been initially coded as "related to others" (Figure 8) aligned closely with collective agency. For example,

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"My father never wished he had a son ever since he had me. He was my inspiration during my childhood days because everything that I did during my childhood was to make my dad proud of everything. It was more for him than for me. Till the day he lived which was 8 years ago is when he passed away, everything that I did was linked to how I could make him happy and how I could make him proud. So, he wanted me to be a doctor." – Radhika

---

In the quote, Radhika explains how linked she is to her father. She explains that his thoughts were integral to her career decision. Hence, due to the importance the thoughts and concerns of others played in her decision, this text was coded as collective agency.

This process of recoding data into the collective and individual sub-categories facilitated a more nuanced view of the ways in which some modes of agency take primacy in certain part of the narratives and the ways in which this shifts over time.

4.5.6 Fragmentation

The data categorised as "Related to challenges" was captured by the concept of narrative fragmentation. The challenges coded in the initial categories (Figure 8) were recoded into the final category of fragmentation. The data in this category reflected a difficult to resolve dilemma and resulted in a disruption in the narrative flow. At these points of the narratives, the story becomes incoherent and a little illogical. These narrative disruptions were unpacked with the help of the study by Humle & Pedersen (2015), who identify this incoherence in narratives as fragmentation. They demonstrate, in their empirical research studying the work stories of knowledge workers, that fragmentation creates

meaning. They argue that meaning is not always created by coherence and causality but in fact can be created by three different types of fragmentation: (a) discontinuity: "created by ambiguity and complexity conditions and resulting in blurred stories with ambiguity in the meaning construction". In this case, stories are not told in a logical sequence and lack coherence; (b) tensions: "created by multiple perspectives resulting in different layers of multiple meanings". They cite the example of tensions between work life and home life; and finally (c) editing: "created by linkages, gaps and slippages to create meanings by partly coherent stories." Such stories are told by the reflexive agency of the storyteller, for example by recounting how they made meaning of both reality and dreams (p.587). The data related to fragmentation had initially been coded as "challenges" (Figure 8). After further analysis, the data in this category were mostly expressed as career related tensions between the self and others. Humle & Pedersen's (2015) typology provides a framework for the structural analysis of narrative data by considering how parts of the story are constructed and told. This approach facilitated the identification of fragmentation in the data. However, as my research focuses on relational and thematic aspects of the narrative, I categorised the fragmentation based on the source of the fragmentation; i.e. based on the relationship with society, family, organization, or self, which is being expressed as the source of discontinuity, tension or editing. For example:

"Sometimes it gets difficult also, you know whenever you have
a huge amount of work and you want to stay in office, but you
have to reach home at time also, right, you can't because Delhi,
is a place where safety is one of the biggest concerns that you
face in the world today. So, we have to be at home around, you
know before night otherwise family gets scared. It is not for me,
I can take care of myself." – Malika

In the above quote, Malika describes herself as a *"workaholic"*; her narrative focuses on her ability to *"always come up with a solution"* and that there had not

been any *"issues"* from her parents about working long hours until she got married. Then she raises a dilemma about having to working late in the office as captured by the quote,

This was coded as organizational fragmentation, because it was expressed as a tension around how to deal with the long hours expected from organizations. On the one hand, Malika's in-laws who live with her in her joint family home fear for her *"safety"* when she commutes at night in Delhi, something her parents did not seem concerned with. On the other hand, she *"wants to stay in the office"* when she has a *"huge amount of work"*. The incoherence between the family's perspective and the personal perspective on dealing with long hours, an organizational condition for career progress, results in organizational fragmentation. She gives equal credence to opposing perspectives and expresses that this is difficult to reconcile. The source of the challenge is voiced as the long hours. The operational definitions applied in this study are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Operational definition of fragmentation

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Fragmentation	Family	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originates from family demands, lack of support by family, experiences of discrimination from family
	Organizational	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originates from organizational demands or lack of support, experiences of discrimination from the organization
	Personal	Tensions and incoherence are personal dilemmas and in struggling to fulfil opposing roles; trade-offs and compromises are difficult for the individual to assess and emotional discomfort is expressed
	Societal	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originates from the wider social context, such as the media and cultural norms being different from the individual's

		activities and plans

Hence, my data focus on ambiguity, complexity and tensions created by the multiple and seemingly opposing perspectives that the women struggle to reconcile in their narratives. The women frequently edited fragmentation by linking discontinuities to broader dreams to make their career stories coherent, thereby telling a story in which they aim to maintain their careers, despite seemingly unresolvable challenges.

4.6 Cultural-centred model development

As discussed in Chapter, 4.5.2, this study first develops a culture-centred framework for analysing career agency. By applying the framework shown in Table 5, this study develops a culturally-sensitive model of Indian women's careers. This model overcomes the shortcomings in mainstream career theories which have historically excluded the voices of women from diverse contexts. Nevertheless, I am mindful of Barkema et al.'s (2015) caution that despite repeated calls for research in non-Western contexts, there has been very little contribution to new theory development. The contributions of most papers from the East tend to be in the "*neighborhood of previous concepts and theories*" (p.461). They suggest analysis of research from the East can make three types of contribution: (i) construct equivalence, when the construct is essentially the same and already known in the extant literature, (ii) construct salience which occurs when a specific attribute of an existing Western construct becomes more pronounced in the Eastern context, and (iii) construct infusion when a new element is added to an existing construct. With the theoretical background presented above, this study explores the careers of Indian managerial women within the context in which they are situated and determines the possibility of construct salience or construct infusion emerging from the findings.

I applied the framework and analysed the ways in which data in properties of agency, modes of agency and narrative fragmentation intersected with temporality. I took a processual view along with a culture-centred approach to

enhance the model development methodology. Van de Ven (2007) differentiates variance and process theory. Variance methods are outcome-driven and examine the causation of change in terms of independent variables acting on dependent ones. Process models examine change through temporally diffused events. A variance approach explores past events and results, whereas a process model examines how the outcomes develop over time and seeks to identify the generative mechanisms.

A culture-centred approach to data analysis permitted a culturally sensitive and postcolonial approach to career agency. CCA, acknowledges that agency is layered and contested in the narration of career stories and encourages the researcher to recognize liminality and hybridization in the narrative as this may help identify the hidden aspects of career negotiations (Mitra, 2015). This permits a versatile view of developmental patterns in the agentic characteristics within the women's career narratives. Hence, when combining the process and culture-centred approach, the focus of the analysis becomes the intertwined and transforming nature of the relationship between the self, others and the environment over time.

My analytical approach focused on the unfolding of events and a liminal and hybridized view of agency shifting over time in the women's stories. Disaggregating the career and relational data into modes and properties of agencies in time periods revealed the specificity of the agentic process in the context of Indian managerial women. Additionally, attention to the incoherent segments of the narratives, and evaluating the sources, circumstances and meanings accorded to the tensions and dilemmas in the stories, was valuable in highlighting the deeper mechanisms at work. A combined perspective which permits a processual and culture-centred reading of data around temporality and fragmentation, with agentic modes and properties, provides an enhanced view of the entrenched reality of career agency in India which resulted in the development of a culture-centred model of career agency of Indian managerial women.

4.7 Quality

An agentic view of quality research requires contemporary researchers to justify the new concepts and theories, and demonstrate the ways in which they add to existing knowledge (Barkema et al., 2015). Throughout the data analysis process, I ensured that I had taken proper measures to justify the knowledge that was being generated. These measures are typically referred to as reasonable levels of reliability, objectivity, and internal and external validity; however, these terms carry connotations of measurability that are not consistent with qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The alternative criteria for qualitative research are more appropriately termed dependability for reliability, confirmability for objectivity, creditability for internal validity, and transferability for external validity. With special attention to the particularities of these criteria for qualitative research in the critical realist tradition, Miles et al. (2014, pp.310-315) provide practical guidance by suggesting the following terms for assessing the quality of qualitative research:

(1) objectivity/confirmability;
(2) reliability/dependability/auditability;
(3) internal validity/credibility/authenticity;
(4) external validity/transferability/fittingness;
(5) utilization/application/action orientation.

They include the fifth category, which raises the question of what does this study do for the participants, i.e. researchers, researched and consumers. This question and concerns for the practical value of the work is important. I will now discuss the ways in which I managed the quality of this research based on these five criteria.

4.7.1 Objectivity/confirmability

The researcher needs to report findings with relative neutrality and free of explicit researcher bias by demonstrating objectivity (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.278). Any researcher taking up the responsibility of interpreting the constructions of the participants must ensure a clear understanding of his/her

assumptions and how they influence the research design and analysis (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). The researcher must at the same time ensure that he/she observes the data from various perspectives and challenges his/her initial interpretations, taking an "*ironic*" (Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009, p.79) approach, especially in the use of culture on contingent concepts, such as masculinity and femininity. Although researchers cannot achieve complete neutrality or objectivity, it is important that researchers reflect on potential sources of bias and work to minimize them by acknowledging and reporting potential bias (Ritchie et al., 2014). I was open, curious and consciously choosing to listen to the women and minimize bias in interpreting their expressions. However, I was aware that my own experience and my observations of other managerial women in my family led me to believe that familial support of middle class families were key enablers of Indian women's career achievements. I was mindful of this and reflected carefully on the interactions and interpretations, with notes and memos during and post each interview. I wanted to ensure that my bias towards seeing the family as an enabler was not unduly privileging certain aspects of the narrative over others. I consciously strived and double checked my categorisations to report my understanding of the narrative and not purely my version of it. I found this process of checking myself was challenging and disruptive initially. However, it became more and more integrated and natural in my analytical process with every additional interview I analysed. The data analysis and writing up process has helped me see my biases more clearly. I have discovered that the influence of family on women's careers is much more mixed than I had thought it would be. My ability to maintain a reasonable degree of neutrality and the instinct to check my interpretations in the moment is enhanced by my work as a career coach. I have developed strong listening skills, the ability to suspend judgement and the agility to evaluate various theories and explanations in situ.

4.7.2 Reliability/dependability/auditability

The study should be consistently designed and implemented such that proper care has been taken with the methods. The process should be stable "*over*

time, across researchers and methods" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Sandberg (2005) adds, "*The principal question of reliability concerns the procedures for achieving truthful interpretations*" (p.58). This involves the demonstration of controls and checking of interpretations throughout the process, starting from the formulation of the RQ, selection of participants, gathering and analysing data and reporting the results. I recorded the procedures in detail, creating an audit trail, maintaining a history of the data collection and models used to analyse them, keeping a diary of my own thoughts throughout the process, and ensuring that assumptions and conclusions are explicitly questioned. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.278) provide a set of queries to assist the researcher with this task. Careful and rigorous record keeping was maintained of all the steps of data collection and data analysis, as reliability also requires the study to be replicable (Patton, 2002).

As a critical realist, my aim is not to prove my findings but to explain my interpretation and be transparent in my method and process of interpretation. As a researcher with pre-existing knowledge of the subject and the context being studied, I recognized the risks of 'lone researcher' bias (Lofland et al., 2006) in my data collection, analysis and interpretation. I summarised my understanding and reflected my interpretation back to the interviewees throughout each interview and at the end of each interview to confirm my understanding. In addition to the rigorous data analysis process, including co-coding with my supervisor and panel reviews of data discussed in Chapter 4.5, I checked interpretations with two of my initial sources for the snowball sampling method applied in this study. Both of my sources are Indian managerial women with extensive experience working in Europe and America. One was the Director of Leadership Development at an organization and the other, a Senior Vice President of a business unit at another organization from which I had interviewed several women. I discussed data translation, interpretation and colloquialisms with them in detail. For example, I needed to clarify my understanding of the daily functioning of women who do not live in joint families but continue to make reference to their duties to their in-laws. I discussed this with my sources who live in India and they helped me by elaborating on the

relational systems in such cases. Additionally, several women had indicated to me that they prefer to wear Indian clothes once they achieve a certain leadership position; I checked the meaning of this and the cultural connections made between Indian clothes and maturity and authority, as opposed to Western clothing being viewed as youthful but lacking in authority. Discussing my model with these women also confirmed the connections I was raising between the self and other and it is through their feedback that I noticed the assertion of the individual in the later stages of careers.

4.7.3 Internal validity/credibility/authenticity

Internal validity requires the researcher to provide an authentic portrait of the phenomenon. The findings need to make sense and be credible to people being studied. To ensure validity I heeded the guidance of Sandberg (2005) who identifies the researcher's role and breaks it up into communicative, pragmatic, and transgressive validity. Communicative validity ensures coherence with a community of interpretation providing an understanding between the researcher and participants on the aim of the study. I explained the aim of the study prior to and again at the start of the interview and confirmed that they understood it well. Pragmatic validity ensures that people do what they say they do. This can be achieved by observation and follow-up questions, which insert their statements into real situations and occasionally misrepresent their statements to test their own coherence. When required, I asked for elaboration on statements that seemed to conflict with previous statements. Transgressive validity implies looking for contradictions, as opposed to the previous types, which aim for coherence; in other words, looking at data that do not seem to fit the patterns or are ambiguous and contradictory in some way, to reveal the researcher's own taken-for-granted assumptions, especially as the data relate to culture and gender. Through memos, notes and awareness of this criteria I noted some of the transgressions and have reflected the types of variations that came up in the case studies presented in Chapter 6.

4.7.4 External validity/transferability/fittingness

The external validity criteria require the findings to be transferable to other contexts (Miles et al., 2014). The Culture-centred theoretical lens, combined with the exploratory nature of the study in a nascent field, required a contextual focus. Nevertheless, the findings provide both validation for the need for greater focus on context-specific analysis as well as a framework for understanding the career agency of various groups in specific contexts. The framework develops concepts and abstractions at a level that will support transferability to other contexts, and can be tested and validated with other populations and other cultural environments. The study also picks up on and reconciles the disparate findings on how Indian women maintain their careers, and therefore demonstrates its fittingness and transferability to past research data.

4.7.5 Utilization/application/action orientation

A study should have some value to its participants, both researcher and researched (Miles et al., 2014). This study provides insights into the career agency of an under-researched population and supports the numerous calls for cultural sensitivity in career theories. It includes and records the career stories of Indian managerial women for academic and practitioner benefit. The study demonstrates the importance of understanding context-specific agency for MNCs to design appropriate context-sensitive career support systems. The study demonstrated the Western centric focus of career research and contributes a framework to widen career theories. I have reviewed the findings of the study with the three original contacts (two Indian managerial women, and one Indian managerial man), who provided access to their networks and they found the framework useful and valid. The framework can be applied to career intervention programmes and career coaching initiatives in providing an expanded and nuanced understanding of career agency.

4.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have discussed how my world view, philosophical approach and research paradigm result in an aligned process for data collection and data

analysis. I showed how I will apply the culture-centred framework of women's career agency which was presented in Chapter 2.4. I demonstrated the iterative process of data analysis and model development and established the endeavours undertaken made to ensure that acceptable levels of quality in data collection and data analysis were maintained.

5 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings that resulted from the data analysis described in Chapter 4. I will begin with an overview of the biographical data to provide a profile of the sample. I will then discuss the findings on the career agency of Indian managerial women emerging from the data analysis, using the culture-centred framework presented in Chapter 2. The chapter concludes with a preliminary analysis of the findings and begins to formulate the response to the RQ. The data analysis presented in this chapter sets the stage for the development of the culture-centred model of career agency to respond to the RQ and SQs in Chapter 6.

5.1 Biographical data

A total of 36 interviews were analysed. Prior to the interviews, I confirmed that the interviewees' profiles matched the criteria for selection. The women were required to have been born, raised and educated in India. They were required to be in a managerial role in an MNC with a minimum of five years' workforce experience. These criteria were given to the contacts ahead of time and when I contacted the women to set up interviews I ascertained that they had completed most of their education in India and had mostly worked in India. Other than the years of work experience and current role in the organization, biographical information was not specifically collected. However, all the interviewees volunteered biographical information within their narratives.

The biographical data for each interviewee are presented in Appendix B. Due to the snowball sampling strategy, the data show a high level of consistency in the profiles of the 36 respondents: 27 were married, of whom 14 were in arranged marriages and 10 lived in joint family households; 23 had children; 26 had Masters level education; 23 had never lived abroad; 22 had between 10 and 19 years of work experience; 17 were working in the IT industry, and the rest were spread out over 10 other industries. I interviewed women based in three of India's metropolitan cities: Delhi, including its major suburbs Noida and Gurgaon; Mumbai; Bengaluru.

The biographical data demonstrate a reasonable level of consistency in the women's personal, educational and professional profiles. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, the biographical data broadly fit with the general demographic descriptions of the new Indian woman. The data illustrate the typical profiles of urban middle class managerial women in a contemporary Indian cultural context. Notably, the majority being married with children, reflects a general adherence to long-standing traditional cultural norms of being married and actively engaged in family life. Over half the married women in the sample were in arranged marriages, marriage partners being selected by their families, rather than independently by the women (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016). In line with traditional Indian family structures, nearly half the married women lived in joint families (Chadda & Deb, 2013), i.e. sharing their homes with parents-in-law and some including husband's siblings and their families.

5.2 Agency in the career narratives of Indian managerial women

In addition to biographical information, the data analysis process applied the culture-centred framework for studying the agentic process for careers by examining four aggregate categories of data: temporality, properties of agency, modes of agency, and fragmentation. I applied the culture-centred framework introduced in Chapter 2.4 and discussed in Chapter 4.5.2 disaggregating career agency as shown in the Figure 9.

Disaggregation of career agency			
Temporality of agency	Properties of agency	Modes of agency	Narrative fragmentation
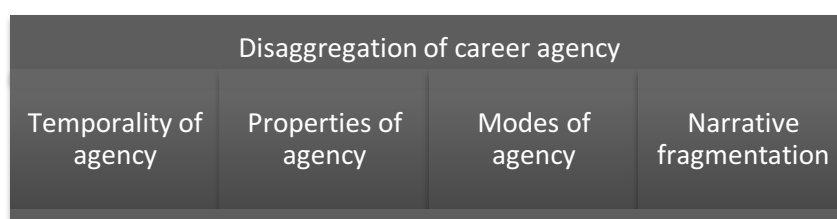
Figure 9 Culture-centred framework of career agency

I used the matrix coding tools in NVivo to analyse the data in properties of agency, modes of agency and fragmentation against temporality. This data analysis approach permitted me to take a process oriented view around temporality. It also permitted me to apply the culture-centred approach

discussed in Chapter 2.4. Mitra (2015) suggests (1) recognition of the untidy connections between culture, structure and agency centred on communication through the circulating career scripts; (2) conceptualization of a hybridized career agency, shifting across individual and collective; (3) deconstruction of career agency which is complex and fragmented; and (4) exploration of the ways in which career agency is constructed and constrained.

The category of properties of agency permits a disaggregated view of agency and reveals the ways in which it is constructed over time. The modes of agency category help to identify the liminality and hybridity of agency shifting over time across the individual and the collective. The category of fragmentation separated out by time periods demonstrated the untidy connections between the culture, structure, and agency as the individual grapples with tensions and incoherence, and reveals the ways in which agency might be constrained in this context. The data set per woman is given in Appendix C. An overview of the number of women, with data in each of the cross-coded categories, is shown in Table 10.

Table 10 Overview of data in all final categories

Data categories	Number of interviewees by temporality			
Modes of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Collective Agency	28	34	34	15
Individual Agency	10	14	21	5
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Forethought	2	6	11	24
Intentionality	14	14	8	5
Self-reactiveness	13	32	28	10
Self-reflectiveness	11	29	36	7
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Family related	0	12	18	6
Organizational	0	25	27	6
Personal	0	7	18	2
Societal	11	5	15	3

In the following sections I will review the data; beginning with Chapter 5.2.1 Temporality, I will provide a snapshot of the data within each temporal category to provide an understanding of the primary properties of agency, modes of agency and sources of fragmentation in each temporal category. I will discuss the data in each column first and then subsequently the data in each of the rows in Chapter 5.2.2 Properties of agency, Chapter 5.2.3 Modes of agency, and Chapter 5.2.4 Fragmentation. As the category of temporality runs across the data, this section focuses on highlighting the data flow through time to establish the shifting nature of agency within the narratives.

5.2.1 Temporality

An overview of the data in each column shows how agency and fragmentation are constructed in each of the sub-categories of temporality. A reminder of the operational definitions of each of the sub-categories in temporality, originally presented in Chapter 2.4.1, is recalled in Table 11.

Table 11 Operational definition of Temporality

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Temporality	Pre-career	Experienced during childhood or university years, before the first job.
	Past career	Experienced during the previous position, role or organization
	Current career	Experienced in the current position, role and organization
	Future career	Expected or planned career actions or beliefs, assessment of possibilities yet to be experienced

I will discuss the modes, properties and fragmentation for each temporal category below.

Pre-career

The pre-career phase is experienced during childhood or university years, before the first job. The patterns of data flow in temporal phases through the modes of agency, properties of agency and sources of fragmentation are discussed below.

Pre-career modes of agency

The data in Table 12 show that the majority of the women refer to collective modes of agency in their careers during this phase of their lives and some to individual agency.

Table 12 Pre-career modes of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Mode of agency	Pre-career
Collective Agency	28
Individual Agency	10

A deeper analysis into the data in this category reveals that most of the women are referring to a collective view of career shared with their parents and general family support systems.

> *"So, I don't think that was a question from the very beginning, my parents were like you are like – just don't do a superficial thing and get married, that is not the life you should have. So, I think that was never a question of should I be like, if I am all that. Where to go was obviously choices. So, I did my engineering that was more like that thought that was the best thing to do and in other systems and all that you go figure out, explore and do it, generally like, yeah you don't understand much and typically families decide, a doctor's son and daughter want to be a doctor." – Meera*

Meera's quote refers to the importance she gives to the guidance from her parents about having a career and not do the "*superficial thing and get married*". She implies that she had a choice and says the choice she made to study engineering was thought to be the "*best"* and *obvious*. The fusion of her choice and that of her parents is indicated by her statement. She concludes by saying that "*typically families decide"*, showing her deep belief that parents deciding on their children's professions and children accepting this as being their choice is a societal norm. Hence in her view, her collective agency is normal and typical in her context.

On the other hand, several women also referred to an individual sense of agency stemming from childhood family experiences. Hansa's quotes below exemplify individual agency within her family and societal context. Hansa's perspective on her mother's lack of independence, which she views as *hardships*, was the initial reason for her need for "*independence, financially and emotionally"*.

> *"Anyway, so having seen all of that and the hardships that she had to go through, to your point where did it start and how did it start? I think that kind of somewhere made, I was very clear in my head on the need for independence, financially, emotionally. Financially first and then hence the whole need for emotional independence as well". – Hansa*

In her narrative, Hansa, goes on to express that she saw similar difficulties in lives of her sister, aunts and grandmother. Growing up and seeing other women struggle due to lack of independence, is tracked as the period when her intentions for career started.

Pre-career properties of agency

Table 13 shows that before they start working, in the pre-career phase of their lives, career intentionality is established. In addition, self-reactive, actions in terms of pursuing appropriate educational degrees, and self-reflectiveness assessing personal qualities that will benefit them in their careers, are present in the data.

Table 13 Pre-career properties of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Property of agency	Pre-career
Forethought	**2**
Intentionality	**14**
Self-reactiveness	**13**
Self-reflectiveness	**11**

Aishwarya shares the positive influence of her brother's academic performance, as well as her reaction to her grandmother's claim that women were not as good as men, on her desire to succeed academically.

> *"I think the big thing, which pulled me academically and career-wise was my brother. Because he had done so well in life and because my grandmother said that women were not as good. In my mind that was like, that is the benchmark for me, I need to do as well as him if not better. So, I remember I got 96% in the 12th standard boards and I was like OK fine, I have got as him if not better. So that always pulled me ahead. So then, but I but I didn't really have a notion of what career meant". –*
> *Aishwarya*

Aishwarya reflects on the impact those interactions have had on *pulling* her *ahead*. She implies that she worked hard to achieve top grades in school and hard work and desire to succeed were established in childhood. In the above quote, she says that she did not have a notion of career, but then after reflecting that her strong academic record earned her entry into one of India's top universities, called IIM (Indian Institute of Management) she states that she established a *concept of career*.

> *"I joined the Ahmedabad and I think that has shaped me a lot in my concept of career, of working styles and my concept of working in a group responsibility. I don't think, I knew I was ambitious but I didn't have a notion of how to be a professional until I went to IIM." – Aishwarya*

Aishwarya implies that she acquired professional skills and know-how to succeed in her career. Her desire for a career and her approach to achieving career success were established in her childhood and university years.

Pre-career fragmentation

The women indicate little fragmentation or incoherence in their stories in the pre-career phase. The few tensions that are expressed arise from differing

societal expectations around gender roles. Table 14 shows the number of women expressing fragmentation in each sub-category.

Table 14 Pre-career fragmentation

Data categories	No. of women
Fragmentation	Pre-career
Family related	**0**
Organizational	**0**
Personal	**0**
Societal	**11**

In the face of these misaligned societal norms, the women typically express support and cohesion with their parents in terms of pursuing education and career goals, despite opposing social pressure. Most of the women also stated that they did not consider, or were not aware of, many educational choices. Their awareness was driven by societal discourses and parental opinion that a degree in engineering or medicine was best. In certain communities (primarily Bengalis), the girls were also required to have some musical training.

Renu shares her insights into some of her childhood experiences when her parents behaved towards her in ways that differed from her community's norms towards girls and in doing so they set the stage both instrumentally by providing educational opportunities but also psychologically by instilling a sense of independence.

> *"I was fortunate to have two brothers, one younger, one older.*
> *My mom and dad treated us equally in the sense like they said*
> *if boys have to figure out to be independent, she does too." –*
> *Renu*

Renu's parents treated her and her brothers *"equally"* and in that way encouraged her to be independent. She feels fortunate for equal treatment as that was not the norm in her social setting.

> *"I have to thank my dad for letting me be in a coeducation school because that's another thing that if you continue to stay in a city like (name of small town) in Uttar Pradesh, normally the girls are sent to girl's schools for obvious reasons." – Renu*

Her parents' attitude towards gender equality in raising her carries forward to their choice of schooling for her. Renu clearly states that in a small town in Uttar Pradesh, girls are not normally sent to co-ed schools, but her parents did provide co-education. Hence the fragmentation comes from being at odds with social norms. Many women expressed a similar sense of gratitude to their parents for providing them with educational opportunities, as well as a sense of equality, by going against societal models for raising girls and thereby setting the stage for their professional lives.

Past career

The past-career phase is experienced after university and from the first job until the previous position, role or organization up to but not including the current position or role.

Past career modes of agency

The data in Table 15 show that collective agency continues to be more prominent than individual agency.

Table 15 Past career modes of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Modes of agency	Past career
Collective Agency	**34**
Individual Agency	**14**

Jasmin discusses the influence and wide array of family members who not only live jointly but also jointly contribute to her ability to pursue a career.

> *"So, when we got married, we were staying in a joint family which means my husband's elder uncle, his wife, and mother-in-law were the three senior citizens, so to say, with whom we were staying. And then, my husband's cousins, again three daughters of the elder uncle have been in professional life, so there was a lot of empathy towards challenges that women face. Also, they have seen the kind of growth and they have seen the kind of opportunities that women also get and careers can be fully rewarding. So, there was a precedence in the family, saying this is probably the way things happen in, you know, life today. And therefore, the acceptance of my career, the timings, the travel, the pressure was probably easier for them." – Jasmin*

Jasmin highlights that the senior citizens in her family understood the demands of a career. She stresses the importance of precedence in obtaining family support and this helps her to meet the demands, in terms of the long hours, travel and pressure of her career.

Past career properties of agency

In the past career phases, some intentionality and forethought is present but many participants indicate that self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness is the

primary way they act in the early phases of their careers. Table 16 reflects the number of women expressing each of the properties of agency in the past career phase.

Table 16 Past career properties of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Properties of agency	Past career
Forethought	6
Intentionality	14
Self-reactiveness	32
Self-reflectiveness	29

Abha says she decided to "*jump in"* and to take up an unexpected opportunity for career progression. She was self-reactive in making this move and self-reflective by realising that she took herself out of her "*comfort zone".*

"I thought it was important to take myself out of my comfort zone a bit and rarely does one get an opportunity to build a business from scratch, you know, at an organization like (company name), typically a lot has been established before and sort of following what somebody else has started. So, I thought I would jump in a little bit." – Abha

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The career opportunity for Abha meant moving her family from another country back to India. The position being offered was also a stretch for her in terms of her skills and experience levels. Yet she chose to act on it with a focus on the opportunity to "*build a business*" and to take up an opportunity to start a segment of the business *"from scratch".*

Past career fragmentation

Past career fragmentation is dominated by organizational tensions, followed by family, personal and societal challenges. The number of women expressing the fragmentation in each of its subcategories is shown in Table 17.

Table 17 Past career fragmentation

Data categories	No. of women
Fragmentation	Past career
Family related	**12**
Organizational	**25**
Personal	**7**
Societal	**5**

When looking back, the women seem to express the interconnected nature of their career challenges, but more often focus on the organization rather than the family as the source of their tensions.

Mridu explains her dilemma in dealing with an organizational demand for travel. She had expressed earlier that with the demand of a young family and her in-laws' expectations of her, she was not comfortable travelling early in her career. She does not express her source of tension as the family. She chose not to travel and she knows organizations reward employees who are willing to travel.

"My career was going decent, because I stretched. There was one part which I feel is like my peers would be one level up. Why? Not because you know that they gave in extra, but because they agreed to travel, which is what I could not do. I have been to Bangalore only once and in these 14 years of career otherwise I have not travelled at all. So, you know, that obviously makes an impact on your career. So, I had to sacrifice that." – Mridu

Mridu believes that by taking roles that did not require travel, she made a "*sacrifice*" and this had an "*impact*" on her career progress. Despite her high level of performance, her peers surpassed her in rank, simply because they "*agreed to travel*" for work.

Current career

The current career phase is experienced in the existing position, role and organization.

Current career modes of agency

The data show that collective agency still dominates the modes of agency but there is a notable increase in individual agency. The number of women expressing each mode of agency in the current career is shown in Table 18.

Table 18 Current career modes of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Modes of agency	Current career
Collective Agency	**34**
Individual Agency	**21**

In most narratives, collective agency typically focuses on family support. In the current career phase however, there is an increase in shared goals and support of organizational actors and professional contacts, as illustrated by Sanchali's quote below.

"But just the relationship that has formed and you know my ex-boss, I was reporting to the founder of the start-up and he's still my mentor and a couple of years back I was contemplating another role and I spoke to him and he is the one who told me, who kind of helped me evaluate the pros and cons and after that, I decided to continue to stay at (company name). So, I think that having mentors yourself, as a career woman, is extremely, extremely important." – Sanchali

The long-term relationship that Sanchali has forged with her ex-boss is valuable to her. She counts on his support and guidance to make career decisions. She concludes that having mentors is "*extremely, extremely important"* highlighting how integral these relationships are for a "*career woman"*.

Several women echoed the value of relationships with mentors and guides, who tended to be ex-bosses. Most of them stated that they had rarely taken important steps in their careers without consulting their mentors first.

Current career properties of agency

The current career aspects of the women's narratives were typically dominated by self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. At times the latter led to forethought and specific career plans or a reiteration of career intentionality, typically without a specific plan. The number of women expressing each property of agency in their current career is shown in Table 19.

Table 19 Current career properties of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Properties of agency	Current career
Forethought	11
Intentionality	8
Self-reactiveness	28
Self-reflectiveness	36

Sonia reflects on her current career and considers the areas she needs to improve, actions she needs to take and establishes a plan. Sonia demonstrates self-reactiveness by ensuring that she is "*going through a learning cycle right now*", acquiring skills and experience to further her career goals. She is also self-reflective, as she discusses the career actions she deems necessary to move up into the role of general manager.

> *"What I lack currently is a regional or a global experience because I've always worked in India and worked with a lot of global counterparts but I haven't stayed and worked outside the country because that as a perspective that as a general manager must have. So that is one thing that is my next goal that I have a regional or a global exposure to complete my learning cycle. I am going through a learning cycle right now in this new project, but that is one thing that is amiss and I am very clear that's exactly what I need now and that's what I hear from everybody that this is what you must add to your learning cycle so that I can see the whole picture." – Sonia*

Sonia also hints at forethought as she realises that currently something is "*amiss*" and she will need to take actions to get "*regional or global exposure*". Sonia is actively engaged in her career currently and is keen on progression.

Current career fragmentation

The current career expressions of fragmentation are spread out nearly equally with a slightly greater number in organizational fragmentation. The number of women expressing each category of fragmentation in the current career phase is shown in Table 20.

Table 20 Current career fragmentation

Data categories	No. of women
Fragmentation	Current career
Family related	**18**
Organizational	**27**
Personal	**18**
Societal	**15**

The challenges the women face can be complex and cut across several themes. Overt gender discrimination and the pay gap in organizations came up in several narratives. Sharmila's quote reflects primarily on the lack of gender equality in the Indian business context, and was categorised as such. She demonstrates the tensions arising from a business cultural context that has set goals for a greater number of women in leaderships.

> *"Today whatever is said and done in corporate India you have very few women who are in leading positions and increasing because most companies have become sensitive to the gender diversity rate. So, every company wants at least 30%-35% of the workforce as women. They want more and more women in leadership, but in reality, it's not yet there." – Sharmila*

Sharmila juxtaposes corporate gender diversity goals with what she sees as the reality, and this reality is "*not yet there*". Hence, this seems to raise doubts about the possibility of her attaining a leadership position, and reveals a structural constraint. It also provides a rationale for accepting the slower rate of advancement in her own career.

Current career phases of the narratives also show a sudden rise in personal sources of fragmentation, usually taking the shape of work-life balance dilemmas. Lalita illustrates the various aspects of her life as being like "*balls in the air*" that need to be dealt with simultaneously.

> *"I feel stressed sometimes, kind of with everything happening. I feel that all the balls are in the air. Right? So, between the son and the kid is sick, or I have to travel and I have these late-night calls and myself am not keeping well and there is a lot of … what shall I say homework to be done, despite the help right, so what should be cooked and the whole getting the things and the groceries, and all that…"* – Lalita

Lalita describes her feeling of stress dealing with childcare and self-care, as well as "*homework*" (she and several other women us this term to refer to housework), despite "*help*" (by which she is referring to paid domestic staff). She struggles to reconcile this with work-related "*travel*" and "*late night calls*". Her concerns were echoed by several women. Many others spoke of the added stress related to late night calls occurring due to the time zone differences with their head office staff, colleagues and customers in the United States and Europe.

Future career

The future career phase encompasses expected or planned career actions and beliefs. The data characterises this phase as dominated by collective agency, forethought and relatively low levels of fragmentation.

Future career modes of agency

The prominence of collective agency remains stable throughout the time phases. This continues in the future career phase, as shown in Table 21.

Table 21 Future career modes of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Modes of agency	Future career
Collective Agency	15
Individual Agency	5

Sachi reveals her collective agency, she says that her career goal is to move up to the next level of management in her organization. Her seniors all know about her career ambition. She finds her management "*very supportive"* and describes their efforts to help her get the right opportunities to reach her future career goals.

> *"They all know that I want to pursue (a higher positon in the company). So, any opportunities that they see that I can get on, they really put me in that place…. They are very supportive…They see that I am capable and that's my, that's, I have the potential to play that role. So, they, my boss even up to two levels up, are very supportive. That's another nice thing in (company name) that even up to like executive directors, or, they are very approachable." – Sachi*

Sachi expresses positive emotion by saying that the senior management is "*very approachable"* and that this is another "*nice thing"* about the company. Hence her career actions are a group effort and have a collective quality.

Future career properties of agency

The properties of agency are naturally dominated by forethought, as implied by the future time frame. However, there are also several women who demonstrate self-reactiveness as tactics, and actions being taken now that are framed as actions aimed at a future gain. The number of women expressing the sub-categories of the properties of agency in their future career phase are shown in Table 22.

Table 22 Future career properties of agency

Data categories	No. of women
Properties of agency	Future career
Forethought	24
Intentionality	5
Self-reactiveness	10
Self-reflectiveness	7

Dipti discusses her plan to network and get on LinkedIn, recognizing this as a "*developmental area*" for her career.

"Networking and everything, yeah. So that is something that… I have made conscious decision and going forward, I think I am going to draft out a nice resume and have some time, maybe over the weekend (chuckles) because at work you never get that time. And this is number one on my priority list and second is definitely get on LinkedIn, not so much as to start looking for a new job but they may you know, get networking see what other people in different organisations are doing, what is the new that they bring. That is definitely a developmental area, I recognize that and will definitely do something to change it." –

Dipti

Dipti's quote above, demonstrates that she is bringing self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness and forethought together to benefit her career. She reflects that she hasn't kept up to date on opportunities out there but is now ready to do something to "*change*" that. She wonders what is the "*new*" that others bring, implying the she reflects on what differentiates others and how she can apply that to her own career profile on social media.

Future career fragmentation

The number of women expressing each sub-category of fragmentation in the future career phase is shown in Table 23. Although 18 women expressed personal dilemmas in their current career, as shown in Table 23, only two expected personal fragmentation in their future career.

Table 23 Future career fragmentation

Data categories	No. of women
Fragmentation	Future career
Family related	**6**
Organizational	**6**
Personal	**2**
Societal	**3**

Societal fragmentations were about the growing uncertainty in India's economy and concern about fewer good jobs being available in the future. Organizational concerns for the future were around the long hours required. At times these long hour demands were framed as family related and at other times as an organizational barrier; two women framed them as a personal dilemma.

"I don't know, but I have started feeling over the period of time that there is so much struggle and so much, you know, so much of time I have to give this that sometimes and sometimes we, you know, take our families for granted and all those things when I look around my family and when I will have a kid, I don't know will I, will I be able to give this much push which I am as of now able to give?" – Ruchika

Ruchika illustrates the long hours as a personal dilemma. She highlights the tension from opposing demands on her time from families and organizations. She wonders how she will manage when she has a child. She expresses her future concern and looking ahead, she does not know if she can give the energy or the *"push"* required by organizations that she is able to give currently.

Ruchika discusses her concerns about long hours not only in terms of future childcare but also in terms of the family.

To conclude, temporality as a category is valuable for understanding the shifting ways disaggregated components of agency flow into the narrative. All temporal phases are dominated by collective agency; however, the increase in individual agency in the current career and then its sharp fall in the future, in conjunction with the increase in self-reflectiveness and forethought as well as personal fragmentation in the current career, show the individual pulling away from the collective.

5.2.2 Properties of agency

Bandura's (2006) description of properties as agentic capabilities was helpful to unpack the data which I had initially grouped as "related to career actions and beliefs" (Figure 8). From this data set I drew out and re-grouped data in line with each of the properties of agency suggested by Bandura (2006): forethought, intentionality, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. The operational definitions of the sub-categories of each property of agency are shown in Table 24.

Table 24 Operational definition of properties of agency

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Properties	Intentionality	Expressions of determination and commitment to career
	Self-reactiveness	Tactics and deliberate actions taken towards the career
	Self-reflectiveness	Self-analysis and discussion of the meaning and satisfaction of career pursuits
	Forethought	Encompassing future career-plans and assessment of future options

Table 25 shows the number of women who expressed these properties of agency in each temporal category.

Table 25 Properties of agency data

Data categories	No. of women			
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Intentionality	14	14	8	5
Self-reactiveness	13	32	28	10
Self-reflectiveness	11	29	36	7
Forethought	2	6	11	24

Observing these properties as components of agency revealed the ways in which these capabilities were blended temporally and exposed the flow of agency in the narratives. The data show the temporal shifting of the properties of agency from an equal focus on intentionality and self-reactiveness, to primarily self-reactiveness and finally to forethought.

I will discuss each of the sub-categories of the properties of agency in the following sections of this chapter.

Intentionality

Statements in which they explicitly expressed a determination and commitment to have a career were coded as intentionality. Some women made such statements in relation to the pre-career and past career narratives and a few expressed their goals in relation to the current and future career. The number of women expressing intentionality in each temporal phase is shown in Table 26.

Table 26 Properties of agency - Intentionality

Data categories	No. of women			
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Intentionality	**14**	**14**	**8**	**5**

Pre-career intentionality data are reflected in Jasmin's quote below. She captures the views of several interviewees, that somewhere at the end of their schooling years when they had to make decisions about university, their intentions for a professional life were crystallised. Jasmin's intention of having a career is clear, but the reason for having one is less clear.

"I think as early as probably class 12th, when you are at the cusp of saying what do you really want to do, which graduate course do you want to take? Do you want to take up a professional degree or do you just want to have some basic qualification and pursue something else? So, the thought of a career and the thought of creating something that adds value to some aspect of life, either society or whatever, started off then."
– Jasmin

In Jasmin's quote the option of doing a *"professional degree"* is contrasted with *"some basic qualification"*. There is a clear value judgement on professional being better than anything else. There is no consideration given to other options

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for study that might match more closely with the stated objective of *"creating something that adds value"*. Hence Jasmin's career goals are mingled with higher level goals, but study options are limited to professional degrees.

Later in their narratives, many express concerns that are more instrumental in nature, but the goal to continue in a career remains stable. The expression of intentionality generally shifts from being a positively expressed intention of *wanting a career*, to a negatively expressed intention of *not quitting*. Jasmin illustrates the dual expressions of career intentions in many narratives. Career intentions are conveyed as being both an innate personal desire and a resistant response to perceived external pressure to quit.

After having children, many interviewees expressed tension and stress around childcare and managing the home while working; however, the majority stated that their emotional concern was not to quit their jobs but rather they were focusing on sorting out childcare;

"I was always thinking in direction that I want to keep my career, not that I let me (myself) quit and see, let me arrange this and then go back to something." – Sachi

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Sachi says she *"was always thinking"* of ways to keep the career going and not allowing herself to quit. Although she had presented an unresolved tension around childcare, she expresses clear intentions to continue her career and shows her confidence in her ability to *"arrange this"* somehow.

When it came to expressing their intentionality currently, many suggested that it was not necessary to have specific plans; rather they expressed more spiritual concepts such as, *"accepting things as they are"* – Radhika, *"blind faith"* – Reshma, *"destiny"* – Sarika, or principles and values such as *"work to learn not for money"* – Manvi.

A few women mentioned a specific and immediate career intention or desire but even then, it was framed as dependent on what senior management feels is

suitable. The women often said that they were ready for greater responsibilities and that their management was aware of this.

"I've been telling my management to say that I want to be responsible for bigger geographies and if you find it fits let me know." – Renu

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Very few women spoke of active pursuits for the higher positions or of applying for more senior roles either within the organization or elsewhere. Renu reflects the sentiment echoed in many narratives, they expected their career progression to be managed by their managers and took a largely passive stance.

The overall message from across the data set, was that there was no intention to quit or end their careers in the future. The only scenario that several identified could disrupt their careers was a serious requirement from the family, usually described as major illness with a child.

"I think I will very much continue, there is every indication that I will continue and as I said, it's only in the contingency scenario, but yeah I don't foresee any reason to stop working as such." – Rita

"I would think only my personal circumstances changing would change things." – Gayatri

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Rita and Gayatri illustrate that they will continue their careers unless a personal family challenge forces them to stop. It is not customary in India to speak directly and explicitly of potentially negative things happening to one's family, so indirect language such as "*contingency scenario*" and "*personal circumstances changing*" are used to imply serious challenges in one's life.

The clear theme was the women's intentions to continue in their careers. The motives of many women to pursue both family and professional lives were captured succinctly by Malika's quote below.

"I will be continuing my career along with my family that is my motive." – Malika

---

Career continuation was re-iterated in all the narratives, there is no intention to quit, regardless of the fragmentations experienced and unresolved issues currently being faced. However, this intention is rarely backed up with a clear-cut career plan. In lieu of concrete plans, spiritual expressions are applied in the search for meaning. This seems to leave the original intention of careers intact and defends it from the threats presented from the external context and from within.

Self-reactiveness

Self-reactiveness refers to the tactics and deliberate actions taken to maintain careers. Expressions of self-reactiveness are dominant in the past and current career phases of the narratives. The number of women expressing self-reactiveness in each temporal phase is shown in Table 27.

Table 27 Properties of agency - Self-reactiveness

Data categories	No. of women			
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Self-reactiveness	**13**	**32**	**28**	**10**

Pre-career self-reactiveness focused on parental influence and societal beliefs around suitable educational choices, which would lead to a career. When looking at their past careers, the interviewees discussed actions they had taken towards their careers. Most of them mentioned the importance of taking developmental opportunities that required them to move away from home as

career enhancing. Many expressed their time away has been helpful professionally but challenging personally.

Pre-career self-reactiveness is illustrated by Abha, who explains why she studied engineering, accepting that her choices were limited in India, and it was good for her future even though she hated it.

"You know, just purely because I did well in my undergrad and you know at the time in India if you did well, you either did engineering or medicine. I didn't want to do medicine, so there was no science to it. Actually, I hated it from the moment I did it, but you know I did it to, knowing all along that it was a good training to get and that I was then going to do my MBA. So, I was pretty clear." – Abha

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As the above quote illustrates, there was an acceptance of the course choices and personal preferences were put aside. Even though Abha *"hated it"* she undertook the educational options she was given, believing it to be *"good training"*. The reflection shows the actions taken by the women and the validation of the choices they made were at times based on external measures rather than personal preferences.

Many expressed the importance of learning how to adapt to their changing circumstances resulting from marriage, children, and moving into managerial roles within their organizations.

"So, what I learnt that people will not change, you need to change and adapt to circumstances if you want to grow. So that principle I applied to my professional life and alignment with other functions, alignment with senior leadership, alignment with folks. I've always got excellent feedback from my global teams." – Radhika

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Radhika demonstrates this in her efforts to align with those around her. Hence, an emerging theme from the interviews was the value the women gave to having the ability to adjust to the context and accommodate the beliefs and needs of the people around them as a key skill to their career success. Radhika encapsulates the beliefs of several women who saw *"alignment with folks"*, implying a collective and collaborative approach as a good *"principle"* for professional development.

The current career self-reactiveness was typically around managing work-related politics, being unemotional and multitasking effectively. Many women spoke about taking initiatives and that they were now starting to put themselves forward into leadership roles. They expressed these as new approaches to their careers based on lessons they had learnt from past experiences and observing others succeed. Ruchika, expresses her initiatives and actions in her current role. She expresses confidence and experience and realises that individual efforts to nominate herself will result in leadership roles.

"I bring in the business, I do the networking, I initiate the basic level discussions….I nominated myself, okay, I want to be in this platform and gradually I was told you lead the entire internal sessions." – Ruchika

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Kajal looks ahead to the future and states a specific career plan to be a corporate board member. She has taken steps by selecting mentors to help her achieve her ambition to be on a board. Kajal had struggled through challenges of a bad marriage and divorce and was very concerned about the progress of her special needs child.

"Next, I am looking at you know becoming into a much more seasoned leader in terms of taking on a business role to support the organisation for entire line of business. That is one

line of thinking. I would like to do that for the next 5 years or so.

After that, I would like to, you know, come out and then be on

the board. I am very keen on being on board. I have picked up

a few mentors outside who are on boards." – Kajal

Kajal expresses a strong desire to succeed in her career. Although she had instrumental support from her mother, she needed to fund special education for her son and had only herself to rely on for financial support. Most of the other women who expressed the desire to leverage their experience and take on greater leadership roles, did not have a concrete plan and did not identify a next position as clearly as Kajal does. Kajal had proactively developed a network of mentors outside her organization to guide and support her into becoming a board member. Only a handful of women in this data set had taken such concrete steps to advance their careers.

Most women expected to make compromises on their choices around career pursuits in the future. They talked about needing jobs that limited travel, were closer to home and provided flexible work arrangements. Some women felt that even if they could find a way to manage childcare without giving up their careers, they felt they might need to compromise on their careers for eldercare of in-laws. It was less common to rely on hired help for eldercare than for childcare.

Self-reflectiveness

Self-reflective expressions were around self-analysis around the meaning and satisfaction of career pursuits. Most women expressed self-reflective data related to the past and current career. The number of women expressing self-reflectiveness in each temporal phase is shown in Table 28.

Table 28 Properties of agency- Self-reflectiveness

Data categories	No. of women			
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Self-reflectiveness	**11**	**29**	**36**	**7**

The pre-career self-reflectiveness was illustrated by childhood experiences of their parents' feedback and their academic performance in school seemed to have an impact on their self-analysis and understanding of their qualities which would be significant to their careers. In addition, their ability to help their parents and be financially independent had great value to them. Hence the opinions and validations of others were reflected in their analysis of themselves.

"… talking about leadership, a part of it is inborn because amongst me and my sibling my parents always thought I was the go-getter in the family, I was someone who was very clear with my thought process." – Radhika

As Radhika demonstrates, most of the women expressed a sense that they were meant to be successful and this was identified by their families very early on. She was the *"go-getter"* in the family and leadership was *"inborn".*

Past career self-reflectiveness highlighted developmental opportunities in this category. Generally, the women emphasised the value of having worked on key strategic projects or in interesting overseas positions.

"Getting that international exposure at that early experience is rare….so by the time I came back it was like almost four to five years' experience with me, and then, I got an opportunity to become project manager." – Mala

Mala discusses the value of gaining "*international exposure*" from an overseas assignment, most of the women gave concrete examples of developmental opportunities early in their careers which they credit with their success. Very few of them took direct credit for the success and rarely framed the career success as resulting from their professional skills or performance.

Their current careers were reflected upon as a source of pride and satisfaction in themselves as well as financial independence and ability to take care of their parents.

"Independence is really appealing, you know, and doing something for others. Or if my parents have done so much for me, if I can contribute in any way you know, that I can go give them a nice gift, sponsor something. It feels really nice. It feels really good." – Dipti

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There is a very clear and deep expression here on personal satisfaction felt by Dipti in her career. Her ability to give back to her parents, *"feels really nice"* and *"feels really good"* illustrates the ways in which she experiences that satisfaction.

"I enjoy my work, it gives me happiness, I do a good job I feel rewarded and it gives me gross amounts of self-confidence, right." – Pia

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Pia illustrates the "*happiness*" and "*self-confidence*" women's careers provide. Most of the narratives indicated an underlying sense of accomplishment and personal fulfilment. These were not necessarily expressed as tools for editing narrative fragmentation, rather these statements had a stand-alone quality, a kind of inherent motivation that would not be swayed by the challenges

presented, nor did they seem to serve the narrative purpose of editing an incoherent aspect of the story being told.

The self-reflections for the future focused on making the most of the privileges they had received so far. It was about reflecting on the feeling of fatigue and stagnation to think of ways to make their careers meaningful again. For some it was about finding careers that would satisfy higher level needs of contributing to society and for others it was about being bold in future career actions.

"I have always got tremendous personal satisfaction from my work you know from my commitment so that's beginning to dull and then I feel when that happens, it's time to really make a big move so I know it' a big risk that I'm taking." – Sunita

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Sunita was disappointed in her current position and current management teams. She said she had recently become unhappy and her work had become *"dull"* so she was seriously considering an offer from another smaller and newer organization, even though in her eyes it might be a "*big risk*". The pursuit of happiness and interesting tasks from their work comes across in most of the narratives.

Many expressed the future goal is to increase work satisfaction and they were usually ready for change if required. However, very few seemed to have an objective career plan in place.

Forethought

The forethought category captures the ways in which the women reconcile learning from the past and project the learning into present actions and future career expectations. The number of women expressing forethought in each temporal phase is shown in Table 29.

Table 29 Properties of agency- Forethought

Data categories	No. of women			
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Forethought	2	6	11	24

The number of women expressing forethought increases in the current career and future career categories. In their current career the women spotlight the career actions they are taking and unresolved dilemmas around reconciling family and work life. The future thoughts focus on carrying on in their careers. Many women were quite optimistic about career progress.

An analysis of these data shows that only a few women described their pre-career thoughts as focused on the process of enrolling in acceptable educational programmes that would lead to a career. A few mentioned forethought in their past career and this was focused on issues around work-related travel, moving away from families for jobs and feedback from their bosses as being developmental opportunities. In their current career the focus is on the career actions they are taking and unresolved dilemmas around reconciling family and work life. The future thoughts centre on reiterating the need to carry on in their careers, despite the challenges.

Aditi's quote below reflects on her thoughts prior to graduating from business school. She discusses the impact of her social and family environment which encouraged her to go into an MBA programme directly after completing her undergraduate degree without any clear career plan as such.

Aditi's quote demonstrates the career influencing choices were being made without a specific career plan and without any career experience. The wisdom of doing certain university degrees and the faith that they would lead to stable and financially secure careers, was often expressed as the way in which interviewees and their families took steps towards a career without any concrete career plan or much knowledge and experience as such. This reflects the newness of managerial careers as options for middle class women in India and the sense that they are entering uncharted territory. Despite a lack of

knowledge on the various career options, all the effort was put into obtaining the right academic qualification.

> *"No there was no plan, there was just no plan and I think part of that also has to do with, you know, just the fact that I had no work experience." – Aditi*

Aditi reflects that she had no plan and not enough experience to a make plans early in her career. Forethought around developing soft skills and ideal career trajectory choices happened after they started their first jobs. There is a pattern in the narratives of the women discovering, and reflecting more about succeeding in, careers after they have started working. Early work experiences and feedback helped them to develop more explicit thoughts around their careers.

Hansa reflects on negative feedback that she received early in her career and that opened her eyes to the importance of impression management and what she referred to as politics and corporate maturity.

> *"All of the good stuff was happening and I got a pretty horrible rating which said while no issues with work, work is fine, you are ramping up fair, but how you carry yourself, how you conduct, you know, just whole fun attitude that you have to yourself given an impression that you are someone who is more careless… .while careless I don't think was the word but they said that if there was a serious like an engagement which is more intense and has a set of senior partners, etc. would you be the first choice, maybe not because we are not necessarily sure on how you will be able to conduct yourself. That kind of took me and nobody had ever given that kind of feedback. I didn't even know that was like a blind spot." – Hansa*

Hansa demonstrates a reflection on a sense of naivety and ignorance, a *"blind spot"* in the professional life during the early phases of her career. She shows that feedback and learning from the past are reflections for today.

Malika states her expectations for a promotion as being imminent and reflects that she is due a promotion and she had already taken up the extra responsibilities in anticipation of it.

"I have a career plan here, because you know right now I think the level I am, since I am the same level from last two and a half years. So, I am looking for a promotion to this level so that, you know, though I am already taking the additional responsibility, which generally my colleagues have at a higher level, so I am expecting that I should get it very soon that's the promise from the management." – Malika

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Like Malika, several women felt that taking on *"additional responsibilities"* would assure career progress in the near very future. Their expectations for a promotion were contingent upon their performance and on promises from management. There was faith in the system and that their performance history and management support would lead to progress. The faith in the future was often supported by enthusiasm about their future roles.

"To be honest, once you become a partner, you actually go back to actually starting out again, so it's, It's I think the first two years will be dealing with that and whenever I have, you know I am very, I think what excites me, excites me personally are goals and this was a big goal and that's kept me going for like two years, I have to just set a new goal." – Gayatri

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Gayatri's thoughts on her future are impacted on by her experience to date and by her acknowledgment of the satisfaction of knowing that she will be made up to partner in her firm in the next round. Like Gayatri, most women had an optimistic attitude about more senior roles and prepared to work hard and deal with the challenges of *"starting out again"*, and hence the prospect of change for growth in all the stories was a positive one.

To conclude the findings around the properties of agency, when looked at in its disaggregated components, reveals a temporal pattern. Intentionality is more likely to be expressed in the pre-career and past career phases, while self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness appear in the past and current phases, followed by forethought featuring most intensely in the future.

5.2.3 Modes of agency

Modes of agency refer to the relational ways in which agency is exercised. Bandura (2006) refers to three modes: First, individual agency focusing on the capacity of the self to undertake career actions; Second, collective agency is enacted in actions and beliefs shared with others; and Third, proxy agency is a socially mediated mode in which the career actions are taken by influencing others to act on their behalf. In this study, I did not find any references that matched proxy agency. Hence, I have analysed two of the three modes: collective and individual, defined in Table 30.

Table 30 Operational definition of modes of agency

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Modes	Collective	Career related actions and beliefs shared with others and framed as interdependent with others
	Individual	Clearly individualistic focused on the capacity of the self to undertake career actions

Table 31summarises the number of women expressing each mode of agency in each temporal phase of their narratives.

Table 31 Modes of agency data

Data categories	No. of women			
Modes of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Collective Agency	**28**	**34**	**34**	**15**
Individual Agency	**10**	**14**	**21**	**5**

Collective agency is expressed more often than individual agency throughout. However, individual agency increases as the narrative shifts to the current career, implying a shift in expectation by many women to act individually without the support of others. The number of women expressing individual agency falls again into the future career narrative.

Collective agency

Agentic expressions around career actions are more likely to involve the support of others and are most frequently expressed in the past career and current career phases of the narratives. The number of women expressing collective agency in each temporal phase is shown in Table 32.

Table 32 Modes of agency – Collective

Data categories	No. of women			
Modes of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Collective Agency	**28**	**34**	**34**	**15**

The expressions of collective agency typically shift from being related to parents in pre-careers, family and husband in past careers, to organizational relationships in the current and future careers.

"They pushed me to do well for myself, specifically my mother,
So, she's my actual motivation to do what I did in my life
whether it's small or whether it's big but I think she's the one
who drove me to this." – Reshma

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Reshma expresses the importance of her mother's encouragement, which she expresses as being pushed and driven as her motivation for everything in her life including her focus on her career. She gives equal importance to her mother's role as she does to her own efforts in pursuing a career.

"I always wanted to be in advertising really, just follow my father's footsteps…. He encouraged me to go speak to multiple people in fact spoke to a principle of a college, and MBA college and he said that you know, keep it broad so you emerge really knowing that this is your calling. So, starting off with something like sales could always help you even if you want to go into advertising so I said OK, you know I, that's how I got into sales and loved it." – Samira

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Samira further demonstrates the role of parents in establishing career directions. She follows in her "*father's footsteps"* in making her career choice. She expresses her satisfaction in taking his guidance on how to develop her career and reflects that she "*loved it"*, showing the fusion of choice, as well as the acceptance and satisfaction of decisions made with collective agency in careers.

The pre-career collective agency category is dominated by parents' opinions and thoughts about the women's careers. These opinions and thoughts are taken on board quite uncritically by women with a belief that the parents' views reflected the right approach to careers. Their fathers' thoughts were instrumental in deciding which subjects to study and which aspects of their personalities to leverage to develop a successful career.

"So, my father wasn't keen even then because he knew I am not for regimentalisation. You know, I don't like structures and I'm not kind of, you know, don't have fetish for discipline or

anything like that and he knew with my kind of free spirit, and I would maybe feel claustrophobic, even in the air force, so he kind of tried to dissuade me." – Sarika

Sarika discusses her father's reaction to her desire to follow in his footsteps and join the armed forces; although she did go on to join the air force, she subsequently left and changed professions, and acknowledged her father's assessment of her *"free spirit"* as a reason for leaving a highly-regimented work environment, for a career in IT where she had more freedom and flexibility.

"I think it really helped that my father recognized that I was this introvert and gave me a lot experiences through my education that really got me out of my shell. Not really changing me and who I am, but really being able to handle myself." – Sameera

Sameera expresses her gratitude and her father's role in helping her develop her interpersonal skills. She also says that she grew up with her father as her *"role model"*.

"So, I was the first person, because my dad was supportive of me and he never let me feel I was different, and I went on to study in a college outside." – Aishwarya

Similarly, Aishwarya credits her dad for her career, as she was the first woman in her family to have a career outside the home and the first to attend college away from home.

Mothers were also mentioned frequently as related on an emotional level and as motivational in establishing career intentions. They refer to their mothers when making meaning of career pursuits and challenges, and developing intentions for a career.

"I was lucky to have a mother who was pushing me." – Pia

Pia expresses her gratitude to her mother by saying that she was *"lucky"* to have been *"pushed"* to go into a professional career path by her mother.

Many refer to their mothers as teaching them how to get through difficulties.

"It was my mother's genes of a lot of patience which taught me that failures are stepping stones to success, so she always felt that if you haven't really failed or if you haven't really tasted the defeat, the success will not be as sweet, so it's okay to be standing third. It's ok to not always get the first prize and so don't worry." – Radhika

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Radhika explains her attitude to overcoming *"failures"* helped her to get through many challenges in her work life and she credits this to her *"mother's genes"*. Radhika highlights the way in which she and her mother are interconnected and credits her mother's genetics for her professional advancement.

Several women talked about their mothers expressing frustration, in not having been allowed to work, as a generational barrier and encouraging their daughters who were usually the first generation of women with the choice to go ahead and work.

"She is like we have spent our lives god knows doing what, like it is a gratitude-less, it is a thank-less job at the end of the day. Right, don't do that with yourself." – Meera

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Meera states that her mother did not feel her role as a homemaker was appreciated and encouraged her daughter not to be a homemaker as it was a *"gratitude-less", "thank-less job"*. Her mother had not enjoyed her role and

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seemed to have felt exploited, her advice to her daughter Meera was *"don't do that to yourself"*, she was making Meera conscious of having a choice not to be a homemaker.

Past career collective agency reflected on the early careers of the women. Most often the women expressed the value of the emotional and instrumental support of parents and husbands. In several cases, it was more than support, in fact parents and husbands were an integral part of their career related decisions.

"So, my mom, typical Indian mother said no, 2 siblings are a must, …… I said ok so long as you are sure you are going to help me bring up the baby I am okay, so anyways I had the baby." – Sarika

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Sarika's mother insisted on her having a second child and maintaining a career and was fully prepared to provide the childcare required to enable that. Due to the collective career goal her mother shared with Sarika, she was able pursue career opportunities without childcare tensions. The mother was sufficiently invested in Sarika's career that she committed to childcare for an indefinite period.

Current career collective agency demonstrated a focus on the distinct connections with women's fathers, husbands, as well as bosses and colleagues in terms of their career agency.

"So, he wasn't much concerned about my salary and things, he knew that I am kind of too much of a free-spirited person to be sitting at home as a homemaker or housewife." – Sarika

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Sarika demonstrates how the views of others about her nature and its impact on her career are aligned. She had initially credited her father for recognizing her *"free spirit"* in her youth and guiding her career accordingly. Later she credits

her husband for seeing that same "*free spirited*" nature in her. In recognizing her nature, he encouraged her to keep her job even it meant they would live apart. Her husband knew that when he had to move for work, she was better of keeping her job rather than for quitting and moving with him to another smaller town where she was unlikely to find comparable employment. It seems her father and her husband knew the types of jobs that would suit her. She demonstrates a collective agentic view of herself and her career, she seems to agree with her father and her husband and their opinions mattered to her.

".. he said okay right as if that's going to happen. So, he knows, that I will be miserable, knowing me and he has always pushed me, and we have had discussions, he said you must go for this course you know you must go and do this course or do this or work late hours, if it needs to, like I have to go to Bombay next week he said, I guess I won't travel, I will be with the baby and he said you go you know." – Lalita

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Similarly, Lalita, feels support and engagement from her husband for her career pursuits. She reflects on her husband's cooperative feedback when she has considered quitting or when she needs to travel for work. Lalita stresses how integral her husband is to her career success. He curtails his own work travel to "*be with the baby*" so that she can carry out her professional duties. In addition to the husband, others from their work contexts play instrumental roles in their current career agency.

"Yes, the work environment, you know, your peers, your manager, they definitely have a role to play. So, I feel really blessed. I have got great managers to work with." – Dipti

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Dipti acknowledges the *"role"* of professional colleagues and the supportive organizational context in her career. Several participants felt that, despite family

constraints, they could continue their careers due to enabling factors in their organizations, contingent upon them achieving the desired performance at work.

"…actually, whatever is happening is more of my family constraints. Because the kind of flexibility I am offered I think that much any organisation can offer…. For example, I choose my time, I prefer to come early, leave early, that is my choice. Nobody is questioning me for that. Obviously whatever responsibility I have. I have to deliver." – Mala

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Mala highlights the sense of having a *"choice"* on how to work and this choice without *"questioning"* enables her to overcome her *"family constraints"*. She acknowledges her organization's support, both structural and cultural, for not questioning her coming early, or leaving early as an enabler for her career, while she casts her family as a source of "*constraint*s".

The collective agency in their future career is marked by faith in the role of others and especially in the supportive environment of their organizations to enable the women to act on behalf of their careers, but this is framed as being contingent upon them doing their share of hard work.

"... there is a clear path and yes I will enjoy if I continue to work hard, I know the motors in the system will help me and will get me there." – Aishwarya

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Aishwarya stresses her faith and belief in a *"clear path"* and the *"motors of the system"* helping her if she continues to *"work hard"*. Hence the women, demonstrate a strong connection to others and to their organizations as an interrelated sense of agency throughout their careers.

Individual agency

Individual agency is defined as clearly individualistic in nature, focusing more on the capacity of the self and less on others to undertake career actions. The number of women expressing individual agency in each temporal phase is shown in Table 33.

Table 33 Modes of agency – Individual

Data categories	No. of women			
Modes of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Individual Agency	**10**	**14**	**21**	**5**

Individual agency was produced in far fewer cases than collective agency and seemed more present in the narratives of women from families without financial means or without interest or knowledge about professional options, and by being rewarded for individual actions in the workplace.

Pre-career individual agency was expressed by many women as some form of support from parents, a few mentioned coming from families that did not have any professional background or interest. Others seemed to have developed individual agency because of marital difficulties and one due to the dual challenge of her husband's adultery and having a child with mental health issues. Circumstances such as these highlighted the case of women in unconventional family structures or those without family support. This meant that the women needed to develop their career plans and take actions independently.

This is illustrated by the case of Janaki, who was in a difficult arranged marriage and desperately wanted a divorce, despite a lack of support for divorce from her family. She did not work and did not have the intention to work when she got married, until she discovered her husband's adultery. To get divorced she needed to support herself, as she could not expect any financial support from her husband or her parents. To work, she needed an education which she needed to fund. She made career plans to work in IT after doing some research on ideal career paths for herself. As is typical in Indian marriages, she was

given jewellery by her parents as part of her dowry which she secretly sold to pay for her education to lead to a professional path. She did not reveal her plans to anyone, until she was accepted into an appropriate programme of study. In the interview, she says she regrets not having studied for a professional career before marriage.

> *"Oh, I wish I had studied a bit more, so that I could have got in a professional career… I self-funded, self-funded, I had a lot of financial challenges and it was funded by selling my own jewellery,…. I sat for the entrance exam, sat for the interview, when I got through, when I got selected that's the time when I broke the news to everybody." – Janaki*

Janaki conveys the difficulties a woman might face trying to start a career after marriage, especially if the marriage is not a happy one. Her aim for this career is to establish self-reliance and escape the marriage. Ironically, she uses the jewellery that was part of her dowry (a long-standing Indian tradition) to fund her education and leave the marriage. In other cases, growing up without much money led to the need to start working which seemed to contribute to individualistic career decisions.

> *"My father worked in the government, it's not as if we had money flowing around, right. So, I thought its best to get, become independent, so I started working." – Sonali*

Sonali indicates that the lack of money in her family was an impetus for her to develop a career and *"become independent"*, and hence rely on herself in an individualistic way without expectations of support from others.

Past career individual agency was more likely to be expressed by the women who were either divorced or unmarried. At the time of the interview Binita was

engaged to be married, she had reflected throughout her interview on her personal skills and drive as the reasons for success. She was proud of the fact that she had overcome parental restrictions and their ignorance around professional life and that she had received an award from her organization for her performance.

"I did so well that the CEO of my company actually came straight up and gave me an award, which is like for the only very very top performing people. So, I think it's just the own individual drive that I think sometimes gets you through situations." – Binita

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Binita was getting married within a few days of the interview and seemed to believe that this would hinder her progress; she wondered, with some concern, how she would work around her husband's and mother-in-law's needs. However, she also said that she was already past the appropriate age for getting married and this was her chance to give it a go. Although she classified her upcoming marriage as a love marriage, she had met her fiancé only a few times and had been introduced to him by a family member. He lived overseas, she would be moving abroad to live with him because she felt that she had waited long enough to get married. Her organization had found her an opportunity in their office abroad and in that way, they expressed to her that they valued her, which she credited to her *"individual drive".*

Current career individual agency is characterised by narrating how experience and success results in confidence and acceptance of the individuals' own ability to take responsibility, and comfort in expressing their sense of ownership over the field of work.

"I have started positioning myself, yes, this is my sector, I am the one who's doing it and now I am more vocal about it." – Ruchika

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"I take feedback quite constructively and I act upon it." – Hansa

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Ruchika and Hansa illustrate the ways in which women focus on their own skills and actions as drivers of their careers. The focus on the individuals' actions and recognition of their accomplishments takes on a larger role when recounting their current career, most of the stories become about their own achievements, skills and experience.

"You are on your own, you have to do it yourself." – Jasmin

A few women such as Jasmin expressed the challenge of individual agency, they voiced feeling perhaps a little vulnerable, as being on their own and having to take career decisions quite independently.

In these cases, individual agency was based on necessity as well as self-confidence and belief that their individual leadership skills and technical knowledge would take their careers forward.

In conclusion, collective agency and the influence of others are present throughout all the narratives. Individual agency usually arises from necessity and the realisation that others may not be able to provide the support that was expected of them. Individual agency seems to intensify around the same time as self-reflectiveness intensifies.

5.2.4 Fragmentation

Through narrative discontinuities, expression of tensions from different perspectives and editing of incoherence, the women reflect aspects of their stories that are fragmented. Initially fragmentation is low and there is a high degree of coherence in their career stories. Pre-career tensions are primarily societal. Increasing with time the tensions and dilemmas stem mainly from the organizations in the past and current career parts of their narratives. Then looking forward again the expectation of fragmentations decreases overall and

is expected to arise primarily from the family and organizational aspects of their lives. The sub-categories of fragmentation are described in Table 34.

Table 34 Operational definition of fragmentation

Aggregate categories	Sub-categories	Operational definition
Fragmentation	Family	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originates from family demands, lack of support by family, experiences of discrimination from family
	Organizational	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originates from organizational demands or lack of support, experiences of discrimination from the organization
	Personal	Tensions and incoherence are personal dilemmas and struggles to fulfil opposing roles, trade-offs and compromises are difficult for the individual to assess and emotional discomfort is expressed
	Societal	Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originate from the wider social context such as the media and cultural norms being different from the individual's activities and plans

Fragmentation data show a shift in terms of the primary sources of tensions and incoherence. As shown in Table 35, fragmentation is expressed by only 11 women in the pre-career phase and it focuses on tensions arising from society. The focus shifts to organizational tensions and then reduces significantly, and is similarly distributed across all sources in the future career.

Table 35 Fragmentation data

Data categories	No. of women			
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Family related	0	12	18	6
Organizational	0	25	27	6
Personal	0	7	18	2
Societal	11	5	15	3

Each of the fragmentation sources are discussed below in further detail.

Family

Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originating from family demands, lack of support by family, experiences of discrimination from family were categorised as family related. Family related fragmentation does not appear in the pre-career parts of the narrative. However, it increases in the past and current careers then decreases again in the future career phase. A few women discussed the tension they feel from experiencing the gaps between expected career actions and family needs. These differences are typically framed as being let down by their families and having to choose between their family's needs and personal career pursuits, despite having been supported by families earlier on. The women begin to realise that despite a general support for their career intentions, there is less support for the actions that the career entails, as career actions result in a reduced capacity to fulfil family duties. The number of women expressing family related fragmentation in each temporal phase is shown in Table 36.

Table 36 Fragmentation – Family related

Data categories	No. of women			
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Family related	0	12	18	6

Family related fragmentation is expressed by most women in the past and current career phases. None of the women voice any career related tension with their families in the pre-career phase and only a few expect family related fragmentation in the future.

> *"So, it's very strange you know the whole issue of a daughter versus a daughter in-law comes in. So, she was always there for my sister-in-law. When her daughter needed her to come and look after, when my sister-in-law had to do long travels in*

Sharmila expresses her feelings of frustration with her mother-in-law's double standards. She shares insights into ways in which daughter's careers might be supported by parents while daughters-in-law are expected to prioritize homemaking. Sharmila illustrates the sense of betrayal from the cultural norms, which provide varying opportunities to the same woman. The expectations of her and the gender norm suddenly change when she shifts her status from daughter to daughter-in-law. This seems irreconcilable in her story.

Mothers are often cast as enablers but they are not always fully supportive of their daughter's careers as life progresses. Although mothers seem to encourage their daughters to have careers and be independent, they seem to withdraw this support when societal pressure around gender norms is faced by their daughters requires an investment of time away from family. They seem to encourage their daughters then to resolve the difference by pulling back from careers and complying to family demands.

Renu describes her mother as putting others before herself and expecting this of her daughter. Renu labels society's expectations of girls as the *"general compliance"* that her mother wanted her to adhere to. She describes her mother as a *"please-all personality"*, and then she says, *"I am not my mom, I am not a please-all, I have come to realize that"*. So she feels in opposition and in conflict with her mother's requirements, she also seems to have realised this recently.

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The realisation of the variance between her behaviour and her mother's expectations causes a narrative fragmentation, she struggles to relieve the sense of disconnect and resentment she voices.

Many women express a sense of both being let down by their mothers and mothers-in-law and in turn realising that in continuing their career pursuits they were letting their mothers and mothers-in-law down as well. This seems to be a difficult realisation and one without a resolution.

Organizational

These were tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originating from organizational demands or lack of support, experiences of discrimination from the organization. The number of women expressing organizational fragmentation in each temporal phase is shown in Table 37. The number of women conveying organizational fragmentation is mostly in the past and current career. It is 0 in pre-career and decreases significantly in the future career phases of their narratives.

Table 37 Fragmentation – Organizational

Data categories	No. of women			
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Organizational	**0**	**25**	**27**	**6**

Organizational fragmentation typically comes from long hours and at times from discrimination.

"I was the only non-white female director on the board or in fact on the leadership team"; "I was often felt talked down to"; "It was extremely imbalanced in terms of responsibilities and liabilities"; "My initial legal advice from lawyers is that what they're doing is completely illegal and discriminatory and possibly on gender and racial grounds." – Rita

Rita explains that she is pursuing legal action against her previous employer due to their discriminatory treatment of her. She tells of the surprise and sense of discontinuity she felt from being treated disrespectfully after becoming the first *"non-white female director"* in a leadership position in an MNC. She describes her dismay at being given the title and the duties without adequate support or appropriate pay, and of being ignored by her American and British colleagues during global team meetings.

"I said I don't drink. As I said, I'm a religious person it was a Thursday, I don't drink on Thursdays so I said I don't drink on Thursdays. He said oh don't act like a saint woman in… and he's an American. He's not someone who belongs to an orthodox Kashmiri village, Indian village. He's from a very very developed country like United States of America so he comes and tells me that oh come on don't act like a saint. We know that women in corporate world are all about. I said what are they all about? He kept quiet." – Reshma

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In another cross-cultural encounter, Reshma describes a comment which she interpreted as sexual harassment by her American team leader during an informal gathering of work colleagues in a bar. She conveys her surprise at the lack of respect and discrimination from someone from a *"very very developed country"*. So, she expects people from America to behave more equally towards women than she expects people from an Indian village to do. She does not seem to realise that the contemporary Hindu approach to fasting by giving up certain foods on certain days would have no significance to those unfamiliar with Indian cultural norms. She then goes on to describe her surprise and sense of discontinuity at the response from the international HR team, who did not respect her either.

> *"The India team was very very supportive, they wrote to the international HR team. The international HR team calls me up and sent me the mail actually to me, that you belong to India which is slightly conservative and (name of American male colleague) was in a very entertainment mood that night, so that's why he said, so you should not take it otherwise. When that mail came to me I tore into the HR lady and I cc'ed my HR head. I said I'm not going to take this shit. He was asked to leave."* – Reshma

She felt that the HR team She finally received support from her Indian HR team and was relieved that the man who had harassed her was asked to leave the company. Despite different expectations towards gender equality from her Western male, she is suspicious of the International team's fairness. She is comforted by her non-Indian team's support. She seems to imply that the Indian HR team treated her with more respect than the International HR team.

> *"So, even before a woman walks in, if she is career minded, if she is single and hasn't married and she has this whole group of people reporting to her, you know, she is almost typecasted as this person who [chuckles] it must be this, absolute tyrant, right?"* – Sameera

The tensions of cross-cultural interactions are one source of organizational fragmentation. In other cases, the women realise after reaching senior positions that they are in fact not being treated appropriately or paid fairly. Sameera describes her feeling of being *"typecasted"* as a *"tyrant",* by Indian colleagues particularly because she is single.

Many women described paradoxes in their contexts, on the one hand they describe being honoured for their skills and on the other hand they express

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being disrespected for their gender, race, and being too young in their organizational contexts. Others state that after a long and successful career path, they begin to experience the *"glass ceiling"* once they reach senior positions*.*

"I think the larger point that I stress here, is that it was the first time that I found a glass ceiling, not because of my husband, not because of society, but really not because my kids are grown up, so I have more time now than I have ever had, right? So, it was really company driven and I think as they get more senior, the mindsets remain, it's very much an old-school boys' network. The boys' network still remains and the girls don't get ahead as much unless you are really one of those aggressive, and the whole thing about you will be called bossy and they will be called aggressive etc. so I think that's where the rubber hits the road." – Pia

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Pia describes the barriers she faces now from the male dominated networks that seem to keep her out of top management. Pia was one of the few women who used the term *"glass ceiling"*, but she expresses the gender bias that a few other women also described. She feels that her efforts and leadership activities in the organization result in her being labelled *"bossy"* and *"aggressive".* She uses the expression *"that's where the rubber hits the road"* to highlight her belief that it is this *"boys' network"* that ultimately manifests the discrimination and might just succeed in impeding her progress. Pia highlights that the fragmentation is not around her intention to have a career, but around the actions she is required to take to invest in her career. Her efforts encounter resistance from the organizational context.

Looking to the future career, most women describe a tension around being able to fulfil the long hours and travel that will be expected from them. They say they do not wish to stop working, and feel frustrated about being stagnant but do not

seem to know how they will manage the hours required in more senior positions.

> *"I know if I go to the next level I see the way my boss is working day and night, I don't think I can do that." – Saanvi*

When asked if she had discussed her concerns with her management or with the HR staff in the organization, Saanvi responded:

> *"No, there is no outlet. I don't know, there is no HR intervention at that scale happening at all. We have a tool, I don't know whether you are aware. If you have an issue you go and talk to the tool, raise a case. There is no human out there, no human voice." – Saanvi*

Saanvi describes the tensions coming from more than the long hours; they also come, for many, from not having anyone to talk to about the problem. Hence, organizational fragmentation arises from cross-cultural interactions, feeling alone and unheard, and worrying about the long working hours.

Organizational fragmentation also arises through the disbelief of facing discrimination from colleagues. Tensions are caused by a sense of disconnect between the position achieved and the challenges they are beginning to experience. Many of the women look forward but see only longer working hours and increasing prejudice. They express these challenges as being unresolved and possibly unmanageable.

Personal

Personal fragmentation are tensions and incoherence are personal dilemmas and struggles to fulfil opposing roles, trade-offs, compromises are difficult for the individual to assess and emotional discomfort is expressed. The number of

women expressing personal fragmentations in each temporal phase is shown in Table 38. Fragmentations of a personal nature occur primarily in the past and current career phases.

Table 38 Fragmentation – Personal

Data categories	No. of women			
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Personal	**0**	**7**	**18**	**2**

Fragmentation data were coded as a personal dilemma if they were expressed as a career challenge that required a personal solution, such as more acceptance, or change of mindset, as opposed to an external solution, such as changing organizations, moving away from family, obtaining a divorce. None of the women expressed any personal dilemmas or tensions in the pre-career phase and only two expressed it in future career discussions.

Several women seemed to be asking themselves if they can go on with things as they are, given the tensions from family care responsibilities, long hours, combined with a desire to do something more meaningful. Very rarely were these tensions and dilemmas responded to within the narrative with concrete plans of action. Instead the desire to continue the career was clearly reiterated and if a reason were given it was typically around the value of the career in terms of personal satisfaction and financial independence, not in terms of ways to resolve the tensions. In the personal dilemmas, the women begin to transfer the resistance encounters in their career actions to questioning if their career intentions can continue.

In the current career, there were few concrete examples of actions that they were taking towards advancing their careers. The focus was on destiny and faith to take them forward.

"Like I don't remember the last time I sat and did whitespace thinking to say let me think of 10 crazy ideas simply because I

Several women expressed feeling too tired and too busy to think through their career actions but rather their effort was to do the best they could to *"navigate"* what Sunita refers to as a *"huge, huge ocean"*.

The sense of fatigue and feeling of being overwhelmed by long hours was evident in many cases. There were varying degrees of fatigue, and some expressed the challenges in terms of workplace demands while others expressed them in terms coping with household and family care requirements.

The actions for the future centred around leveraging and optimizing their professional relationships. Several women expressed concerns about how everything will be managed going forward. They expected to have to make career compromises in terms of time spent at work because increasing family demands would make it difficult to give as much time to work as would be required. Binita who was the only engaged to be married woman in the sample, was thinking ahead about her career actions after marriage. The expectation of a conflict in work and family challenges was framed with the acceptance of a need to make compromises across many narratives. Also, the boundary between self and family is blurred.

Binita had demonstrated a high degree of individuality and self-reliance in her career narrative, but now looking forward she was putting herself and family in one group sitting in opposition to the potential demands of work.

> *"I can't do this anymore. Like every day here has been a struggle, like I can't put these hours. I work in the car when I am coming in the morning, I have a one-and-a-half-hour drive, I am working in the car, on the phone, I am sleeping with work, I get up at night, I have some client issue in my head. I just want a break from all that, I just can't do this." – Meera*

Meera's fatigue and despair are reflected in this description of the long hours she puts in and long commute she endures. She says she *"can't do this any more"* but then later, she reflects a desire to go on anyway. As shown in the quote below, the incoherence is edited with acceptance of the challenges, without a concrete plan; however, the original intention to have a career is maintained.

Meera whose assessment of her current situation is quite dire, surprisingly goes on to state that her intention is not to quit, despite the challenges.

> *"Like having everything just seems not so possible at least in the current scenario. So, I can still, it's not like I will stop working, but the trajectory will be different." – Meera.*

Although she did not elaborate on her plans as to how things will be *"different"*, she did reflect that she knew that something had to be different and she was certain that she *"will not stop working."*

In looking to the future there are no dilemmas based on personal factors; most tensions are expected from divergences with family, organizations and societal expectations, and very few are expected from organizational factors. Hence the

women might be underestimating personal dilemmas and projecting them all externally onto family, organizations and society. Despite the tensions, none of the women expresses a desire to quit their careers.

So, sometimes it's little overwhelming but I guess it's a phase and it passes." – Lalita

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Lalita had spoken of her challenges in managing childcare, self-care, housework with long hours and work travel, describing her coping strategy in the previous quote. Although Lalita is "*overwhelmed*", she resolves the conflicts and finds an emotional way to keep going. The personal sources of fragmentation arise from feeling overwhelmed by the demands of work and life. Rather than the resolution coming from concrete actions, the resolution to this tension comes from taking a spiritual perspective, which permits acceptance, and nurtures a change in mindset. Many women achieve acceptance of the tensions by reframing their challenges as a temporary "*phase"* and expressing faith that "*it will pass"*.

The underlying message from most of the women in my sample seems to be that somehow the tensions will work themselves out and the women should continue their career pursuits regardless of the tensions they foresee. So career intentions which were questioned at earlier stages are re-instated and no longer questioned.

Societal

Tensions and incoherence in the career narrative originate from the wider social context such as the media and cultural norms being different from the individual's activities and plans were categorised as societal fragmentation. As shown in Table 39, the number of women expressing societal fragmentation is higher in the pre-career and current career phases of the narratives.

Table 39 Fragmentation – Societal

Data categories	No. of women			
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Societal	**11**	**5**	**15**	**3**

Societal constraints and the parents' acceptance of these constraints on the career choices are a source of tension in the pre-career phase. Most women were supported and encouraged to study if they chose to study medicine or engineering at the undergraduate level. At the graduate level, Master of Business Administration (MBA) was acceptable to some but not as universally accepted as medicine and engineering.

"In those days, I think the only two career choices you could make was either engineer or doctor." – Saanvi

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Saanvi expresses the societal and familial belief in only two fields of study as acceptable and worthwhile in terms of a professional life. This limitation to study choices is consistently expressed in almost all the interviews and seems to reflect the earliest form of career related fragmentation the women face. At times, it is expressed as a tension to contend with as the women express the stress of gaining admission to these highly sought after and competitive fields. In these cases, they seem to have accepted this limitation as valid and important.

In other cases, this limitation seems at odds, a form of discontinuity with the discourse of independence and autonomy to be afforded by a professional life; when expressed in this way, the women are expressing some disagreement with this generally accepted rule.

> *"So, I chose law, unlike some people in India who tell you that oh, I didn't get through engineering, so I chose law, I <u>chose</u> (emphasis) to do law."* – Lalita

Lalita, who chose law, stated that many in India believe that one would choose a subject such as law only because they had failed to secure a position in engineering or medicine. Lalita repeats *"I chose law", "I chose to do law"*, emphasizing the word *"chose"* to demonstrate how she needs to clarify and confirm to others that she chose law out of personal interest and not because she had failed to secure a place in one of the more acceptable fields of study (medicine or engineering).

> *"So that is where the dramatic switch happened for me, rather than move into, you know, continue science as a subject which did not interest me, I had a conversation with my parents and I decided, you know this is not working out for me and I need to move (… into psychology)."* – Dipti

Choosing a course of study that is different from the two acceptable options, involves negotiation with figures of authority, who do not have power to refuse them admission onto the course. Dipti illustrates her efforts to negotiate with her parents to study psychology.

> *"And here again the norm is that when you finish your bachelors, you go in for a Masters, either at MIT or Mellon or wherever. It's like almost a set path for people or for students. And then you have somebody like me, who comes and as an exception and says no, I want to do B school. So, there was a lot of, again back and forth discussion with professors and lecturers, you know, why are you doing something different?*

But that has probably been me, I have always tried to
experiment and explore and do something different." – Jasmin

Jasmin's quote below, illustrates negotiation with professors and lecturers to do an MBA. Jasmin accepts societal views that her decision to do a Master's in Business Administration (an MBA, which she refers to as B School, short for Business School) rather than continue in science is *"different"*.

The two women, who consciously chose other studies (psychology and law) did so only after demonstrating that they had the academic results to enter engineering or medicine and thereby proving to society that their choice was not a response to failure. Yet, most of the women unquestionably went along with societal value for those subjects. The majority, did not really question the limitation to education choice; it was not expressed as a fragmentation, it was simply accepted as correct.

"I hated from the moment I did it, but you know I did it, knowing
all along that it was good training." – Abha

Abha stresses that *she hated it from the moment she did it*, but fully accepted the societal assumption and knew that studying engineering was good training for a career. Similarly, several women edited the fragmentation to align with the education choice discourse and presented their decision to convey that even though they did not enjoy their studies, it was the right career move, and they are now glad they did it.

In addition to education, many women were facing tensions due to societal norms around when to get married and when to have children. Reshma, who was pregnant with her first child during our interview, reflected on the societal tensions she was facing.

> *"A lot of people have said that I'm crazy about my career and lot of people have given me feedback, oh my God you should have started a family 5 years back instead of waiting 8.5-9 years and that happened at every step. People would not leave me. Barring my in-laws and my parents who I told once that I will have a kid when I'm ready for it because I don't want to have a kid where I start thinking of a kid as a burden and someone who's played a wrong role in my career as I take a step back. That will kill me. So, I'll have a kid when I, barring my in-laws and my parent…, Manjari, everyone had an opinion in my life."* – Reshma

Reshma's reaction to the opinions of others about when to have a child has had a strong impact on her. Her frustration is shown in the way she leaves off some of the words in her second to last sentence, which if it had been completed would have probably read something like*, "So, I'll have a kid when I, want to, barring my in-laws and my parents."* Interestingly, although she strongly resists the interference of others in her decisions, she make it clear twice, that she permits the opinions of her parents and in-laws, to take priority even over her own, in the decision on when to have a child. It seems she leaves it to the parents and in-laws to make the final call on what might be a battle between her personal career related needs and societal norms.

Societal fragmentation is primarily expressed as tensions that are transferred to the women through their parents. Hence, the parents' acceptance of the social value given to certain fields of study are frequently discussed as limitations and constraints faced by the women, even before their careers started. Later, similar social norms around when to get married or when to have a child are also transferred to the women through the parents. These tensions are eased by the women transferring the responsibility of the decision to the parents, who become the mediators in times of conflict between the individual and society.

In conclusion, fragmentation intensifies in the current career phase of the narrative, the emphasis on societal fragmentation in the pre-career phase, declines and is distributed between family, organization and personal in the past career, with personal dilemmas then becoming very intense in the current career, which simply declines in the future career. Career intentions are questioned in personal reflections when career actions encounter resistance from the environment, however those intentions are re-instated and fragmentation is reduced when looking to the future.

5.3 Conclusions from the data

In this section, by summarising the biographical data and analysing the properties of agency, modes of agency and fragmentation through the lens of temporality, I have examined and described the temporal-relational context and the agentic characteristics of the Indian managerial women in this study. In the next section I will extend the examination of these categories to develop a model to respond to the RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

The data analysis in this chapter shows the shifting nature of career agency and the varying degrees to which the modes and properties of agency are expressed alongside expressions of fragmentation. The data support the discussion in the previous section and shows that as the intensity of fragmentation increases the self-reflectiveness and individual agency also intensify, peaking in the current career. This points to a shift from the more interactive and collective nature of career agency in the past career to a more reflective and individual nature of agency in the current career.

Looking at the data broadly, we see that the nature of the career agency of Indian managerial women shifts over time. Pre-career and future career data have less agentic activity but discussion of the data in those categories helps us

to understand both the build-up and let-down of tensions. The women do not expect or experience many tensions before they start their careers; they develop a career intentionality which they share with their parents. They face tensions from different perspectives on their roles once they start working. As they reflect to narrate their career stories the experience of the tensions seem to heighten as challenges to be contended with come into focus and become explicit. In many cases these tensions are framed as personal dilemmas for each to resolve for themselves. As they reflect on these tensions and are not able to devise concrete solutions from their usual support system of the collective, hence a collective agency becomes less coherent. Shifting their career agency towards the individual mode allows them to edit the fragmentations in the story; it seems by shifting away from others and transferring the focus to individual agency they shift away the tensions. In this way, the women re-align the story by projecting an integration of personal and collective expectations in the future to permit the narrative of career intentionality to go on, and thereby maintain the original premise of the story.

Table 40 Overview of mode, property, fragmentation and temporality data

Data categories	Number of interviewees by temporality			
Modes of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Collective Agency	28	34	34	15
Individual Agency	10	14	21+	5-
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Forethought	2	6	11	24
Intentionality	14	14	8	5
Self-reactiveness	13	32	28	10
Self-reflectiveness	11	29	36+	7-
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Family related	0	12	18	6
Organizational	0	25	27	6
Personal	0	7	18+	2-
Societal	11	5	15	3

Table 40 shows a shift from collective to individual agency and demonstrates that some, but not all, properties of agency might be present in the career/life phases expressed by the women. It also shows the fragmentations as tensions from various sources at different times.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings from the data analysis process described in Chapter 4. I started this chapter with an overview of the biographical data showing the demographic profile of interviewees matches the middle-class profile established in the literature review presented in Chapter 3. I then discussed the findings on the career agency of Indian managerial women emerging from the data analysis, categorising the data with the themes from the

culture-centred framework of women's career agency presented in Chapter 2. I then demonstrated the temporal flow of agency in the data. The analysis presented in this chapter has set the stage for deeper analysis of the connections between the categories to respond to the RQ in Chapter 6.

6 CULTURE-CENTRED MODEL OF CAREER AGENCY

In this chapter I will present the analytical process I used to develop the culture-centred model of career agency by identifying the agentic bonds which form the agentic process. After that I will discuss each of the agentic bonds and illustrate them with data. I will conclude this chapter with a review of the expanded model which responds to the RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

To develop the model of career agency, a process approach (Van de Ven, 2007) was combined with a culture-centred approach to identify the conceptual connections and interplay in the data. A culture-centred approach acknowledges that agency is layered and contested in the narration of career stories and encourages the researcher to recognize liminality and hybridization in the narrative as this may *"shed light on hidden aspects of career negotiation that a purely objective stance might have missed."* (Mitra, 2015, p.1826). This permits a versatile view of emerging developmental patterns in the women's career narratives. Hence, when combining the process and culture-centred approach, the focus of the analysis becomes the interplay and shifting nature of the relationship between the individual and their structural and cultural environment over time.

The findings presented in Chapter 5, indicated that agency shifted between the collective and individual modes and was rarely in just one mode or the other. The temporal nature of this shift was pertinent to the way meaning around career pursuits was being constructed and how the tensions they were contending with at that time were understood by the women. I analysed the flow of modes and properties of agency, the patterns and connections of this flow with fragmentation and temporality. I explored this interaction and interplay to identify the emergence of the different types of bonds, between the individual

and their context, that occur to maintain careers. I have termed these as agentic bonds, which refer to the ways in which the individual engages with their structural and cultural context to maintain careers. Figure 10 illustrates that the agentic process of careers is formed by the emergent agentic bonds over time.

The process of career agency

Individual career development ← Agentic bonds → Temporal-relational context
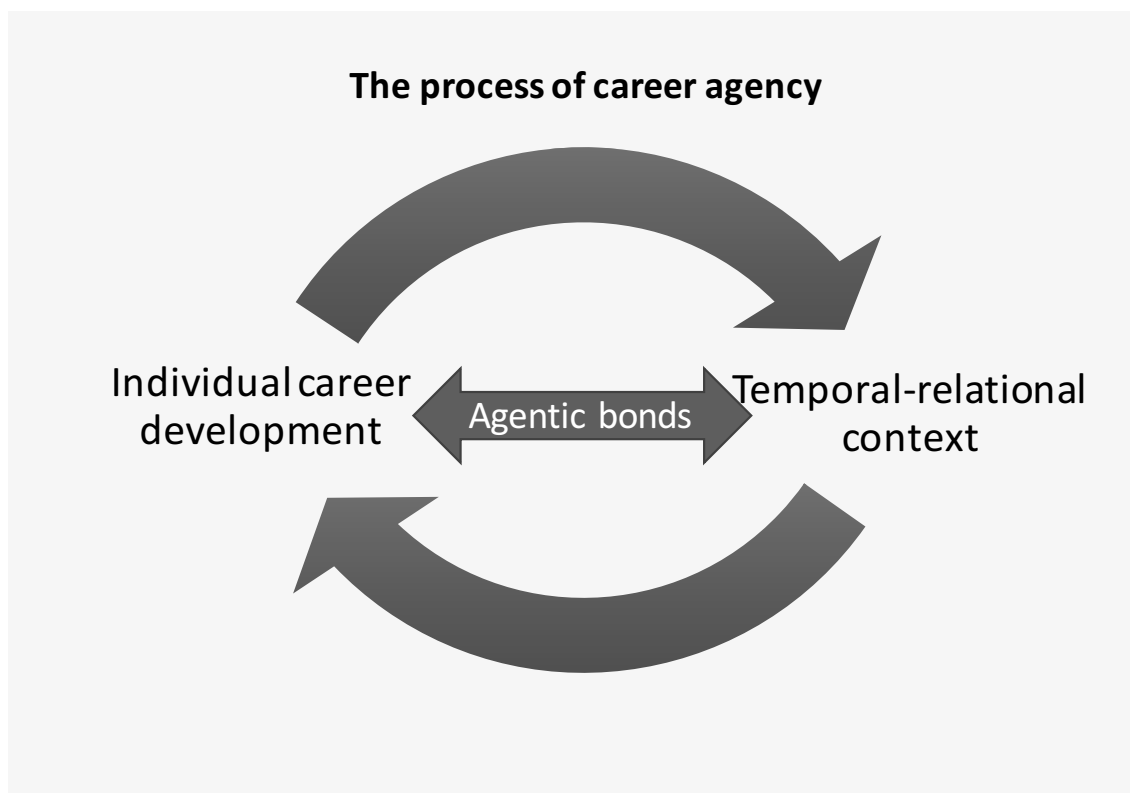
Figure 10 The agentic process of career agency

With the concept of agentic bonds, I addressed how career agency shifts with shifts in the temporal-relational context faced by the women, I developed culture-centred model of career agency. The model development process was facilitated by the culture-centred approach suggested by Mitra (2015), particularly in conceptualizing the fluidity and hybridity in career agency. In telling their stories, a clear sequence emerged, with the women beginning their accounts by referring to their childhood and early expectations about career possibilities. They moved on to describe their past careers and then to discuss their current situation. Finally, they looked forward to their future career. The career stories were more than organizational in content, they were intermingled with aspects of their family and social life.

With the culture-centred approach (Mitra, 2015) lens, I focused on intermingling to perceive the hybridity and fluidity in the data. The findings revealed how agentic bonds between the individual and her context shift over time. These bonds mediate the relationship between the individual and her context. The shifting agentic bonds are: fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration.

I break down the four analytical steps I took to develop the model comprising agentic bonds and the agentic process. First, I began by observing the patterns, connections and interplay in the data. Second, from these patterns I conceived the nature of the underlying bond that was emergent. Third, I re-analysed and recoded the data using the categories of agentic bonds. Fourth, I analysed each case one by one with the categories of agentic bonds, to assess how the agentic process plays out in each woman's narrative. These steps are demonstrated below.

The first step, summarised in Table 41, was to review the data and highlight the cells with the greatest number across temporality or with a notable change. By highlighting the patterns in the data, I could see the shifts in the data which illustrate the flow of agency and fragmentation, and demonstrate the temporal interplay of the modes of agency, properties of agency and fragmentation.

Table 41 Highlighting the patterns of interplay in the data

Data categories	Number of interviewees by temporality			
Modes of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Collective Agency	**28**	**34**	**34**	**15**
Individual Agency	10	14	<u>**21 Increase**</u>	5
Properties of agency	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Forethought	2	6	11	**24**
Intentionality	**14**	14	8	5
Self-reactiveness	**13**	**32**	**28**	10
Self-reflectiveness	**11**	**29**	**36**	7
Fragmentation	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Family related	0	12	18	6
Organizational	0	**25**	**27**	6
Personal	0	7	<u>**18 Increase**</u>	2
Societal	**11**	5	15	3

Second, the patterns in the data highlighted in Table 41, were analysed to reveal the emerging agentic bonds. Table 42 summarises how the interplay of the modes of agency, properties of agency and fragmentation produces the emergent agentic bonds in each temporal phase.

Table 42 Emergence of agentic bonds

Temporal Phase	Modes of agency	Properties of agency	Sources of fragmentation	Emergence of Agentic bonds
Pre-career	Dominated by collective mode	Distributed with highest being intentionality	Few express fragmentation, all expressions are societal tensions	**Fusion**
Past career	Dominated by collective mode	Dominated by self-reactiveness & self-reflectiveness	Dominated by organizational tensions	**Communion & Divergence**
Current career	Increase in individual mode	Dominated by self-reflectiveness & self-reactiveness	Dominated by organizational fragmentation, notable increase in personal fragmentation	**Assertion**
Future career	Dominated by collective mode	Dominated by forethought	Low fragmentation and distributed roughly equally in all sources	**Integration**

Third, analysing the data once again through the lens of the agentic bond types, I found that although a specific bond type dominated a given temporal phase, it also appeared in other phases. So, I recoded the data through the categories of the emergent agentic bond to determine the distribution across temporal phases. Table 43 shows the number of women in each agentic bond type through the temporal phases. The patterns analysing the highest number of women are highlighted in Table 43.

Table 43 Data on the agentic bond type by temporality

Agentic Bond	Number of interviewees by temporality			
	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Fusion	**26**	11	16	1
Communion	3	**32**	**31**	6
Divergence	8	**28**	**28**	12
Assertion	10	16	**23 +**	5
Integration	1	3	11	**16**

+ notable increase

Table 43 summarises the data intensity for the agentic process and shows the temporal pattern. Fourth, Table 44 reviews these agentic bonds for each interview and shows that more than half (21 of 36) the respondents match this pattern fully, while 15 match it partially

Table 44 Agentic bonds and agentic process by individual case

Name	Fusion	Communion	Divergence	Assertion	Integration
Abha	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aditi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aishwarya	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Binita	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dipti	0	0	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gayatri	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hansa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Janaki	0	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jasmin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Kajal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lakshmi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Lalita	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mala	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Malika	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manvi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Meera	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Mridu	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Neha	Yes	Yes	Yes	0	Yes
Pia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Radhika	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Renu	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reshma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rita	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ruchika	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saanvi	Yes	Yes	Yes	0	0
Sachi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sadhana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Sahana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Samaya	Yes	Yes	0	Yes	Yes
Sameera	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Sanchali	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Sarika	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sharmila	Yes	Yes	Yes	0	0
Sonali	0	Yes	Yes	Yes	0
Sonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sunita	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total: 36	**35**	**35**	**35**	**33**	**25**

Table 44 shows that a general pattern of agentic bonds shifting over time can be identified across the data set. It also shows that individuals experience the agentic bonds in varying ways. Nevertheless, the agentic process is comprised

of the flow of agentic bonds over time. This model, illustrated in Figure 11, is applicable across the data set as well as for individual cases.
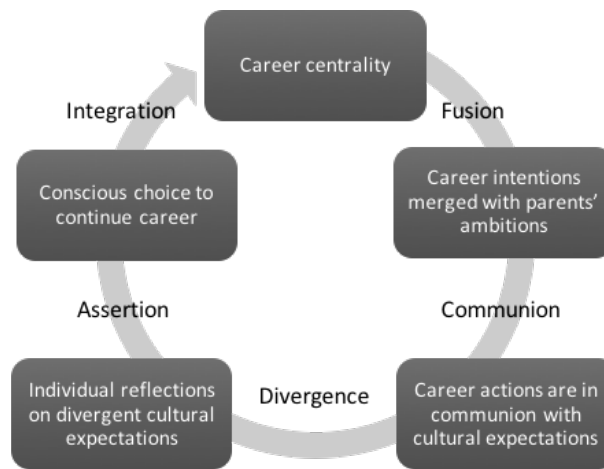
Figure 11 The culture-centred model of career agency

The shifting agentic bonds emerge when the women encounter their context. If the individual encounters an environment where her career goals are shared by her context, which is typically the family in childhood, fusion emerges. If the environment is supportive but the goal is individual, then she experiences communion. If she perceives her environment as generally unsupportive of either career actions or career intentions. then the bond is divergent and the individual experiences tensions. When the individual reflects actively on her position within the cultural and structural landscape she is facing and decides to invest in her career regardless of the landscape, then the bond is assertion. When the individual makes a conscious choice to pursue her career and decides explicitly to fulfil personal as well as collective expectations, then she experiences integration. The model has explanatory power in responding to the Looking at the data broadly, we see that the nature of the career agency of Indian managerial women shifts over time. Pre-career and future career data have less agentic activity but discussion of the data in those categories helps us to understand both the build-up and let-down of tensions. The women do not expect or experience many tensions before they start their careers; they develop a career intentionality which they share with their parents. They face tensions from different perspectives on their roles once they start working. As

they reflect to narrate their career stories the experience of the tensions seem to heighten as challenges to be contended with come into focus and become explicit. In many cases these tensions are framed as personal dilemmas for each to resolve for themselves. As they reflect on these tensions and are not able to devise concrete solutions from their usual support system of the collective, hence a collective agency becomes less coherent. Shifting their career agency towards the individual mode allows them to edit the fragmentations in the story; it seems by shifting away from others and transferring the focus to individual agency they shift away the tensions. In this way the women re-align/edit the story to permit the narrative of career intentionality to go on, and thereby maintain the original premise of the story.

By analysing the data through the model, we can see how the individual interacts with their structural and cultural contexts over time to continue their careers. The interplay of the individual, structure and culture produces emergent agentic bonds. These bonds shift with changing circumstances, and in doing so, leverage positive external support or compensate for negative external support, thereby providing an ongoing stable platform for career intentions and actions. Women's career agency shifts temporally between the collective and individual dimensions depending on the degree of career support they perceive from the cultural and structural environment. The shifting relationship occurs through the mechanism of *agentic bonds*, as the women engage with their cultural and structural context. Agentic bonds can take various forms to connect the individual and the collective: *fusion, communion, divergence, assertion, and integration.* Each of the agentic bonds are discussed below.

6.1 Fusion

Fusion typically emerges when the primary mode of agency is collective, the properties of agency are distributed, and intentionality is being established in the pre-career of phase of the women's narratives. Emergence of fusion in the pre-career phase is shown in Table 46.

Table 45 Emergence of agentic bond: fusion

Temporal Phase	Modes of agency	Properties of agency	Sources of fragmentation	Emergence of agentic bond
Pre-career	Dominated by collective mode	Distributed with highest being intentionality	Few express fragmentation, all expressions are societal tensions	**Fusion**

The intention for a career begins early in life and is fused with the ambitions of the family. The women spoke at length of the clear expectations that they would gain an education and go on to have a career. They described this as something they had always known and taken for granted. Despite saying that they had encouragement from their parents to follow their own preferences, most clearly stated that the acceptable educational degrees were limited to engineering and medicine. These degrees were believed to be the most likely to result in stable career trajectories.

> *"So, I did my engineering that was more like father thought that was the best thing to do….. you don't understand much and typically families decide." – Meera*

Meera expresses why she studied engineering; she says that as a woman at that age *"you don't understand much"*, without knowledge to decide, *"the best thing to do"* is to respect the father's educational choices.

Sonia echoes the commonly accepted cultural and structural constraint of most of the women around the restricted educational choices.

> *"We just went by what our parents told us and fortunately it worked out well, but probably there would have been very many other opportunities if I would have had more exposure, but I am happy with what happened." – Sonia*

Sonia recognizes the limitations put on her by the restricted choices from her parents, by wondering if *"more exposure"* might have produced *"other opportunities"*. Yet she demonstrates an acceptance of her parents' choice by doing *"what our parents told us"* and validates that choice with her assessment that her career *"worked out well"* and shares her personal satisfaction as she is *"happy with what happened"*.

Many of the women saw their parents as role models and inspiration, especially their mothers. Most women's career plans were family plans. Many women expressed how their families made necessary sacrifices and took actions to ensure they were educated in a field that would result in a career. For instance, Sunita explained:

"I don't think I ever really thought about having a career because it was always -- that was never a question I asked myself because I grew up with my mum who is working and I just never saw it as a choice. I mean it just came naturally to me to assume that I would also -- and I always of course encouraged to do what -- what it is that I want to do and was encouraged to get out there and work." – Sunita

---

Sunita never asked herself if she wanted a career, she *"never saw it as a choice"*. She makes sense of this by saying in her case it was natural that she would work because her mother worked. Yet other women express a similar natural and unquestioned career intentionality for exactly the opposite reason.

"She is like we have spent our lives god knows doing what, like it is a gratitude-less, it is a thank-less job at the end of the day. Right, don't do that with yourself." – Meera

---

Meera credits her career intentions stemming from her mother's dissatisfaction from the homemaker role she had played and takes on board her mother's caution *"don't do that with yourself".*

Gayatri also demonstrates fusion with her parents; talking about her mother who was in banking, she says:

"I just took it for granted through my life that I will always work and it's no big, I didn't see a that, that, that's, the it's, it's, sad actually, because I just thought that I, I don't think I appreciated what my mom did, I just thought it's something you have to do and it's no big deal." – Gayatri

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Gayatri "*took it for granted*" that she would work. Her hesitation and repetition of words, is indicative of her reflecting as she speaks to me. She seems to be realising for the first time that she had taken it for granted. She also goes on to reflect that she had not realised the challenges her mother might have gone through and she finds it sad that she had neglected to appreciate her mother. So, working had been taken for granted, it was implicit in her upbringing and modelled by her mother. Yet the challenges that go along with work had not been explored, and Gayatri realises now that she had perhaps only been partially exposed to her mother's experience. Nevertheless, in childhood Gayatri's career intention was fused with her family. This had remained as implicit and taken for granted until this interview.

6.2 Communion

Communion typically emerges in the past career, dominated by the collective mode of agency; the women usually express a high level of self-reactive and self-reflective activity at that time. They also begin to express increasing narrative fragmentation dominated by organizational tensions. The emergence of communion in the past career phase is illustrated by the connections between categories made in Table 46.

Table 46 Emergence of agentic bond: communion

Temporal Phase	Modes of agency	Properties of agency	Sources of fragmentation	Emergence of agentic bonds
Past career	Dominated by collective mode	Dominated by self-reactiveness & self-reflectiveness	Dominated by organizational tensions	**Communion & Divergence**

Based on nuances within the emerging themes, collective actions and beliefs were not clearly interdependent or fused with others. In some cases, this was comprised of agentic actions and beliefs that involved the active support of others but not the fusion of goals; these expressions were categorised as in communion. In other cases, the women's agentic actions and beliefs involved the withdrawal of support of others or a reaction to divergent expectations from structural and cultural sources; these were categorised as divergence. Divergence is discussed in the next section. In many cases, however, communion and divergence occur simultaneously. Both communion and divergence bond with varying actors and different sources, as Radhika's story in Chapter 7 will show, when her agentic bond shifts from communion to divergence with her mother, and simultaneously shifts from divergence to communion with her husband.

Communion with significant others usually family members, bosses, colleagues and friends featured throughout the narratives. The women credited their families in various ways for supporting their careers. Mothers were often the primary advisors and motivators providing inspiration, encouragement and facilitating career pursuits.

"That's what my mom keeps telling me that, you know, had you been sitting at home, you will be like, you know, frog in that well. Now, just look at yourself, you think from a different perspective and so she keeps telling me that you have to, you know, keep going." – Ruchika

Ruchika expresses the value of her mother's view on her career. Her mother points out how much Ruchika has gained cognitively from her career. She thinks "*from a different perspective"* now and if she did not work she would be a "*frog in the well"*, referring to a Chinese fable, with the moral being that not knowing anything outside one's own world makes one ignorant. So, her mother encourages her to "*keep going".*

Husbands and fathers were often cast as advisors influencing career tactics and career decisions. Bosses featured frequently in discussions, particularly in accounts of early career experiences, giving advice on decision making and offering support and informal development and coaching usually as supporters and guides. Renu describes the influence that her boss had on her early in her career:

> *"He was a fatherly figure and a very very big supporter." "I think he nurtured me well in this four months, that helped me to prepare to really eventually take the full job, so then I was there with them for five and a half years." – Renu*

Renu's boss was a "*supporter"*, he "*nurtured* "her and helped her to "*prepare fully"*. She calls him a "*fatherly figure"* as a sign of her respect and credits their communion in her career goals to the number of years she spent in that organization. Her gratitude for her boss's support is echoed in many of the women's narratives. Bosses feature prominently in past-career decisions as facilitators and catalysts of career pursuits.

> *"I goofed up big time in one of the mega projects that he was doing, and I thought he is going to fire me, but to my surprise the next day when I got to office, he was like you know I am glad you are making mistakes that means you have started working. …... So, I think there are some people who are kind*

of those catalyst kinds of people in your career and I would

definitely think he was one person who did give me the

opportunity and I really -- I think I stepped up because I thought

he personally believed in what I could deliver. I had that much

more for me to step up every time." – Binita

Binita describes her boss as a *"catalyst"* in her career but also states that she *"stepped up"* to meet his expectations. Binita is grateful for her boss's approach to handling her mistake and for his encouragement to learn and grow from that.

Friends were typically seen as helpers providing material and emotional support, primarily through networks of professional contacts leading to attainment of jobs. In general, significant others were seen to have the impact of enabling careers, and initiating positive change and being relevant in forming career ambitions.

"I have always been mindful that I want to make a mark

because I know people have worked hard around me to get me

where I was." – Rita

Rita summarises the broad relational theme that is frequently expressed throughout the data set. Others feature as significant stakeholders in their career stories, not only as contributors to career progress but also as beneficiaries of the career success.

6.3 Divergence

Divergence, like communion, typically emerges in the past career, dominated by the collective mode of agency; the women usually express a high level of self-reactive and self-reflective activity at that time. Notably, they express increasing narrative fragmentation dominated by organizational tensions. The emergence of divergence in the past career phase is shown in Table 47.

Table 47 Emergence of agentic bond: divergence

Temporal Phase	Modes of agency	Properties of agency	Sources of fragmentation	Emergence of agentic bonds
Past career	Dominated by collective mode	Dominated by self-reactiveness & self-reflectiveness	Dominated by organizational tensions	**Communion & Divergence**

Communion and divergence are both comprised of agentic actions and beliefs that involved the others. When the women's agentic actions and beliefs involved a reaction to divergent expectations from structural and cultural sources, these were categorised as divergence.

The data included career actions and beliefs that were not supported by others, more specifically involved the withdrawal of support from others and were the source of tensions, but were nevertheless triggered by the divergent actions and beliefs of others and resulted in a sort of disruption to the flow of the narrative. Divergence was produced as a response to tension from misaligned expectations arising from the structures and cultures around them. In searching for relief from the tension, the women seemed to have two types of reaction. First, they seemed to pull away from the collective mode towards that individual mode of agency and second, they triggered self-reflectiveness to make sense of the incoherence. At times, they externalised the solution by changing things structurally and at other times they internalised the solution by accepting the divergence and taking a spiritual perspective on it. In such cases the tensions were handled with self-regulating behaviour through work around tactics and re-framing the situation as an opportunity.

Organizational divergences included being put in unfairly challenging roles. Sonia describes her feelings towards being given the lowest performing brand in the company, despite having been a strong performer and worthy of a different role. She feels less supported by her organization but decides to use the opportunity to further her career.

> *"So, of course it was a challenge that do you want to be a brand manager of the lowest performing brands in the company, but okay, that was also an opportunity to turn it around and prove the metal or the value that you bring to the table." – Sonia*

Sonia first expresses the dismay at being put in an unfair position and being undervalued by her organization. Then with "*but okay*", she displays a shift towards individual agency. She adjusts her view of the situation and re-frames it as *"an opportunity"* rather than a *"challenge".* She decides to "*prove"* herself in and show her "*value"* to the organization.

Sexual harassment and discrimination was also a source of tension. Several women, such as Reshma, shift away from the collective and take self-reactive steps to relieve the tension. Reshma shared her tactics to avoid sexual harassment. She told me that by knowing when not to shake hands, which text messages to ignore, and by dressing in traditional Indian clothes to make the right impression in business, she avoided sexual harassment.

> *"Because I was 30 when I became director as in I was leading marketing for a multinational in a region so no one took me seriously while I was wearing trousers and everyone was in their 40s when they became director in my leadership team so suddenly when I started wearing a saree people started taking me more seriously, so I still wear sarees." – Reshma*

Reshma chooses not to leverage her contacts in the organization and discuss discrimination with anyone, rather she took it upon herself to find a way to deal with the age discrimination she describes. Many women echoed the benefit of wearing Indian clothes in the workplace. Traditional attire is seen as formal, mature, and modest, giving women credibility and protection from sexual

harassment. Similarly, some felt that avoiding handshakes and eye contact with certain men would create distance and protect them from unwanted advances.

Despite being aware of sexual harassment policies in their organizations, most women suggested that it is more mature and appropriate to find a way out without involving the organization. They said would either avoid the culprit or challenge the perpetrator directly themselves.

"I would never raise an ethics case. I feel like I should be able to stand up for my own self. I don't want to be one of those weaklings to I think I'm a victim of sexual harassment, people are not treating me giving me the due. That's when people start to get weary of you. They don't want you on their team then. Because you are throwing in that gender angle." – Sarika

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Sarika refers to an experience of discrimination and sexual harassment as an *"ethics case"*. She expressed the concern of several women that if they were to raise such an issue up to the organization in an official manner, people would get *"weary"* of them, and would not want to work with them in the future. She felt bringing up the *"gender angle"* would weaken her position for potential leadership in her organization.

There were divergences between family needs and organizational needs. Several participants struggled with having to explain to their parents and in-laws that they needed to travel and stay away overnight for their jobs, as elders judged it inappropriate for women to be away overnight without a family member.

"There was a time when they would not even allow me to travel overnight, right. If I had a flight to Bombay, Delhi, I would have to do it in a day and come back, but I had to sit them down and make them understand, right, that things have changed and I

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At a time when she was progressing rapidly at work, her responsibilities were growing and her teams and clients were based throughout the country, Binita encountered a cultural barrier; her family was unhappy about her travel. They felt it was inappropriate for an unmarried woman to travel and stay in hotels unaccompanied and especially if the travel companions might be male colleagues. She had to persuade her family and *"make them understand"* that the need to travel was a *"genuine"* requirement of work. Her frustration that her family had not kept up with her career development is shown in her need to understand that *"things have changed".*

Others express the disappointment of parental and family support for career being withdrawn during difficult times, or the ensuing tensions, as expressed by both Rita and Meera.

"…surprisingly for the first time my mom actually was on the fence and in fact more tilting towards saying, you know, maybe it's not a bad time to give up your career and be at home and just help the children grow up." – Rita

Rita's sense of being let down by her mother's shift in attitude toward her career is palpable. She says that *"surprisingly"* and *"for the first time"* her mom encouraged her to *"give up"* her career. Having had emotional and instrumental support from her parents thus far, this was a disappointment for Rita.

"So then the expectations are like very different. That we will adapt, that we will make time, that we will do all of that. Like my parents don't expect my husband to call every week. Right?

They – he calls, like they are ecstatic about it, 'oh he calls, he is so nice' all of that. But for me, it is an expectation that I will call twice a week and I will do all that has to be done – which is like, just like, I have longer hours than him right now – he is in industry, I am in consulting. And like it is there on the undercurrent, the undercurrent is there just always." – Meera

Meera expresses the gender based double standards of her family's communication expectations. They do not expect her husband to call regularly and are *"ecstatic"* when he does. However, they expect her to "*do all that has to be done"* to call them twice a week, regardless of her longer hours. She describes this gender role misalignment as a cultural tension, a chronic constraint, the *"undercurrent"* that is always there.

These disappointments lead to self-reflection and an awakening of the individual mode of agency. It seems a necessity to bring individual agency into the picture as the collective agency which was a significant part of the initial career goal seems no longer available, or supportive, and possibly not able to understand or keep pace with their evolving challenges.

6.4 Assertion

Assertion emerged with an increase in the individual mode of agency, was dominated by self-reflectiveness and self-reactiveness, and accompanied by an increase in personal fragmentation in the narratives. The emergence of assertion is the current career phase is shown in Table 48.

Table 48 Emergence of agentic bonds: assertion

Temporal Phase	Modes of agency	Properties of agency	Sources of fragmentation	Emergence of agentic bonds
Current career	Increase in individual mode	Dominated by self-reflectiveness & self-reactiveness	Dominated by organizational fragmentation, notable increase in personal fragmentation	**Assertion**

As the dilemmas and challenges are expressed, in the current career self-reflection tends to intensify. Assessment of their current situation results in assertion and a conscious choice to continue their careers, despite feelings of disappointment and lack of support from others, particularly others who had been in fusion or communion with them up to now.

> *"I started feeling like you know what I have compromised way too much, way too many times but the last three years, nobody's even bothered to have a career growth conversation with me and I know my career's in my hands, I know that you know and I have always taken chances and I have moulded -- moulded my -- my career the way I wanted it to go except in the last three years, I just felt like it's slipped from my hands a little bit but I feel like it's time to reclaim that."* – Sunita

Sunita describes her disappointment at essentially being ignored by her organization. She had counted on that structure to carry her career forward, but the system had left her out, *"nobody's even bothered to have a career growth conversation"* with her. Now, she is also ready to *"reclaim"* her career. So, her focus seems to shift to her own efforts rather than on the efforts of others to move her career along. She reminds herself that she has *"taken chances"* before and she has *"moulded"* her career as she wanted to in the past, as if re-assuring herself that she can do it again. Self-confidence and rewards of the career are often the rationale for continuing their careers even when faced with disappointment.

> *"Just on Diwali, me and my sister gifted our father a car because he was getting retired. So, nobody questioned, neither my in-laws asked me nor my husband asked me that why you're giving it because it's my money, the way I ... so the confidence I have, that is another factor I don't want to stop*

With self-reflection, Ruchika stresses that one of the rewards of her career is that *"nobody questions"* her in deciding how she uses her income. She also stresses the psychological rewards of the *"confidence"* she now has. Her confidence is conveyed in her tone and choice of words. She points out that neither her in-laws nor her husband would question her, highlighting a break from a cultural gender norm in India. Traditionally a woman would need permission from her in-laws and her husband to spend money, especially if the money was to be spent on her own parents.

The sense of confidence is echoed in many narratives and plays out in the face of work-life challenges. Despite stress and fatigue, most express faith in their abilities to manage home and career responsibilities.

"So, far things are being pretty good in terms of how I managed

to balance home with my career needs. So far, it's been

stressful, yes, but managed it." – Sharmila

Sharmila exemplifies the way in which many women accept the challenges; she expresses self-confidence and faith that future challenges will be managed.

6.5 Integration

Integration emerges with a decrease in the individual mode, increase in forethought and a notable reduction in narrative fragmentation. The emergence of integration in the future career is shown in Table 49.

Table 49 Emergence of agentic bond: integration

Temporal Phase	Modes of agency	Properties of agency	Sources of fragmentation	Emergence of agentic bonds
Future career	Dominated by collective mode	Dominated by forethought	Low fragmentation and & distributed roughly equally in all sources	Integration

None of the women in this study expressed any intention to withdraw from their careers. A desire for continuing careers was expressed after the examination of the investment already made in the career and a reflection on the benefits of having a career. The self-reflection then led to the reiteration of career continuation. The sense of the individual setting boundaries and finding herself within the collective comes through around the discussion of resolutions to conflict and a negotiated closure to their career dilemmas.

"Sometimes, you also don't get-- I mean, people in your community are not going to appreciate that the first thing people would ask me if I ever met a guy or in a family or in arranged scenario, they would say, "Are you willing to leave your job"? And I found that very absurd, right, I was like I worked so hard, I am not giving up all of this just because you want me to be a housewife and look after the home." – Binita

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Binita describes the sense of being let down by the expectations of people in her community. She reflects on her options to quit and become a *"housewife"* to satisfy the community or to continue working. She decides that the societal and cultural expectations of marriage at the expense of career are *"absurd"* and that she is *"not giving up all of this"*.

In a uniquely disturbing case, Renu described the resistance to her long working hours from her in-laws with whom she was living in a traditional joint family system. After expressing her need for support with housework her in-laws suggested that she should give up her job rather than ask for help with

housework or she should move out. She described having to escape verbal abuse and physical violence from her father-in-law due to this request.

"So, yeah, I think my character built a lot, but that made me more, how to do you say more clear in my head that I am not quitting. I am not quitting. I need to maintain my financial independence. I need to maintain that part of the hours in the house when I am not home and I am in my sanity, I am working, I am making my life worthwhile because to a certain extent with all that treatment my self-esteem was taking a hit." – Renu

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Renu's experience caused her pain and she was clearly emotional in recounting the story and revealing the tension in her life due to the strained relationship with her in-laws. However, she says it also *"built my character"* and it did not deter her from having a career. She moved out of the joint family home with her husband and maintained her career. She stressed that this incident only further deepened her desire to continue her career and she links *"working"* to keeping her *"sanity"* and *"making her life worthwhile"*.

All the women, regardless of marital status, expressed their engagement in family life. Many referred to the supportive structures in place as well as belief in themselves as the rationale for continuing their careers.

"So, when you have a good leadership or management who is supportive to you, good family who is supportive to you, you can manage those things. I guess that won't be that much difficult that is what my perception right now, tomorrow what circumstances will be there that we can't say, but that is what I think and I will be continuing my career along with my family that is my motive." – Malika

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Malika expressed the view of many women in the sample. They express their awareness of the collective by acknowledging the value of *"good leadership"* and *"good family"* to their careers. Most plan to continue their careers and continue to fulfil family roles without expecting significant structural or cultural change in their context. Malika voices a desire to integrate personal and contextual expectations in her career actions.

"I am successful and I will be successful and that's what pushes you even further to try harder, take challenges because I think I became very confident in the very early years of my work." – Sonia

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Sonia expresses confidence in herself and faith in continued success. She plans to *"try harder"*, *"take challenges"* and continue her career. Although not all women re-affirmed the desire to continue their careers as clearly as Sonia does, none of them explicitly expressed any intention to quit in the foreseeable future.

6.6 Conclusions of the culture-centred model of career agency

These findings show that an agentic process supports the pursuit of careers. The women gradually shift their agentic focus from the collective to the individual in response to cultural and structural constraints. In doing so, they maintain the original intentions of having a career, even when the collective participation of the original actors seems to be receding. Hence, these women who clearly do not intend to quit, reframe how their careers are valued. They shift their focus from the career being of value primarily to the collective to becoming of value to them personally as well.

These shifts in agentic bonds are adaptive to the temporal-relational realties faced by each woman. Although the type of agentic bond might vary, a bond of some type is always in place permitting a consistent platform, encompassing the cultural and structural realities with the personal intention of having a career.

In response to the RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

The model shows how the agentic bonds between the individual and their temporal-relational context takes the form of: fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration, as represented in Figure 12.
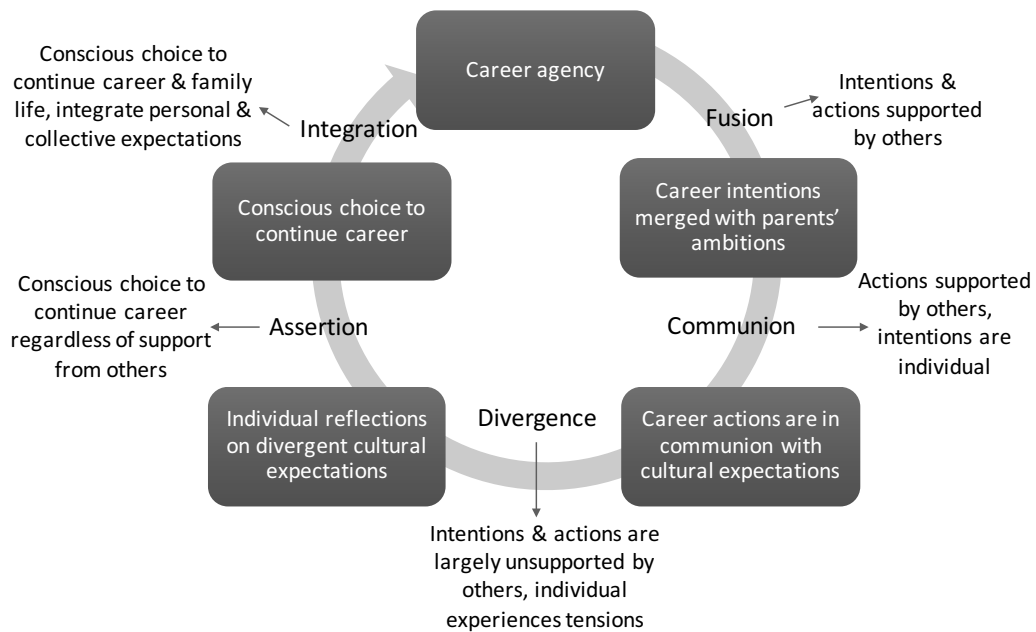
Figure 12 Emergence of agentic bonds

This model responds to the RQ by showing that "shifting agentic bonds" emerging from the encounter between individual career intentions and the prevailing cultural and structural realities, show the shape of career agency and explain why it shifts over time. If career intention encounters shared goals and support for actions then the agentic bond is fusion and is relatively subconscious; if a supportive reality is encountered with support for actions, but the intentions remain individual or vice versa, then there is communion; if an unsupportive reality is met then there is a divergent bond which tends to lead to an increase in self-reflection and an assessment of careers; when the individual

consciously articulates their intention for continuing their career regardless of the cultural and structural realities, assertion emerges; and a conscious choice to continue their career as well as family life leads to the emergence of integration. Hence career agency can be conceptualized as the process of emergent agentic bonds through which an individual engages with their structural and cultural context to invest in their career over time. The response to SQ1 is shown by the ways in which intentionality established in the pre-career phase and the projections of lower tensions in the future career phase facilitate the resolution of tensions and incoherence in the career story and therefore shape career agency to permit a continuation of careers. The response to SQ2 comes from the ways in which career agency is shaped by the perceived level of support from others. Therefore, if society and family are supportive the individual is in fusion or communion; however, when the support is withdrawn, the individual experiences tension and incoherence, and asserts more individual agency to compensate for the loss of support.

The model is a valuable tool to examine how career are advanced with agentic bonds which emerge from the interplay of culture, structure and individual intention over time. The application of the model for analysis of career narratives will be demonstrated in Chapter 7.

6.7 Chapter summary

This chapter began by discussing the analytical process to develop the culture-centred model of career agency and identify the agentic bonds which form the agentic process. Each of the bonds was discussed and illustrated with data. The section concluded with the culture-centred model of career agency to respond to the main RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

The culture-centred model of career agency shows how individuals connect with their structural and cultural contexts with agentic bonds. These agentic bonds shift over time with changing circumstances and provides the mechanisms by which careers continue.

7 CASE STUDIES OF THE AGENTIC PROCESS

The culture-centred model of career agency presented in Chapter 6 shows that shifting agentic bonds emerge over time between the individual and their structural and cultural context to continue in their careers. This chapter reviews four individual cases through the culture-centred model of career agency and shows the differing ways that agentic bonds are produced in each story. The aim of this chapter is to twofold: first to validate the explanatory potential of the culture-centred model as a theory of career agency and second to demonstrate the analytical value of reviewing individual career stories with the model.

7.1 Overview of data by agentic process

Table 44 in Chapter 6 shows that of the 36 interviews conducted, 21 interviewees experienced all five agentic bonds: fusion, communion, divergence, assertion, and integration. This level of commonality in the group data validates the underlying, generalizable pattern of agentic bonds which form the culture-centred model of career agency.

However, it is important to note that 15 of the 36 interviewees did not express at least one of the agentic bonds; of those, four did not experience two of the agentic bonds, and 11 of the 16 did not express integration. These differences indicate that there can be individual variances in the emergent agentic bonds.

The data show that the culture-centred model of career agency applies to the group of women in this sample. It is also an analytical tool for exploring and assessing the agentic bonds of individual women. I will demonstrate the applicability of the model to individual women's career narratives and elucidate the variances with four case studies. The first is Radhika's story, which encompasses all the agentic bonds. The second is Dipti's story which is without reference to fusion and communion, but with a higher than average number of references to assertion. The third is Samaya's story which is without references to divergence. The fourth is Saanvi's story which is without references to assertion and integration.

7.2 Radhika's story

Radhika had a medical degree and had practised medicine briefly before joining first a pharmaceutical company and then a biotechnology organization in managerial roles. When I interviewed her, she had been in the workforce for over 16 years, and had briefly trained abroad. She was in an arranged marriage, and was not living in a joint family household and had one child. Her agentic process, summarised in Table 50, illustrates the process of someone who goes through all phases of the cycle and whose story aligns closely with the culture-centred model.

Table 50 Radhika's agentic process: agentic bonds by temporal phases

No. of references	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Fusion	1	1	3	0
Communion	0	7	4	0
Divergence	0	4	1	0
Assertion	0	2	1	0
Reaffirmation	0	0	0	1

A review of the references in Radhika's case explains how the agentic process through fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration supported her to continue in her career. Her agentic process aligns fully with the culture-centred model and encompasses all five of the agentic bonds, as shown in Figure 13.
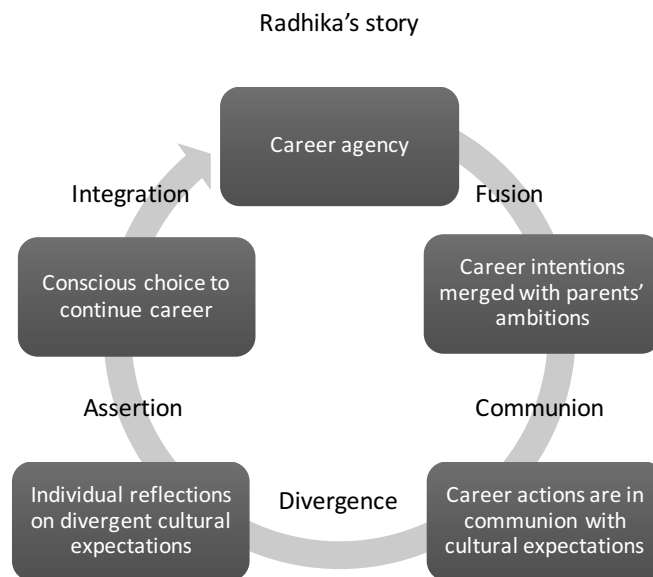
Radhika's story

Figure 13 Radhika's agentic process

7.2.1 Fusion

Fusion is reiterated throughout her story. Radhika tells me early in the interview that in school she won prizes in debating and had considered a career in journalism. However, her father had done a Master's degree in pharmaceutics and that he valued science and research a lot more than journalism. In the following quote, she describes her sister as being prettier than her. She seems to compensate for being less beautiful than her sister by being more like a son and *"linked"* to her father.

"She was the prettier, beautiful girl in the family but I was more like a son to my father. My father never wished he had a son ever since he had me. He was my inspiration during my childhood days because everything that I did during my childhood was to make my dad proud of everything. It was more for him than for me. Till the day he lived which was 8 years ago is when he passed away, everything that I did was linked to how I could make him happy and how I could make him proud. So, he wanted me to be a doctor." – Radhika

Radhika fulfilled her father's wishes by becoming a dentist and pursuing a career in science. She wanted to please her father and he wanted her to follow in his footsteps. To express that she felt valued by her father she says that once he had her, *"he never wished he had a son"*, referring to the traditional preference for sons in India. So, she fulfilled her father's dreams by becoming a doctor as possibly a son would have. She did it *"more for him"* than for herself. She did everything to make him *"happy"* and *"proud"*. She demonstrates a certain respect for her father, by referring to the day he died as to the "*till the day he lived"*, thereby avoiding the grief associated with death in her expression.

Her link to her father continues once her career begins. She tells of starting off as a dentist in a private practice and then switching to a managerial role in the pharmaceutical industry as her father felt the long working hours and the financial investment in private practice may not be acceptable to her future husband. Radhika made the change but then missed aspects of her work as a dentist.

"I started missing my practice 4 months into the job. I started missing my patients. I started feeling this was way too mechanical. It was more to do with just reading and anyone could do it. I think intellectually I should pursue my dental career back. I should switch back. And again, that's when my dad said when you start a task in life, a new thing in life, whether you like it or not give it some time. One of the lessons that made me stick to an organization for more than a year..." – Radhika

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Despite some discomfort with her job at the time and thinking she should *"switch back"* to her previous job, she heeds her father's advice to *"give it some time"*. Her father's advice becomes one of her mottos in life and she elaborates on the various ways she has integrated and applied this guidance to the rest of

her career. She illustrates by pointing out that because of her father's advice she has only worked for two companies and does not switch jobs without giving them enough time.

After the death of her father, Radhika turns her focus on her mother and expresses the ways in which her mother's behaviours and spirituality strengthened her own resolve to achieve balance and decide her own future.

"People don't decide your future. It is you who decide to live your circumstances to be happy. There is always a god to take care. So, she's very that ways that why should I bother about the next meal when I'm getting the current one. So, my mom's decision-making came out to be a surprise to me. She'd always been a non-working housewife dependent on my dad for every decision. She didn't even know how to pay the electricity bill till my dad died and she had to take care of the entire house, banking accounts, settling things and I thought if she could do it we are educated women exposed to everything possible in the world and if we lose our balance then there has to be something that is making her strong and that's what as a woman I should adopt. So, that's when I also started – she introduced me to the spiritualism in life and I think it made me a much stronger person." – Radhika

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Radhika continues expressing her sense of fusion with her family. Early in life her expression of fusion was linked to her father; later in life she demonstrates fusion with her mother. By *adopting* her mother's spiritual approach to life's challenges, she became a stronger person and in her current career phase managed her work and life challenges without *"losing her balance"* in the way her mother has modelled for her.

7.2.2 Communion

Even before she was married, the connections around her career decisions were influenced by the projected expectations of her future, and yet to be identified, spouse. Her father's guidance around being in communion and not *"independent"* is expressed below.

"Who I would get married to, that was one of the key concerns my father had at that point when I said okay can we invest into a dental clinic and, you know, he said we can look at it but then you know at the end of the day where and who you'll get married to will have a lot of things. So, by and large in India that is an important factor. There are certain a group of women who are very independent in their thought and I don't mean to be disrespectful to the others who want to play by circumstance and who want to go with the flow but there are far and few who would want to, you know, go against all odds and achieve what they've thought for it." – Radhika

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Radhika speaks casually and uses a very Indian slant to English in this quote. I paraphrase here to clarify the message: Radhika tells me that her father's key concern was for her to make career choices that would be flexible in terms of time requirements and financial requirements, so that she can adapt to meet the needs of her future husband. She says, *"at the end of the day and who you'll get married to will have a lot of things"*. Here, she expresses her acceptance of her father's guidance that ultimately (*"at the end of the day"*), the family (*"where"*) she marries into and the person she marries (*"who"*), will have their own expectations (*"will have a lot of things"*) of her. She says she does not want to disrespect women (*"others"*) who make career choices independently and without concern for their future marriage (*"want to go with the flow"*) and therefore take a risk (*"play by circumstance"* and *"go against all odds"*) by

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making life decisions and seeking achievement on their own ("*achieve what they've thought for it*").

I draw the basis for her career choices being in communion with married life from this quote. I understand her to say that taking marriage into consideration in career choices is a very *"important factor"* in India and equally important to her. This illustrates that the individual, society and family are in fusion.

When she speaks of her subsequent marriage, her narrative around marriage and communion is consistent. Her sense of support from her husband and her desire to be supportive of him supports her beliefs.

"It was an arranged marriage and I think my husband was a very complementary factor." – Radhika

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She was happy with her husband and so was *"everybody"* else. He complemented her very well.

"So, everybody seemed to be saying he's the perfect guy, non-interfering, very encouraging, never cribbed about me travelling, not spending time at home, never talked about my financial statements, never interfered about my decisions at office, so always there to hear me but yet I felt oh he's very different from me." – Radhika

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She seems to have some reservations, felt *"very different"* from her husband; she says, *"everybody seems to be saying he's the perfect guy.*" The reasons for the positive evaluation of others is primarily his supportive or non-interfering attitude to her career. Although she felt very different from him, she appreciated, and others around her seem to encourage her to appreciate, that he was *"encouraging"* about her work, he *"never cribbed"* about her work travel, he *"never talked"* about her finances, *"never interfered"* with her office decisions. In

the case of her husband, Radhika seems to be in an uncomfortable position, there is a need for communion, and cultural pressure from others around her to find that communion. Yet, emotionally there is some divergence. Despite others describing them as complementary, she implies some unease, she feels *"he's very different"* from her.

"I think I started appreciating those differences at a little later stage when I realized that he had such a huge role to play in my growth and me going into leadership role. If not for him I would have probably not had that courage to go for it." –

Radhika

She expresses that his preferences and lifestyle choices varied from hers and initially these differences concerned her as they prevented them from developing a close bond. They did not seem very compatible in terms of companionship and leisure activities. However, over time despite the differences between them, she appreciated his support and encouragement to attain a leadership role in her career and that became a valued element of their relationship. Her career was a shared goal and it seems that they might have developed a marital bond through her career project. She credits him with having helped her; she might not have *"had the courage to go for it"* without him.

She also expresses her sense of communion in her professional life. She values her ability to align with others, her ability to *"change and adapt to circumstances"*.

"So, what I learnt that people will not change you need to change and adapt to circumstances if you want to grow. So, that principle I applied to my professional life and alignment with other functions, alignment with senior leadership,

Radhika, evaluates one of her strengths professionally as being her ability to align with other departments (*"functions"*), *"senior leadership"*, colleagues (*"folks"*) and *"global teams"*. Her experience has taught her that others will not change. To *"grow"* in her career, her strategy (*"principle"*) has been to make the effort to *"change and adapt"* to be in communion (*"alignment"*) with others, and this has been successful for her as it has resulted in *"excellent feedback"*.

Radhika acknowledges the interdependence she has emotionally and instrumentally with her family. She speaks of the satisfaction of knowing she is a role model for her extended family.

"Yeah I think all my younger cousins and my relatives they take me as an example. It makes me proud. But I want to be humble. I want them to grow bigger than me. I want them to do it faster than I did it. I wish them good luck. It feels nice. I feel I made my dad proud. I've reached where he wanted me to reach." – Radhika

Radhika's connection to family starts with her father and extends to future generations. As an *"example"* of success in the family, she wants to facilitate the career growth of those *"younger"* than her. Her influence on her family makes her *"proud"* and in doing so she recognizes that she has *"made her dad proud"*.

She also stresses the support of her mother-in-law and mother in terms of childcare, which allows her to travel for work.

> *"My support system was my mother-in-law and my mom because my job has taken me places. There were lot of travels. And they were always there for my baby." – Radhika*

Echoing the expression used by many women, she refers to her mother-in-law and her mother as her *"support system".* They were *"always there"* for her baby, and this meant she could travel for work. She appreciated their interest in facilitating her work and ensuring that she could keep her career going by doing what they could do to help with childcare, particularly when she needed to travel. She acknowledged that not only did their support provide instrumental value, she also valued feeling comfortable that her child would be safer with family than with hired help.

> *"In this organization, I've been offered twice to move to the US and moving to US means a better career growth, a better lifestyle, a better recognition, a better acknowledgment and I have said no. It's because my support system as much as I need them, they need me too." – Radhika*

Ironically though, to stay with her *"support system"* she would forsake career growth offered to her twice by her company with a position in the US. She highlights the interdependence by stressing that the need for each other is mutual: *"as I need them, they need me too".*

7.2.3 Divergence

Radhika faces fragmentation from organizational, family and societal sources in her story. She senses that others in her organizational context may have divergent views of her ability to fulfil her career once she becomes pregnant.

> *"You're not diseased, you're only pregnant. But that's not how people really take it. It's like oh now she's pregnant she's going to be off work. She's not going to feel well some of the days. So, instead of that empathy I think it's more of like a pain point sometimes in the organization." – Radhika*

When she was pregnant, she felt her colleagues saw her as *"diseased"*. She felt that instead of receiving *"empathy"* from her organization, she felt as if she was a *"pain point"* to them. They would expect her to be less productive, her time off for maternity leave would be considered *"time off"* work, and her physical changes would mean that she may not feel well on some days. This becomes a tension and an incoherence in her career story.

> *"Then when I missed that promotion I realized I need to work harder for the next year. The baby was too small and that's when at some point I realized okay I've learnt a lot over the last 8.5 years it's time to move on. It's time to join an organization which is just coming up or just setting up and then whatever expertise that you've gathered over the last 8 years one needs to apply." – Radhika*

After returning to work soon after her baby's birth, she was passed up for a promotion. After being passed up for a promotion, she decided that she would need to work a lot harder, I believe she means to say work longer hours to achieve a promotion in that organization. Although she had implied that she was passed up for the promotion because of her maternity leave, she no longer looks externally for the cause as discrimination, and internalises the cause as her own lack of availability to meet the organization's long hours demands due to her childcare responsibilities. So, she decides it's time to move on to another organization where she might be able to apply her experience and have more

manageable hours. However, after having the baby she faces further divergence from her mother.

"That's where my husband was extremely encouraging. With a 9-month-old baby, my mother was not very keen that I switch organizations. She felt that the older organization people still understand you they know your performance for last 8 years they know how you are for the newer organization you'll have to work harder you'll have to establish credibility. Is this the right time? And that's when my husband said, go for it; I'm there." – Radhika

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Her mother was against her changing jobs, as she felt Radhika should accept the slower pace of progress and discrimination as a trade-off for familiarity. Her mother believed that she should be focusing on her baby and not her career. Her mother who had been supportive of her career all along, expresses concern and suggests that she give up the opportunity to move forward in her career until the baby is older. Her mother injects doubt and guilt by saying *"Is this the right time?"* However, communion with the husband provides support. When she receives an offer for a better position with a new organization, she finds him *"extremely encouraging"* and his encouragement facilitates her decision to move. This illustrates how divergence and communion bonds can occur simultaneously and shift between actors. Radhika overcomes personal differences with her husband and finds communion in his support of her career.

She experiences fragmentation from her mother's shifting views on her career. Her mother's thoughts shift from being supportive of her career to suggesting that she needs to compromise her career to prioritize childcare. Her mother seems to have withdrawn her support. Her husband relieves the tension by vocalising his support and becoming the voice of assurance that offsets the mother's voice of doubt.

Radhika speaks of societal fragmentation around the feeling of guilt triggered by society's view of working mothers as neglectful of childcare by not spending enough time with their children. The pride she felt from her extended family may not be shared by the wider society.

"There's always this guilt in women that we're not spending enough time as much as a housewife so that guilt remains but then I learnt over years from my seniors, my friends, my working professional friends that it's worse for a child to know my mother is not productive, she does nothing, all she does is cooking, eating, taking care of the house. It makes the child proud at certain age maybe not when they're so young but in their teens, they're happy to say my mother is a working professional. My mother has a leadership role in so and so company. My mum's travelling for work. My mum's a doctor. So, those are things that make children proud also. It helps them gain that confidence in their peer group so that is one thing I learnt." – Radhika

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She expresses that her *"seniors"*, female role models with children, all feel *"guilt".* She edits this fragmentation and sense of guilt. She compares working mothers' productivity to the stay-at-home mothers' lack of productivity and undermines their work as doing nothing but *"cooking, eating, taking care of the house".* She believes a working mother *"makes the child proud at a certain age"* and compensates for the mother's time away. This tension created by societal expectations is relieved by focusing on the pride that children feel for working mothers, rather than looking at it through the eyes of society which seems to instil guilt.

7.2.4 Assertion

As Radhika reflects further on her decision to switch jobs after being passed up for a promotion, her assertion type of agentic bond emerges and she highlights that it was *"totally up to me"* to make the decision to switch jobs.

"It was totally up to me to take it or to leave it but I did take it head on and I switched to clinical research." – Radhika

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She implies that the decision was a confrontation of sorts, by saying that she took it *"head on".* Her assertion against the divergences she had experienced, particularly from her mother and possibly society, is highlighted by the self-reliance expressed in this quote. In one sentence, she iterates her individuality and in her decision, she says: *"it was totally up to me"*, *"I did take it"*, *"I switched".*

She also articulates the value of her career and presents an added reason for making the change.

"So, one reason of switching was because I wanted to be financially independent." – Radhika

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Radhika implies the risks of staying in her previous job might have been a loss of the job and possible a loss of her career. So, making the change to a new job essentially served to pre-empt job loss, to maintain her career, which in turn ensured that she could continue to be *"financially independent".*

She reflects on her growth as a person and elaborates on her spiritual side to express her sense of self and her desire to live in the moment and *"become a balanced person".*

> *"And that is another thing that really helped me become a very balanced person. My circumstances had made me a little aggressive. It helped me reach that level of toning down my aggression, thinking more rationally, not being worried about the future, not really caring about where my career is going to take me 5 years from now. It's like now is the day to live." –*
> *Radhika*

She had not been pleased with who she was becoming. The disappointment of being overlooked for a promotion and the challenges of balancing long work hours with a baby and the underlying risk of losing her job altogether had made her *"aggressive"*. She reached out to the spiritual lessons her mother had taught her, she began to think more *"rationally"*, not being *"worried about the future"*, *"not really caring"* about her career *"5 years from now"* but rather living for the moment. So, she asserts herself into her career story, she reflects on her personal development and frames her intentionality to continue her career without a specific plan using a spiritual approach.

7.2.5 Integration

Despite not having a career plan, her career advances and she re-affirms that she will pursue a career. Earlier she had framed her career goals around financial independence, now she frames her career goals in terms of subjective values.

> *"I do wish to see myself grow not in terms of position but in terms of getting to do newer things in the company, getting to contribute to the society, getting to make an impact or add value to the business that I'm currently doing." – Radhika*

She expresses her desire to *"grow"* is not in terms of reaching higher positions. Rather, she elaborates that this growth needs to be on subjective measures

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such, *"do newer things in the company"*, *"contribute to society"*, *"make an impact" or "add value"* to the business.

7.2.6 Conclusion of Radhika's story

In conclusion, Radhika's story begins with fusion with her father, moves to some divergence and then communion with her husband, then divergence with the organization, her mother and society. A key turning point in Radhika's story is her encounter with discrimination in the workplace and withdrawal of support from her mother after having a baby. She begins her career with objective career goals and continues her career based on subjective criteria as a form of assertion. Radhika re-affirms her desire to continue in her career by adapting the meaning and value of her career pursuits in individual and subjective ways. These subjective measures are more difficult for others to assess and measure and therefore the career becomes more of a personal project than it might have been at the start, when one of her strongest desires was to make her father proud and her primary agentic bond was fusion with him. The culture-centred model explains how and why Radhika maintains her career. Her agentic bonds through fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration shift over time along with the shifting interplay of cultural standards and structural landscape she encounters along the way.

7.3 Dipti's Story

Dipti worked in the IT industry; she had been in the workforce for about nine years. She had a Master's degree and was one of the few who were not married and did not have any children. Most of the women in the data indicated that they had married within the first five years of their working lives. Dipti's agentic process is shown in Table 51.

Table 51 Dipti's agentic process: agentic bonds by temporal phases

No. of references	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Fusion	0	0	0	0
Communion	0	0	0	0
Divergence	1	2	0	0
Assertion	1	3	5	0
Reaffirmation	0	1	1	0

Dipti's story is an outlier in this data set, as her agentic process starts with divergence and assertion. Her agentic process is shown in Figure 14.

Dipti's story

Career agency

Integration

Conscious choice to continue career

Assertion

Individual reflections on divergent cultural expectations
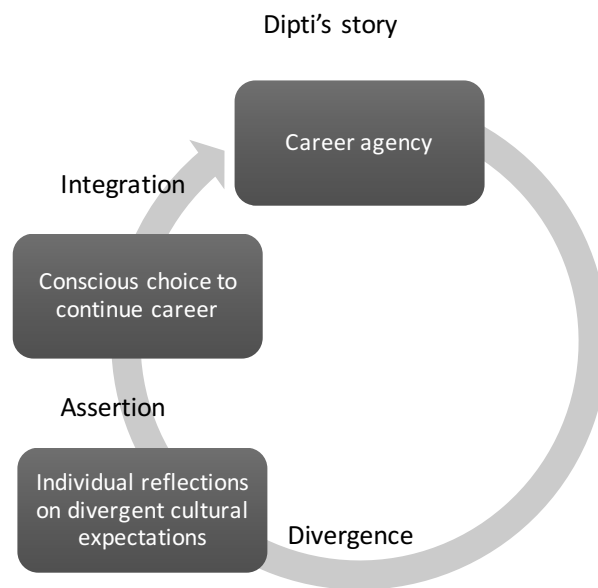
Divergence

Figure 14 Dipti's agentic process

7.3.1 Divergence

In the pre-career phase of their stories, many women stressed that their parents adhered to the wider societal beliefs that the ideal career and education options were one of two: medicine and engineering. Other subjects were not valued and typically discouraged by the parents and typically accepted by the interviewees as the right thing to do. However, Dipti expressed some dissent.

> *"So, in India there are only two career options. Either you*
> *become a doctor or you become an engineer and uh, so my*

family was insistent that I take up both subjects, so you can
imagine, I ended up studying maths, physics, chemistry and
biology." – Dipti

Dipti highlights that the conventional societal wisdom in India; *"either you become a doctor or you become an engineer"* is endorsed by her parents. This belief which she frames as societal, and embraced by her parents, meant that she *"ended up"* studying these subjects. Her choice of words (*"ended up"*) demonstrates her resistance and resentment about the restricted choices. Although she started off complying, Dipti was also the only participant in this study who went as far as to switch her course of study to psychology and ultimately defy the status quo around appropriate education. She later switched again from an undergraduate degree in psychology to a Master's degree in English literature.

"So, he wanted me to pursue you know, give it a year, maybe
drop a year, study more try and crack you know maybe there
was a medical… some seed, some medical seed. So, I had a
conversation with him and I told him, it's just not my cup of tea
and I just don't feel comfortable and then I think was
unanimous decision, so my dad was like 'yeah, I really don't
want to force you but I did see the potential in you and you
have been doing so well, why not give it a shot', but then I told
him you know… – I just give up, you know I… these are not my
subjects." – Dipti

Dipti illustrates her father's desperate efforts to make her fit the societal discourse. He looked for *"some seed"*, *"some medical seed"* in her. He asks her *"give it a year"*, *"study more"*. He says he sees *"the potential"* in her. But Dipti knew it was *"just not her cup of tea"*. Dipti does not seem to hold her parents responsible for their divergent views, she sees this as societal pressure upon

them as well. Dipti's story stands out because while most of the other participants expressed an automatic allegiance to that belief, she actively resisted it. Although for some time she did comply, her actions and words show that she did not accept it as a fused choice. She clearly asserts her personal wishes not to study either medicine or engineering and takes actions to study subjects of her own choosing.

"Two years, Manjari, I had no friends. You know 10th, 11th 12th, you know when you were actually going out and meeting people and I think I was, you know, most depressed, I would just be sitting at home, and you know cramped up with all those books, because, like I said, I just didn't have the aptitude, I just didn't find it interesting, and uh.. it was really tough. So, the conversations, the uh, the transition from science to a totally different field was really actually tough for me as well because again, I didn't know what I was getting into, it's not like I had a great idea of what the subjects were like." – Dipti

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Dipti's story highlights simultaneously experiencing divergence and assertion. After two years of studying science and feeling *"depressed",* she decided she needed to have *"conversations"* with her father and these conversations were *"tough".* Breaking away from the societal view of education for vocation rather than personal interest, left her feeling a bit removed from the security that the fused choice offers. Her sense of being alone in this decision and feeling that she was taking a risk is highlighted when she says, *"I didn't know what I was getting into".*

Later, she says that she managed to persuade her father and eventually her decision to change courses was *"unanimous".* As opposed to the stories of most of the other women who focus on their parents' wishes, Dipti focuses on her own desires and persuades her parents, who she believes are taking the path of least resistance against societal views. She expresses a need for some

acceptance from her parents before she could feel comfortable about her decision. She voices some trepidation, saying the decision was *"really tough"* for her.

After her psychology degree, she decides to do a Master's degree in English literature. At this point I asked if her parents were involved in this decision; her response is in the quote below.

"Uh no, so that was by choice, uhm Manjari. I said I think, you know great idea to get another Master's degree under my belt so with psychology there are limited that I could have done and with the English you know, I could be in the corporate, I could start training, you know… so that's when I got the (company name) job and then because of psychology background I could also do counselling and teach communications skills. So, it was like uh double whammy; it worked out for me. And it was of interest to me." – Dipti

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Her parents were not involved in her decision for further study and professional development; that was her *"choice".* Her reasons for studying English at the graduate level are a combination of interest and vocational opportunities.

The simultaneous narration of divergence and assertion appear in her past career story. Her connection to her family is highlighted when one of her first jobs requires her to move quite far away from her family home.

"So I belong to Chandigarh, my family is there and I didn't know anybody in Bangalore. So that was a very tough decision for me, you know just from right, from North, from winter to down South, knowing nobody and that's where you know it's like the mothership, it's home, you know a lot of things happening there... for me…" – Dipti

---

She expresses that her identity is tied to a region and to her family, when she says she *"belongs"* to a town, which is her *"mothership"*. Here there is evidence of personal fragmentation. For the sake of her career she contends with an organizational fragmentation; she needs to move to another city to advance her career. Changing geographies from "north" India to "south" India meant going somewhere where she knows *"nobody"*. In the Indian context, the north/south divide is considered a significant cultural divide. This is a personal dilemma for her, moving away from where she belongs to launch her career was a *"tough decision"* for her.

She then resolves her dilemma by reflecting on the trade-off. She assesses the move as being important for career progress, as the move was a *"promotion"* and she would *"be with the main team"*.

"It was a promotion… it was a promotion, it was a new role, it was to be with the main team the core team there. So that was a tough decision I had to take I had to let go of my family I had to go to a new place I had to adjust to new people. And the worst was not knowing anybody. But anyways, I took the decision." – Dipti

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Dipti reiterates *"to let go of my family"* was a *"tough"* decision. It's interesting that she felt she was letting go of family, so some sense of her being attached to family and her earlier reference to the *"mothership"* might reflect an underlying agentic communion that does not manifest directly in relation to any of her career pursuits.

7.3.2 Assertion

The following quote demonstrates the individual and self-assertive nature of her interview. The frequency of references to self-reliance in her narrative was unique. She continues to explain her reasons for further studies and further training at her own expense to fulfil her individualistic career goals.

> *"Somebody, you know asked me 'why are you spending enormous amounts of money on certifications, your company is using psychometrics etc. so why are you going in and doing that?' My answer to them would be 'that's ok but as an individual I need to grow'. As an individual I need to expand my horizons, I also need to continue to upscale myself. So the kind of qualifications that I have now may not be necessarily current for the future. For me to grow, for anybody to grow, I feel, you know, Manjari, upscaling yourself maybe, you know, be it by reading new stuff that comes out, you know, sharing articles, reading books, magazines and getting new certifications, getting to see what the world is doing is very, very important. So, uh, you know future, one doesn't know what will happen but yes, always look forward to it with the best of your ability. But then again you will have to be responsible so I will not say for any career decision, I think you have to take the ownership for that." – Dipti*

After telling me about the elaborate and costly actions she is taking to adapt to rapidly changing technology in her industry, i.e. she takes certifications, and reads books and magazines to *"expand"* her *"horizons"* and develop her skills (referred to as *"upskilling"*) in contemporary Indian business English, she expresses her self-reliance, and willingness to be *"responsible"* and *"take the ownership"* of her career.

> *"I think nowadays, people prefer working women. You know and uhm… that is like the new norm. I haven't seen any young couples who just got married, they say yeah, honeymoon can wait, but don't let the job suffer." – Dipti*

She contextualises and validates her decision to put career before marriage by situating it in her view of contemporary Indian society. She was the only woman in my sample to say that the wider Indian society now believes a woman's job is more important than her marriage and that this is the *"new norm"*.

Dipti's self-reliance and need for independence is stressed again when she describes the value of financial independence that her career offers her.

"You can be independent, you can go buy stuff for yourself you don't have to rely on pocket money. I think that is a great motivator, you know you have your money, he'll say save it for a rainy day, I'll tell him it's ok, I'm just going to splurge what I have." – Dipti

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This financial independence of working also accords Dipti further freedom from her father's beliefs. When he comments on her spending by suggesting she *"save it for a rainy day",* she disagrees with him, she confidently rejects his view and tells him *"it's ok I'm just going to splurge what I have"*.

Yet at the same time, these expressions of independence continue to show concern and interest in the family.

"Independence is really appealing, you know... and again doing something for others. Or if my parents have done so much for me, if I can contribute in any way, not that they are dependent on me, but in any way you know, that I can go give them a nice gift, sponsor something. It feels really nice. It feels really good." – Dipti

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As she talks about financial independence, she also says that buying gifts for her parents *"feels really nice",* and clarifies that they are not dependent on her.

She is grateful for all that they have done for her and wishes to contribute to their lives in return.

Her assertion is evident in the way she acknowledges her independence in taking the decision to move for her jobs and then making the most of the opportunities given to her.

"But anyways, I took the decision, Manjari, I moved to Bangalore and uh I think I have honed my skills and learned the nitty gritties of my job in Bangalore. So, two years, I spent there, I got the opportunity to travel, I got the opportunity, there are different locations there, travel uh... you know uh… did a lot training programmes, met a lot of people. So that's, so there we a big team of say 8 people and uh again I spent two years in Bangalore and then I got the opportunity to, you know, to independently handle a site." – Dipti

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She illustrates her assertion by describing her independent decision making, her self-initiated skills development, autonomous cultural adjustment to south India and finally her success in leading a team. She qualifies the value of this move as the opportunity to *"independently"* handle a site.

She was later promoted once more and this time she moved to Delhi. Her experience in the next position was equally satisfying. Once again, she voiced her independence and took credit and ownership of her own success.

"And that's, so 2010 I moved to the Gurgaon side and I am taking care of the entire L&D function for about 2,000 people here independently. So, this has been a real boost to my career and uh, you know I… I think you know, you have to move out of your comfort zone if you really you know explore your potential otherwise you are just like a frog in the well and uhm…" – Dipti

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She presents her current leadership position, and again stresses that she manages the function and the people *"independently"*. She repeats the caution of becoming the *"frog in the well"* referring to the risks of avoiding new experiences and becoming ignorant. The same expression was voiced by Ruchika in Chapter 6.2 as the caution she received from her mother. This time Dipti is applying the caution to herself. She uses this expression to illustrate the rationale to take herself out of her *"comfort zone"*, to move to yet another city to take on a new opportunity.

In comparison to all the others, Dipti had the greatest number of references in assertion. She spoke most often of making the most of opportunities, taking responsibility for her career, developing her skills, and moving out of her comfort zone to achieve career growth.

7.3.3 Integration

In addition to being self-assertive, Dipti has no doubts about her continuing in her career and does not hesitate to re-affirm this.

> *"So being a career woman is my choice and I am not married yet. So, the kind of life partner that I choose I will make sure I have the right conversations with him, because my career is really important to me." – Dipti*

Clearly having a career is her choice, and any life partner she chooses will need to understand that her career is *"really important"* to her.

> *"Career stays central to what I do. And… betrothal aspect it happens, if it doesn't happen… it's good." – Dipti*

Dipti clearly states the importance of her career in her life. Unlike most of the others she explicitly states that she is willing to forego marriage for the sake of her career.

7.3.4 Conclusion of Dipti's story

Dipti's story exemplifies a relatively individualistic career agency. The culture-centred model explains how and why Dipti maintains her career. Her agentic bonds through divergence, assertion and integration move over time along with the shifting interplay of cultural standards and structural landscape she encounters along the way. Differently from Radhika, she perceives aspects of cultural norms and focuses on the enabling aspects of the *"new norms"*. Yet, her fragmentations are framed in primarily societal constraints communicated through her parents. The agentic process permits Dipti to frame her relatively individualistic behaviours as validated divergence from traditional cultural norms around restricted educational choices and assertion of her need for independence within the *"new norms"* of career before marriage for women to maintain careers and provide a coherent career narrative.

7.4 Samaya's story

Samaya worked in the IT industry, is married, had lived in several countries abroad, had been in the workforce for over 20 years, had a technology bachelor's degree, was in an arranged marriage with one child and lived in a joint family house with her in-laws. Her agentic process is shown in Table 52.

Table 52 Samaya's agentic process: agentic bonds by temporal phase

No. of references	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Fusion	0	2	1	0
Communion	1	3	3	0
Divergence	0	0	0	0
Assertion	0	1	0	0
Reaffirmation	0	0	0	1

Samaya's story focuses primarily on fusion and communion, and lightly on assertion and integration. Samaya never expresses divergence and shows no signs of tensions and dilemmas in her career story. Her agentic process is shown in Figure 14
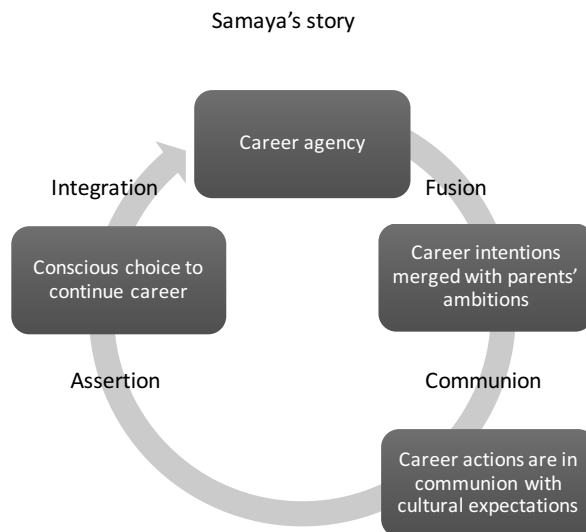
Figure 15 Samaya's agentic process

7.4.1 Fusion

Samaya tells me early on that after graduation she worked for a small company in her home town. She says that in school she decided that she wanted to leave her small town and work for a big company elsewhere.

> *"After I got married yeah, after I got married and he helped me in number of ways like looking for job because those days the jobs used to come in Times of India Ascent on every Wednesdays, I'm talking somewhere in 1992 times. So, there was no access to internet so he used to help me to find out jobs in places like Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, which used to be Bombay at that time." – Samaya*

She illustrates her fusion with her husband with the above quote. After her arranged marriage, she moved to the capital of India to be with her husband. He was supportive of her working and helped her in her job search after her move to Delhi. Together, they looked for jobs in other cities as well, finding a job was more important than staying in the same city.

> *"Then my younger brother was living in US at that time and he suggested, he's the one actually who brought one twist to my career. So, he said that I should take up a course on a mainframe, at that point of time if you remember there was a Y2K the year 2000. Lots of openings in IT so he said why don't you do that particular course, which will help you to get into, you know, so I did that. It was a tough time because I left my family for four months. I went to Hyderabad." – Samaya*

She then describes her brother's involvement in her job search brought a *"twist"* to her career. Her brother suggested that she look for a position in the United States, where her brother was living at the time and he saw opportunities for her there. With the support of her husband, in-laws and parents she followed her brother's advice and took up a course away from home, which would make her a suitable candidate to be in the same role as her brother in the United States. She illustrates her fusion with her family.

> *"I got recruited here and everyone in the family were very happy and they supported." – Samaya*

She was then recruited into a company in the United States and she had full support from the family. Her career was a shared goal and her achieving a position in another country, and decision to live apart from her husband was received positively, *"everyone in the family was very happy"*. Her career and her success was a family project. Family members pitched in by being supportive of her job search, suggesting courses of study, helping to find a job and even accepting that she would need to live away from her husband to study and then to work.

7.4.2 Communion

Going back to her childhood, her desire to move away from the small town was influenced by stories she had read of foreign countries, she fondly recalls a memory of a British teacher who taught her the William Wordsworth poem titled: I wandered lonely as a cloud.

> *"And we used to mug up that poem and our principal she was from UK so she used to visit school for six months and then she used to go back and I remember in the assembly one day she said that I feel pity for my children that they're mugging up the poem without even seeing how the Daffodil flower looks like. So, once she had brought that flower from UK, so March, April time when it blooms there and then, so these are small things. You see I still remember those incidents."* – Samaya

To *"mug up"* a poem, in Indian English means to memorize a poem. She *"still remembers"* how this teacher inspired her to look outside India for work opportunities, so that she could see for herself all that she had read about. She links that experience to the fact that she continued travelling and living abroad throughout her career, even after having a child.

> *"Daughter was with my parents so this all takes care of your social and all those things na?"* – Samaya

When she was away, she left her daughter with her parents and her husband lived in their family home which was a joint family household with her in-laws. The *"na"* at the end of the sentences can be translated as "isn't it". This is a shortcut for confirming our mutual understanding and agreement that it is generally accepted that a daughter being taken care of by maternal grand-parents by default means that the daughter's needs, including *"social"*

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interactions, would be well taken care of. I did not clarify what she meant by "na", I understood, and chose not to interrupt the flow of her narration.

> *"So that that gave me lot of solace, lot of peace, I could concentrate and focus on my work, my career." – Samaya*

She goes on to share that knowing her daughter was well taken care of by her parents gave her *"solace"* and *"peace"*, and the freedom to focus on her career. When I asked her how her in-laws felt about it, she says

> *"They're also quite happy in a way that they have someone in the family who is qualified and working. So, they're also quite happy that way. So, that's how actually the journeys started, you know." – Samaya*

So, the family along with her were happy about her work and about the childcare arrangements. They valued her for being *"qualified and working"*.

The involvement and satisfaction of the family with regard to her career and their direct involvement in childcare allowed her to focus on her work and thereby reap the benefits of a successful career while managing family life.

> *"Many years it has been, yeah life was yeah, life was yeah. My daughter was busy with her studies, with her granny, I mean with both the grannies, grandparents and I used to come like at least once in a year, spend minimum 3 to 4 weeks with them, go back and they used to also visit me when I was abroad. So, that's how, you know that flip of the family was somehow managed." – Samaya*

She describes what sounds like the seamless management of a relatively complex family structure. Her daughter was busy with her studies and with grandparents. Samaya spent 3-4 weeks in India with her family and sometimes they visited her abroad. She says somehow, they managed what she calls the *"flip"* of the family which I understood to mean, her unusual family set-up.

"So, I came back 31st December 2010 I took the flight, came back and I spoke to my manager here. He is a fantastic person my manager here. So, he understood he said yeah time to be with family now. Lot of contribution made for the organization, for the company so he took care of that so that, even though there were lots of other assignments coming in, but then he ensured that there are other people who can handle that and I was supporting the work from here in India." – Samaya

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After many years working mostly from abroad, Samaya decided to move back to India. She told me that she decided to come back when her daughter was preparing for college entrance exams, because that's when she felt her full-time presence was needed at home. She describes the support of her manager and her organization in bringing her back and ensuring that her return to work in India went smoothly.

At this point, during the interview I was struck by the complete lack of challenges in her story. She had worked overseas, left her child and her husband each in different homes, worked in a male oriented environment and not once had she displayed any signs of tensions or dilemmas. So, I asked specifically about challenges. *"What kind of challenges are going to come up against in your career, do you think? Anything you're planning for?"*

> *"I don't think so. I thought that which actually, I did not face, I think the challenge was basically when your child is small because then you have to have put the attention, but I was, what should I say lucky. I do not know, because maybe my mom would say that she's done so much, but I did not know, didn't go through that phase. So, I don't see why should have any challenge in moving forward now for the rest of my career."*
> *– Samaya*

Her response showed no signs of divergence or tension or dilemmas in the past, present or future. She considers herself *"lucky"* so far and expects this luck to continue for the *"rest of my career".*

7.4.3 Assertion

Samaya rarely speaks of her conscious choice of a career. She speaks of her *"desire"* to have a career as being triggered in childhood.

> *"I had a desire to work in a big company. I come from a middle-class family, my father was a textile engineer, my mom was a homemaker and we're one sister, one brother small family, happy family but I had a desire to go out of (her home town) and work somewhere."* *– Samaya*

Despite being in a *"happy family,"* she seems to want to expand her horizons. She conceived of a career in a big company as the way *"out"* of her *"middle class"* life and her home town to satisfy her curiosity about other places, which she said earlier had been triggered in school by her British teacher.

7.4.4 Integration

Samaya frames the future as being *"up to me"*.

> *"Yeah, it's up to me now whether I want to continue or I want to do something different." – Samaya*

She says continuing on her current career path or doing something different is up to her. So, I asked her: *"Do you want to continue?"* Her response is unambiguous:

> *"I want to continue." – Samaya*

Samaya re-affirmed her desire to continue her career but did not elaborate on any specific plans.

7.4.5 Conclusion of Samaya's story

Samaya's story focuses primarily on fusion and communion and secondarily on assertion and integration. Samaya never expresses divergence and shows no signs of tensions and dilemmas in her career story. The culture-centred model explains how and why Samaya continues in her career. Her agentic bonds through fusion, communion, assertion and integration shift over time along with the shifting cultural standards and structural environment she encounters along the way. Her family including her husband and her in-laws are supportive of her career, they provide instrumental childcare support and facilitate her working abroad, even though this meant living away from family for nearly 20 years. Her story is uniquely free of divergence. Samaya's story from some perspectives can appear to be a relatively individual one, yet her own narration of the events of her career life exemplifies collective career agency.

7.5 Saanvi's Story

Saanvi worked in the IT industry; she had never lived abroad, but had travelled to the UK for a project. She had an undergraduate degree in technology with over 20 years of work experience. She was in an arranged marriage, did not live in a joint family household and had one child. Saanvi's agentic process is shown in Table 53.

Table 53 Saanvi's agentic process: agentic bonds by temporal phase

No. of references	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Fusion	1	1	0	0
Communion	0	4	0	0
Divergence	1	10	6	1
Assertion	0	0	0	0
Reaffirmation	0	0	0	0

Saanvi's story has the greatest number of references to divergences, yet she had no references to assertion and integration. Saanvi's agentic process is shown in Figure 16.
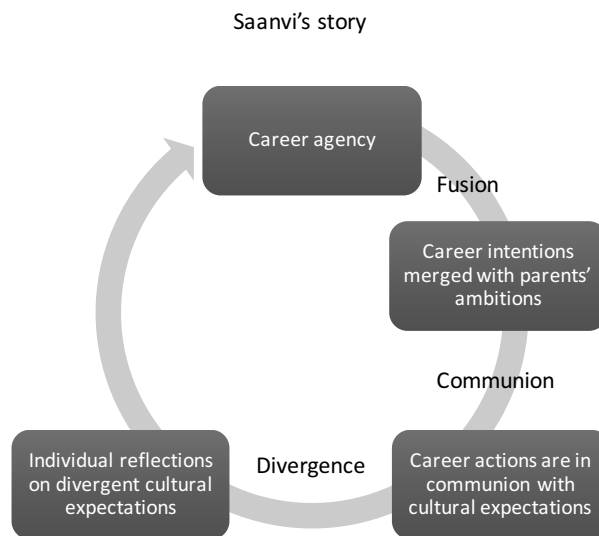
Figure 16 Saanvi's agentic process

7.5.1 Fusion

Saanvi tells of her mother's influence in her career plans, implying that due to her own marital hardships, Saanvi's mother's only aim was to make Saanvi and

her siblings financially independent, by equipping them with an education and a career.

"That was really -- her only aim in life was to bring us as financially independent because financial independence will be only there when you're really educated. So, those values were very much inculcated. So, that option never crossed my mind that again just get married and settle down no need to get into this mess that never ever crossed my mind, though there are options I must tell you, but I never exercised those." – Saanvi

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She illustrates the agentic bond of fusion by saying that getting married and settling down, would get her *"into this mess"*, implying that she needed to avoid the mess that her mother felt she was in. So, the mother's marital predicament and the mother's value for *"financial independence"* were *"inculcated"* and integrated into her career intentionality. She says not working as an option *"never crossed her mind"*. Hence choosing to work was not an independent and conscious decision of an individualistic nature, it was passed down to her from her mother.

7.5.2 Communion

Despite telling me that getting married and settling down was not an option, Saanvi quit her first job and moved to Delhi to do precisely that.

> *"I will tell you the trigger why I left that job finally. Apart from the reason underlying reason was that I need to go out, I wanted to get married and I said, "This is not the place where I can find a match and perhaps I may need to get out of this place." And I could have managed a transfer to Delhi, but in Delhi they were telling me, I was trying for a transfer actually to this place, but they told me that, "You know you can't be transferred just because, you know, you get married then we will transfer you, but we cannot transfer you just because, you know, you have to look for a suitable person." – Saanvi*

She says the underlying reason for leaving her job to transfer to Delhi, was to *"find a match"*, as there were likely to be more suitable candidates in a bigger city. The expression *"finding a match"* is used in India to imply finding a suitable life partner through the arranged marriage system. She had asked her organization for a transfer and in that cultural context was able to justify the reason for the request was, finding a suitable match. Her organization responded that a transfer is possible if you are already married to someone in the other city, but not for looking for a suitable person. So, the management had taken marriage into consideration in designing their policies for transfer requests. I did not confirm with her if this was an official policy. I doubt that it was; however, the significance of this is that her managers were not surprised by her request. Culturally, my experience is that looking for a suitable match is not entirely a private and personal matter, it is an expected stage of a person's life. Her managers subsequently agreed to transfer her to Delhi.

When she arrived in Delhi for her new job, Saanvi found out to her dismay that she was going to be sent to the UK for a project. She had wanted to stay in Delhi to find a partner and being sent to the UK would prevent that. She was 33 years old by now and as she put it: *"In India, that's not the age when people get married."* She did not say why she didn't speak up before the transfer. She says she felt that she was getting too old to find a suitable partner and could not

delay it any longer. She had to find a way back to Delhi. So, she went to see her boss in the UK and explained the problem. Her boss responded supportively.

"She immediately understood my personal issues, I explained to her and she said, Okay but she was a bit shocked you know. People usually come to me saying that we want to stay, oh we'll stay. So, why is it that you are leaving? So, I said, no, I have challenges but she understood and immediately I shifted back."
– Saanvi

Her boss *"understood"* and acted *"immediately"* to move her back to India. She spoke of other bosses who were supportive and guided her in her career. She struggled with being an introvert and credits one of her organizational mentors for helping her to accept herself and stop worrying about it.

"In fact, when my mentor told me about the 360 degree feedback, he told everything was great, great, great. But he said that, everybody has talked about your lack of networking skills whether it's social or professional. So, then I remember I asked him, yeah that's how I'm perhaps – I'm actually an introvert though I am talking a lot today. I don't really talk too much so, I said, "Yes, that's a problem. Unless and until I have something to say, I don't talk. So, what should I do please help me out. He said, that's not in your grain just leave it." – Saanvi

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She identifies herself as an *"introvert"* and shows surprise at herself for *"talking a lot"* during the interview. She shares the gratitude she feels because she learnt to leverage her strengths and accept her weaknesses in communion with her mentor. Her mentor helped her to accept herself *("that's not your grain")*, and not be too concerned *("just leave it")* with the opinions of others.

7.5.3 Divergence

Despite having had supportive bosses, her tensions and struggles arise primarily from organizational sources as well as societal and family sources. She describes the culturally and contextually specific gender constraint of being born a girl in India.

"And I come from a family where we're four sisters so you can understand. Four sisters in a family, I don't know how welcomed it is even in today's age but at that point of time yeah, it was a challenging scenario." – Saanvi

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As a young girl, she experienced societal gender bias. Being in a family which had four daughters, she says made her feel not welcome in India. She does not elaborate specifically on how this impacted on her but she says it was a *"challenging scenario"*. She expects me to *"understand"*, seeing me as a fellow Indian woman who probably shares her experience in some way. I took away that she felt she did not need to elaborate on the painful detail, and I would trigger shame if I pushed her to do so. Her expectation was that I would automatically understand her discomfort, and together we would acknowledge it and keep it quiet, between us. Her experience of being a woman in India, does not align with Dipti's view on the *"new norm"*.

She goes on to talk about discomfort in being a woman in a man's world. Gender relations in the organizational context become an issue when she needs to travel for work, and is put up in shared housing with male colleagues in the UK.

> *"I didn't know what kind of accommodation we will get in U.K. When I went there I – basically I was very conservative, I realized we were sitting in a guesthouse kind of place and we had to share the same washroom. That was my main problem because there are no joint – in India with every bedroom you will find a joined bathroom. In U.K. that's not the – I did not see it in the guesthouse……"So, we had to share there was a mixed population and we had to share that toilet and washroom. And that was completely unacceptable to me." – Saanvi*

Sharing physical space with men was *"completely unacceptable"* to her. She identified herself as *"very conservative"* and explained that in India, *"mixed populations"*, implying men and women who are not family, would never be expected share toilets.

Considering her experiences, I wanted to clarify her understanding of what appeared to me as gender bias. I asked her specifically if she felt there was any gender bias. She responded that did not feel that the bias was gender based. Instead, she felt she had been discriminated for being single.

> *"In fact, there is another bias that I saw there, they used to feel that if you are single you don't have your own family, so you are available to do work. You have no excuse not saying no. I remember my boss used to leave when I used to leave at 10, 10 p.m. I am talking about, Saanvi, these are the test scenarios, can you just go and review it and come back in the morning and…What was his expectation? I am leaving at 10 and he is telling me to at least review these unit test cases in the evening and come back on time at 9 in the morning." – Saanvi*

She believed that because she was not married she faced discrimination. Ignoring the other experiences she had recounted, she elaborates the discrimination towards her for being single. She explains how she was expected to be available for longer hours than her married colleagues.

The long hours were challenging to her, and this time she found going overseas was the solution.

"Then I went to overseas because working at overseas was a better option. There at least we used to have some free time with yourself." – Saanvi

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The overseas offices required less working hours and she could have some free time when working abroad. Her choosing to go overseas as a benefit was in contradiction to all that she had said so far. It was perhaps an attempt to edit the fragmentation, to reduce the tension in the story, by reframing it as a benefit.

The intersection of her marriage and organizational challenges comes up often in her story. She tells of being taken off a project because she gave short notice to take time off for her engagement ceremony. After that incident, she felt she was punished by being sent off to a project overseas and brought back just days before her wedding.

> *"I told them, Sorry tomorrow there is a ceremony and I need to take two days off, and then whole hell broke loose. They said, how can you and why didn't you tell us earlier? I told them, "There was nothing for me to tell you that I am going to get engaged. So, now it is decided so I need to take two days off." They didn't allow me and that was huge "tamasha" (scene) in office and finally I was taken out of that project and that's how I was cooling my heels on bench for some time, ten days because they said, you know, It's in the midst of the delivery and there is no way you can take leave and I don't know how they managed it and since I was – for five, ten days I stayed on bench and then I was shifted to a project overseas after I got engaged. Though I was not in a mood to travel at that point of time, but I thought there is the only way to secure my job because I am now on bench and there was already a fiasco because I just wanted to take two days leave. And that's how I went to Japan I think in Tokyo for six, seven months and I reached just a few days before my marriage." – Saanvi*

She was penalised by being taken off her project and made to sit *"on the bench"* for asking for time off for her engagement ceremony with short notice. Although asking for a transfer to find a suitable match had not been an issue to her managers in her first job, her request to take time off for her engagement was interpreted as her making a scene (*"tamasha"*). It appears her managers were objecting more to the short notice she had given them than to the reason for her request. It ensued then, that she had put her job at risk, and to *"secure"* her job, she had to take an overseas project, even though she was *"not in the mood to travel"*, having just become engaged.

> *"I quit in January. So that's the kind of, you know, because there was no provision. I thought in fact as you know, marriage is a challenge. So, I thought I don't know what to do. I thought maybe I need to give time here as well, I was always conscious of the fact that I had married late so, there could be challenges. And there were that I cannot deny that, there were. So, I decided to just take a break, enough of stress."* – Saanvi

The stress of the way she was treated at her workplace and the challenges of married life finally resulted in her quitting that job and taking a break to focus on her marriage; it seems that she feels she needs to make up for lost time being *"always conscious"* that she had *"married late".* When she talked of having *"so many challenges"* that she cannot *"deny"*, her mother's caution for her not to *"get into this mess",* i.e. advice not to put marriage before career, was evoked in my mind. Nevertheless, at least for some time she put marriage before career in her life. She later returned to work and had a child. Her mother became the primary childcare provider.

> *"…it was a burden on her and not a burden on anybody else. So, we depend still on our mothers, so she supported me for the first five years, but then, I thought I am exploiting my parents and put him in the day care after four or five years. When he was, yes when he was five, I put him in the day care."*
> *– Saanvi*

Although her mother took care of her son, Saanvi had a personal dilemma, she felt she was *"exploiting"* her parents and that childcare was a *"burden"* on her mother.

> *"For the first five years my mother took. I used to actually leave him in the morning with her and pick him in the evening. So, there was again an overhead, huge overhead for me and my husband. Sometimes he used to do and sometimes I, but primarily it was my responsibility." – Saanvi*

When her child was old enough she put him in day care. Yet these challenges were an *"overhead"* faced by her husband and herself, but as she puts it, was *"primarily my responsibility".* She seems to qualify her childcare duties as a fixed cost of having a career, an overhead cost that one pays all the time.

In looking at the ways working women structure their lives in her context, she alludes to a shift in Indian society, with fewer families living in joint family households.

> *"They stay very close by, close by means two, three, hour drive, so it's not - and my mother-in-law never showed any intent in taking that responsibility. She comes often they stay with us but never with an idea to take responsibility of the kid. I think that's not really the, in fashion these days." – Saanvi*

She says that expecting help from mothers-in-law is not really *"in fashion these days".* This seems to reflect that the shifting familial expectations in contemporary Indian society might mean less childcare support for working women in India.

As her story progresses, she shares several tensions and disappointments about corporate life. She captures gender bias by comparing her career to her husband's career and highlighting gender bias in organizations.

> *"He is from the similar background that I am, from the same college everything, just one year senior to me. Actually, he might not have been as brilliant as I was let me also though he very intelligent otherwise but academically if you talk. And when we started, for example even when we got married both of us, I think I was doing much better than he was. But when I look at the last twelve years I see where he is and where I am. There is no comparison, actually his career is on ascent and mine has just stagnated." – Saanvi*

She feels she was more brilliant than her husband but his career is on an *"ascent"* and hers *"has just stagnated"*. Yet, she does not explicitly attribute this to discrimination. Instead she suggests that her need for *"flexibility"* might have stalled her career progress.

> *"In pre-sales, it gives me some flexibility to manage my time. Though I tell you there is flexibility, but I have to work till 11 PM in the night, but flexibility that you know, I can schedule my time. If I work till 11, I can, then I can even start from 10:30 in the morning, so I can slot, you know, put some convenient slot for my work. So that is the reason that I have made pre-sales as a choice. Not, because I want to do pre-sale, because it allows me to be, you know, to actually, to be flexible with my son's schedules as well." – Saanvi*

She tells me that she made a career choice that compromised her career growth but allowed her some *"flexibility"* in terms of childcare. But then she hesitates and adds that although there is flexibility, the hours are still long; she seems a bit ambivalent about the trade-off she had made.

Hearing all this, I did want to ask her why she was continuing in her career, I did not utter those words, but she answered the question anyway.

> *"…if you ask me why I am still continuing with this organization, despite the career not really going anywhere is that, one is the flexi work and the second is the location of this place. It suits me very well. My house is just 15, 20 minutes' drive from this place. My kid's school half way between office and my residence. His day care is also now in his school so I'm not really concerned and I – his day care is not now till 7:30 or 8, it's just till 5:30. So, I ensure that I am at my home when he comes back. I am with him for half an hour or so and then again get busy with my work. The problem is that I'm not really able to spend any time with him, effective time. I'm always, you know, my next call, then my next call so, I'm not really with him. But then you cannot have everything in life. If I'm away at job, if I'm able to manage my job that's good enough. But yeah there is no that cessation from work that now it's my time, I do not find any my time for myself." – Saanvi*

Though she answered the question by elaborating on her daily struggles to manage her time between work and childcare, she says that she is with the organization as it is close to home and offers flexible working. Yet, she does not express satisfaction at having achieved any balance. She feels she is *"not really able to spend time"* with her son. There is a sense of disappointment in her voice. She accepts it by saying *"But then you cannot have everything in life".* She then describes the organizational constraints that she faces.

> *"…on one hand, they do provide you opportunities but those proactive interventions are not there at all. They expect you to do it, if that was the case I would have perhaps gone for some*

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Unlike Dipti's opinion that one must *"take ownership"* of their career development, Saanvi feels that organizations should be *"providing opportunities"* with *"proactive interventions"*, training, re-skilling to be able to pursue the opportunities they provide. She laments and accepts that she is not able to keep up by rhetorically asking *"where do I have time to do that?"* She says she would like a *"helping hand"* in her career development*.*

After that I asked her: *"Do you believe you are paid less than…?"* and before I could finish my question, she responded emphatically.

"Absolutely. Because they know, you know, perhaps people

understand that she is not going to go anyway unless and

until…So, I am really – I know it's not a suspect (suspicion), I

know I am paid – maybe people who are reporting to me are

actually getting more than what I am paid." – Saanvi

Despite having denied any experience of gender discrimination, she acknowledges that she is paid less than others. She believes that her organization takes advantage of her need to be close to home and with flexible hours, by under-paying her. She thinks they know that she does not have many other job options that would meet her criteria around flexibility and location. She continues to express her challenges with work, discussing the long hours at work and the personal dilemmas and guilt around childcare.

"It's long hours, I will not be able to, 22 hours, 20 hours I can't.

I'm sure I know my kid is my priority. So, even at this stage I

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She does not believe she can put in the time required to move up to the next level in her organization; her turmoil around managing work and childcare are palpable. She seems to imply that her organization expects 20-22 hours per day; this might be an exaggeration intended to make a point around an impossible expectation, rather than a precise number. She says her child is *"her priority",* but is *"not doing enough for him".*

After hearing of the challenges and burdens she faced, and as I had not heard any clarity around her plans to continue, I asked *"So, how will you keep your career going?"* Her response was:

"Really I don't have time to give thought to it." – Saanvi

Instead she changed the conversation to my work and wondered if there was anything I could do for women like her.

"But I was very interested to know about your organization. That how you helped women. So, is there anything that you do for women like me?" – Saanvi

She was clearly seeking some help and support. She asked me if I could help women like her, implying that many women have similar challenges. Her challenges seem unresolvable, yet she never expressed any intention to quit. In seeking help and not stating that she would quit, my conclusion was that she wants to continue working and is looking for ways to do that.

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We ended the conversation with her acknowledging her transparency and openness with me. She had become aware of her self-reflection.

"I think I have really talked a lot. Yeah, and very transparently."
– Saanvi

7.5.4 Conclusion of Saanvi's story

Saanvi's story exemplifies the experience of divergences. She has no references to assertion and integration. Her story leaves a sense of discomfort, there is no sense of closure. Her agentic bonds through fusion, communion, and primarily divergence, demonstrate the interplay of cultural standards and structural landscape she encounters along the way. Her story is uniquely strewn with unresolved divergence from society, family and organizations and personal dilemmas. Yet, the indications to me were that she is looking for a way to deal with her challenges and to continue her career. Her story can be contrasted with Samaya's story which is uniquely free of divergence.

7.6 Conclusions from the case studies

Analysing individual agentic processes through agentic bonds and temporal phases in four individual cases demonstrates the value of the model. I have shown the agentic bonds which emerge from the interplay of culture, structure and agency over time to maintain careers. Variations of agentic processes have been demonstrated. Radhika's story has all five agentic bonds, while Dipti, Samaya and Saanvi have some agentic bonds as shown in Figure 17.
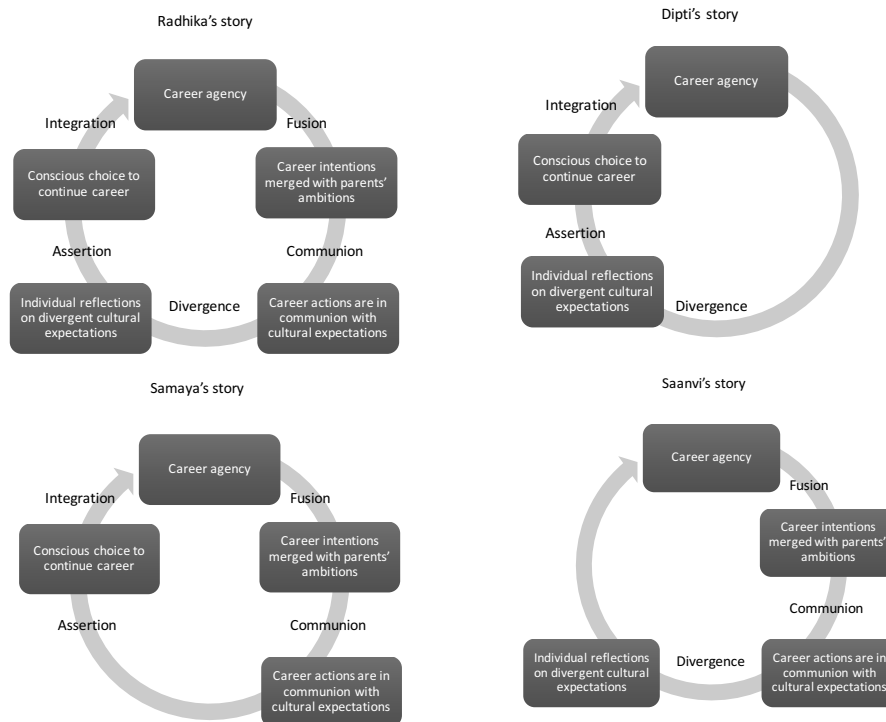
Figure 17 Different agentic processes of four women

The shifting and emergent agentic bonds demonstrate the way in which individuals contend with and leverage their contextual realities to maintain their careers. The data reveal that most of the individuals in this study follow a pattern of agentic bonds are in occurring temporal phases of their careers. Typically, the women shift their career agency from a collective focus to an individual focus through a similar route, displaying all five agentic bonds, as illustrated by Radhika's case study and her agentic process. However, in several narratives not all the agentic bonds emerge. Dipti, Samaya and Saanvi show that only some of the agentic bonds emerge to support careers.

These case studies show that the women adapt the agentic bonds, depending on the structural and cultural realities they contend with or perceive. Even though the women's demographic profiles were quite consistent, each of them faces a unique temporal-relational context. This context shifts over time and each woman finds a way to relate and connect with her context through shifting agentic bonds. 21 out of the 36 women interviewed followed the typical pattern of the agentic process represented above. However, 15 did not experience all

the bonds. The case studies show that they did not need those bonds to maintain their careers. The culture-centred model of career agency provides a tool for exploring and assessing the agentic bonds of individual women as well as the typical process of a group of women.

7.7 Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed four individual cases through the agentic process and shows the differing ways the process and bonds are produced in each story. The aim of this chapter was twofold: first to validate the explanatory potential of the culture-centred model as a theory of career agency, and second to demonstrate the analytical value of reviewing career stories with the model. The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate that although the agentic process is generalizable across the cases, the agentic bonds are not experienced similarly by all participants. Analysing individual data with the culture-centred model reveals the interplay between culture, structure and the individual, explaining how the shifting and emergent bond between the individual and the context supports careers. Chapter 8 will position the findings in the literature and discuss the contributions of this study.

8 DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTION

In this section I discuss the contributions to knowledge made by taking a culture-centred approach to women's career theories.

The literature review in Chapter 2.2 on Stage theories of women's careers emphasises the relational and temporal nature of women's lives. These theories divide women's careers into three core stages: early career, mid-career and later career. They stress that family responsibilities, particularly in the mid-career phase of life, impact on women's careers more than men's careers. A review of the literature in Chapter 2.2 shows that Stage theories fail to explain women's careers in many non-Western and some Western contexts. Although Stage theories emphasise temporality and relationality, they do not elaborate on them and assume these are generalizable across cultural contexts. By omitting pre-career and future-career influences on career agency and an explicit discussion of societal influences and influences of others, Stage theories are limited in their application across contexts.

These omissions indicate a set of implicit assumptions around the context and shape of women's agency. Firstly, the theories assume that the women's careers are unfolding in a Western cultural context and in stable economic circumstances in which the career is developing (Savickas et al., 2009; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Secondly, they also assume individual agency drives careers and omit an analysis of the influence of society and others. These assumptions are not reflected in the contemporary cultural context of many Western careers as shown by literature on boundaryless careers and shared careers (Svejnova et al., 2010; Tams & Arthur, 2010) nor are they reflected in the rapidly transforming economic circumstances of India as shown in Chapter 3. Thirdly, Stage theories assume career influences start at early career and end at late career, leaving out the significance of pre-career intentionality and future-career projections in shaping career agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Stage theories fail to provide explanations or predict the findings around the career development of Indian managerial women. The opt-out predictions of the

theory do not hold in the Indian context; although Indian managerial women experience stress of managing home and work life, they are unlikely to opt out and do not express a turnover intention at the mid-career stage (Adya, 2008; Desai et al., 2011).

This study overcomes the shortcomings of Stage theories and responds to the research questions:

RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

8.1 RQ: What is the shape of career agency and how does it shift in the career narratives of Indian managerial women?

In response to the RQ, this study shows that the shape of career agency is reflected in the emergent agentic bonds, which capture the 'temporal-relational' process through which individuals engage in their careers. Agentic bonds can take various forms to connect the individual and the collective, based on the level of support for career intentions and career actions; these bonds can be: *fusion, communion, divergence, assertion, and integration.*

The interplay of the individual, structure and culture produces emergent agentic bonds. These bonds shift with changing circumstances, and in doing so, leverage positive external support or compensate for negative external support, thereby providing an ongoing stable platform for career intentions and actions. Women's career agency shifts temporally between the collective and individual relational dimensions, depending on the degree of career support they perceive from the cultural and structural environment. The shifting relationship occurs through the mechanism of *agentic bonds*, as the women engage with their cultural and structural context, as shown in Figure 18.
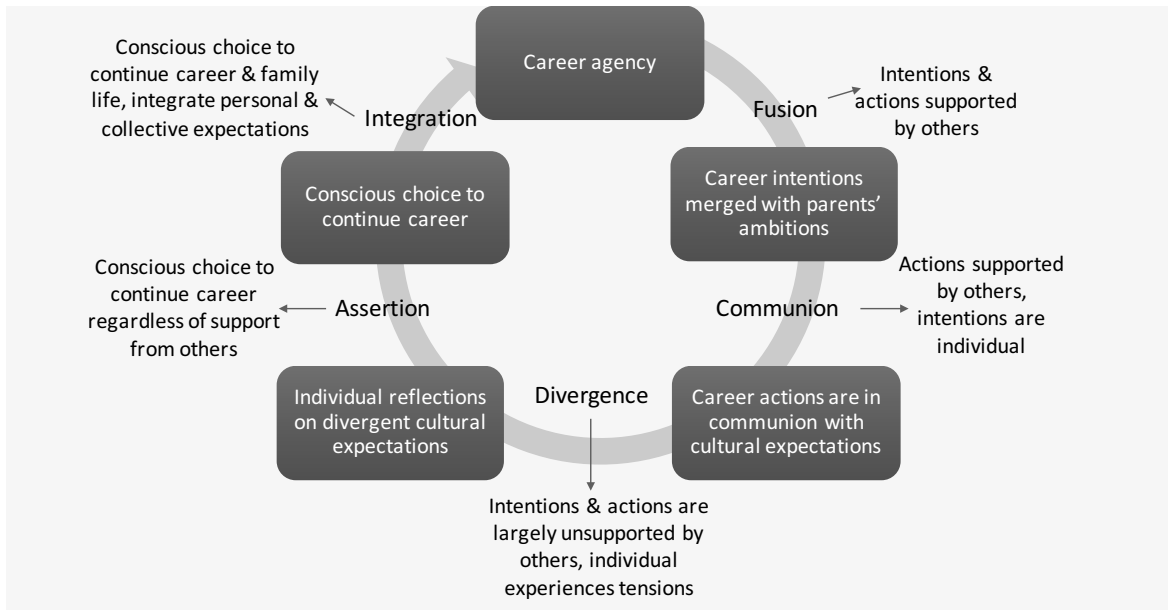
Figure 18 The shape of Indian managerial women's career agency

Therefore, the limitations of the rigid view of individual agency in careers is addressed and the new construct of 'emergent agentic bonds' that permits a liminal/hybrid/fluid view of career agency is offered.

8.2 SQ 1: How do pre-career intentions and future career projections shape career agency?

Pre-career and early parental influences on career intentions are not included in the stages of women's careers. This is a significant oversight in Stage theories as the impact of pre-career experiences has been shown to be significant in studies from Canada (Ezzedeen et al., 2015). Indian women express a fusion of choice in career goals with their parents and those goals seem to be established before the career started and remains in fusion with their families over time (Adya, 2008; Dhawan, 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2011; Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). The temporality and relationality of career stages of Indian women are initiated at a point in their lives that precedes the assumed starting point of the Stage theories, which begin with early-career. This study shows that pre-career intentions are typically set in childhood as a fusion with parental guidance and hardly distinguish the career as an individual intention. Once intention is established, it seems to persist, even when the parental support is

withdrawn partially or fully. Nevertheless, the direction of movement in the shift in Indian women's careers is from a greater focus on other (fusion with family) to a greater focus on self (assertion), whereas Stage theories predict a shift from self to other (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005), with a convergence on a final movement towards integration between self and other, as shown in Figure 19.
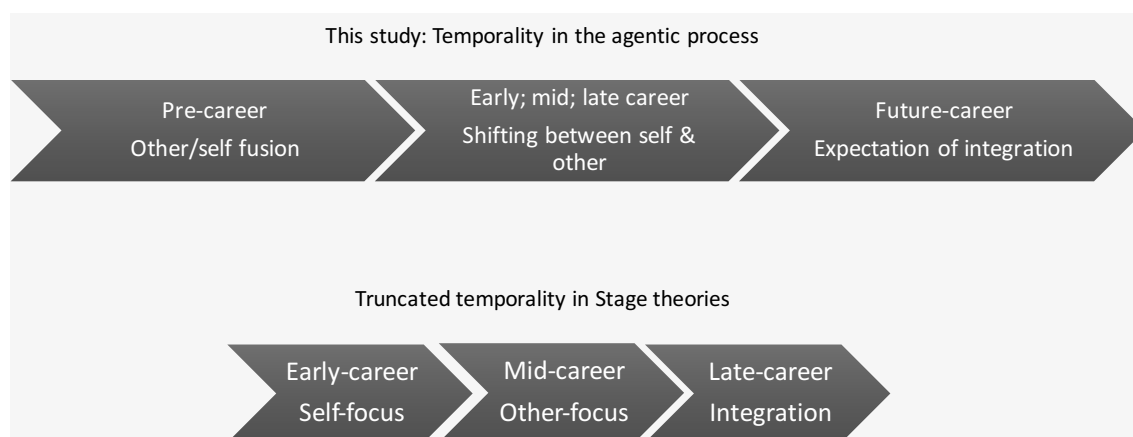
Figure 19 Temporality in career agency

8.3 SQ 2: How do society and family relationality shape career agency?

Stage theories show that an individual factors-in or considers family needs alongside their own needs when making career decisions. Stage theories assume individual agency in careers (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), a conceptualization of agency which has a clear demarcation between the self and others. Stage theories show the individual reacting to 'family demands' to make career decisions. This differs from India where the collective remains present in concepts of rights, agency, freedom, capital, happiness. Indians perceive their well-being in terms of doing what is right based on the standards passed down to them from their families and communities. Maintaining family honour and family cohesion is often still perceived as more important than material success, and family connections are a measure of an individual's societal value (Clark-Decès & Smith, 2017). In this context, societal influences are filtered through and mediated by the family and individual agency is not likely to be the driving force behind career development; the interaction between

individuals and their families are intertwined and collectively influence career decisions. Literature on Indian women's careers reflects a struggle to define career agency as purely individualistic, referring to it with terms such as interactional agency (Bulbeck, 2010), constrained agency (Shenoy-Packer, 2014) and nuanced agency (Uppalury & Racherla, 2014). This study shows that through shifting agentic bonds (fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration) career agency shifts due to 'level of family support', which contrasts with Stage theories which assume that careers shift due to age/stage related 'levels of family demands'. So, the culture-centred approach shows that individuals come to their career with 'support' and react to shifts or withdrawal of support over time, vs. Stage theories that show an individual coming to careers independently of family 'demands' and reacting over time to shifts, typically increases in family demand.

In India, the family is shown to mediate between society and the individual early in childhood and continues later in life when family cohesion is prioritized as the women's ultimate responsibility (Ghosh & Roy, 1997; Hapke, 2013; Lau, 2010). The level of support from society and family support for intentions and actions will shape the agentic bond as shown in Figure 20:
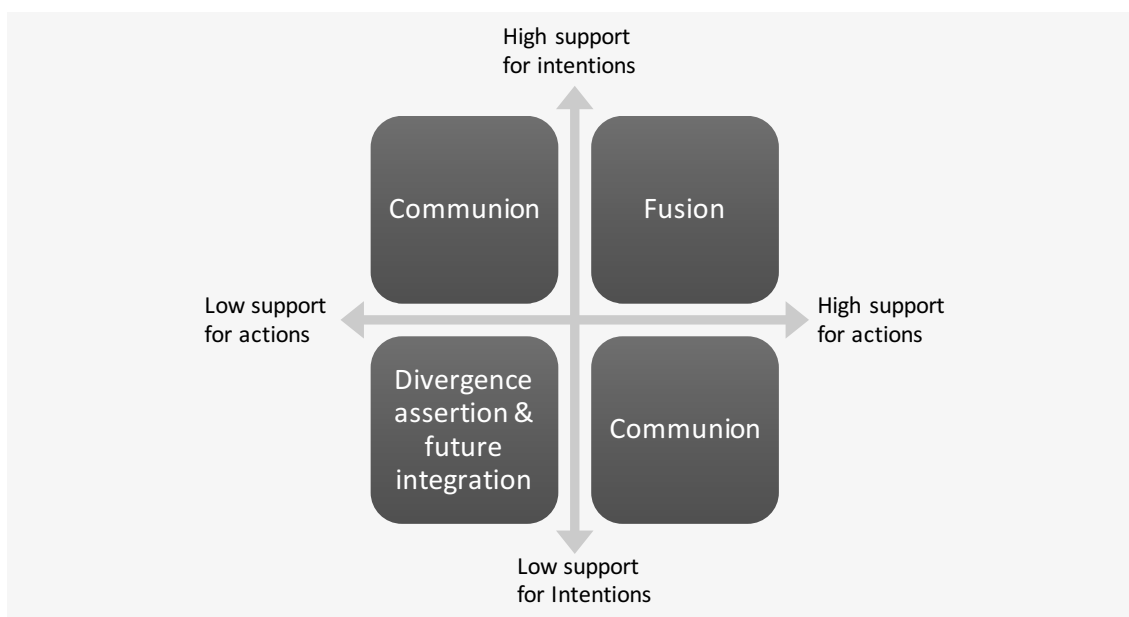
Figure 20 Relationality through contextual support in career agency

Each of the contributions is discussed and positioned within the relevant literature in the following paragraphs.

Stage theories of women's careers fail to predict the stages of women's careers in India. The flawed assumptions are culturally biased towards a Western view of temporality and relationality. Individuals and the collective are conceptualized from a Western, advanced and economically stable industrialised country perspective. This leaves a gap in our understanding of women's career patterns from a culturally sensitive perspective in varying contexts. This study overcomes the shortcomings of the Stage theories of women's careers with a culture-centred approach to Indian women's careers. A culture-centred approach moves beyond the assumptions of a Western context, with stable economic circumstances and individual agency. By shifting the analytical focus to a liminal/hybrid/fluid view of agency, relational and temporal differences in agentic expressions are factored in. Career agency with a CCA (Mitra, 2015) perspective implies a view of agency as a hybrid between autonomous and collective, continually shifting across the self and other, never actually residing in either.

This study makes three contributions to knowledge:

- A theoretical contribution that broaden women's career theories with a culture-centred model of career agency and a framework of women's careers. The framework disaggregates career agency and therefore permits a culturally sensitive reading of career agency as a liminal/hybrid/fluid construct moving beyond the reliance on individual agency. The construct of agentic bonds for the first time provides a construct by which to reconcile varying temporal-relational contexts with career agency, moving beyond assumptions and biases about the context of career actions.

- An empirical contribution: a rich study of the careers of Indian managerial women, demonstrating a typical agentic process and shifting agentic bonds. The culture-centred model of career agency highlights that in opposition to

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the predictions of the Stage theories of careers, Indian women's careers shift from a focus on others to a focus on self.

- A practical contribution: a culturally-sensitive approach to career coaching rooted in a processual view of career agency. Coaches can now take a nuanced view of temporality to assess the pre-career influences and the flow of agentic bonds in their work to facilitate reflectivity in their clients. With a view of agency as a process of agentic bonds, coaches are also now equipped to move beyond individual agency, and take a culturally sensitive approach to stimulate agentic activity as a relational concept.

8.4 Theoretical contribution: Culture-centred model of women's career agency

Despite repeated calls for research in non-Western contexts, there has been very little contribution to theory development from studies in non-Western contexts. The analysis of Barkema et al. (2015) concluded that research from the East can make three types of contribution: (i) construct equivalence, when the construct is essentially the same and already known in the extant literature, (ii) construct salience, which occurs when a specific attribute of an existing Western construct becomes more pronounced in the Eastern context, and (iii) construct infusion, when a new element is added to an existing construct. This study highlights the dynamic nature of culture, structure and agency by showing that 'collective agency' is displaced by 'individual agency' to relieve tensions when career intentions are at odds with contextual exceptions. This study contributes a culture-centred model of career agency, illustrating an agentic process of careers. The culture-centred model is developed with a liminal/hybrid/fluid conceptualization of career agency. The temporal-relational view of career agency is facilitated with the newly identified construct of 'agentic bonds'. Therefore, this study offers a construct infusion in women's career theories by adding the concept of agentic bonds and enhancing the concept of career agency as an agentic process.

The model expands and directs evolving theories of career agency (Chen, 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010), by contributing a framework that permits a culture-

centred view of career agency. Emergent agentic bonds capture the changing interplay of culture, structure and agency in careers, taking women's career studies beyond structure and agency and bringing culture into the equation. This helps to reconcile the differences in theory around the role of internal and external factors. The construct of emergent agentic bonds provides the missing link by showing how internal and external factors are reconciled and reflected in career decisions in varying ways over time.

This model also contributes to the development of culturally-sensitive women's career theories. Career studies highlight the internal and external factors that influence women's career advancement (Fagenson, 1990). Some scholars have focused on separating these factors (e.g. Duffy & Dik, 2009). Others have suggested merging external and internal factors, and consider the ontological duality (Cuzzocrea & Lyon, 2011; Dany et al., 2003; Duberly et al., 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010), while, Stage theorists focus on the relational aspects of women's careers and demonstrate how women's careers shift as they adjust to fit their careers into changing circumstances over time (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). The flow of time is assumed to be linked to age and family life typically experienced in a Western culture with relatively stable economic circumstances (Savickas et al., 2009; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Despite philosophical disagreement on the degree of separation between external and internal factors, there is reasonable agreement that contextual factors are relevant. This is captured by Lee et al. (2011) who suggest that individuals construct careers over time through their own understanding of their broader context, which consists of *"entangled strands of work, personal, family and community life."* (p.1546). These studies fall short of identifying the types of links individuals make with their context. Although the notion of entanglement is helpful, it is limiting; without an analytical separation of the strands, we cannot determine the cultural, structural and agentic components, and risk developing an overly generalized understanding that ignores cultural variations. By ignoring culture, we inherently project our own cultural bias in our analysis and consequently Western scholars are likely to overstate individual agency.

Stage theories of women's careers suggests that individuals are actively striving to understand their broader context and making individual decisions on how to accommodate external demands. A culture-centred approach to women's careers differs from Stage theories as it suggests that decisions are driven by agentic bonds. Agentic bonds are formed by the interaction between the individual and their context. These bonds shift, depending on the degree of support for career intentions and career actions. A view of women's careers as a process of agentic bonds allows a culturally sensitive reading of women's career development. Agentic bonds consider culture as both an external, structural factor as well as an internal, individual factor. The degree of misalignment (Afiouni & Karam, 2014) between internal and external factors towards career intentions and career actions are the triggers for shifts in bonds. With the concept of agentic bonds, the shifts in women's careers are not simply presumed to occur at a given age or stage of family life (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005), rather, they are linked to a more nuanced view of the interplay of culture, structure and agency with regard to an individual's career intentions and career actions. Hence a processual view captures 'how' women's career agency shifts over time. This goes beyond the rigid and truncated view of the temporal-relational context conceptualized as early-career, mid-career, late-career conceptualization of careers in Stage theories (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

With this theoretical contribution, this study questions the applicability of Stage theories of women's careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) in a range of cultural contexts. Culture has been downplayed and assumed to be a relatively static factor in Stage theories of women's careers. The new culture-centred model shows that shifts in 'agentic bonds' are triggered by shifts in career support from the temporal-relational context. The construct of agentic bonds moves us away from the culturally limiting and biased assumptions around age/stage connections and primacy of individual agency as a way of responding to contextual 'demands'. The culture-centred model and the construct of shifting agentic bonds advanced in this study provide a more

suitable approach to understanding and advancing women's careers in the globalized context of MNCs.

8.4.1 Theoretical sub-contribution: A culture-centred framework of career agency

The study additionally contributes a culture-centred framework for the analysis of career agency (Figure 1). The entanglements of work, personal, family and community life which influence careers (Lee et al., 2011) are influenced by cultural norms, yet culture has largely been left out of women's career theories. Empirical studies from China, Russia, Turkey and the Arab Middle East, show the value of taking a cultural perspective. The culture-centred approach in this study permitted me to highlight the hidden aspects of career negotiation (Mitra, 2015). I have shown an alternative approach to understanding career agency grounded in the cultural and structural realities of Indian managerial women. The culture-centred framework disaggregates career agency into analytically discrete components comprised of: temporality; modes and properties of agency; fragmentation. With these components, the framework enables a culture-centred analysis of career narratives.

The analytical lens in this study was facilitated by combining a critical-realist perspective with the culture-centred approach to careers (Mitra, 2015). The joining of these perspectives called for the disaggregation of career agency. In this way, the contribution offers a culturally sensitive approach to the study of careers' varying contexts. In alignment with the culture-centred approach, the study shows that the agentic process of the women in the study is characterised by the fluidity, liminality and hybridity suggested by Mitra (2015). Within the critical realist philosophical perspective discussed in Chapter 4, a search for the domains of reality (Bhaskar, 1979, 2008) revealed the hidden aspects of career negotiation. The domains of reality in this study are represented by continued career development in the empirically observable domain, the emergence of agentic bonds and the agentic process of careers in the actual domain, triggered by the generative mechanisms, which are the shifting degrees of

support for women's careers within the cultural and structural circumstances. The domains of reality of Indian managerial women are illustrated in Figure 21.
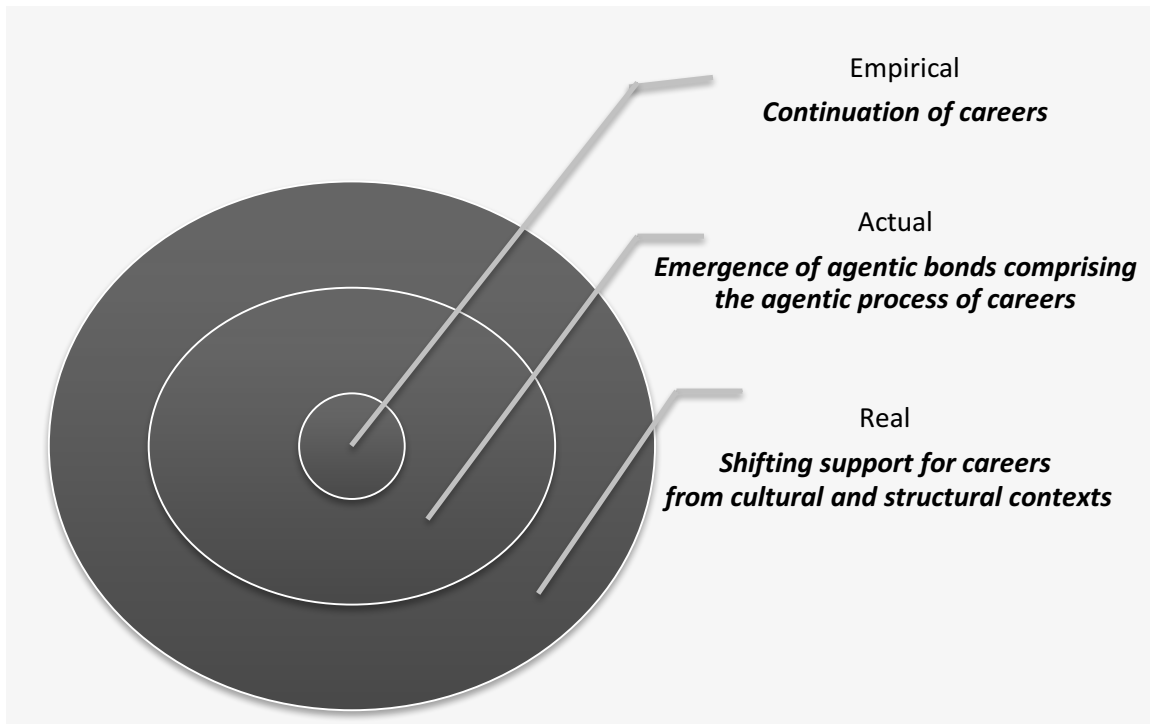
Figure 21 Indian managerial women's domains of reality

Through the combination of the critical realist perspective with the CCA (Mitra, 2015), the study responds to the calls for cultural sensitivity in career theories (e.g. Leung, 2008). This combination of epistemological and methodological approaches facilitated the discovery of the dynamic relationship between culture, structure and agency. I have shifted the focus on careers from 'stages' to 'temporal-relational process', which is comprised of shifting 'agentic bonds'. Building on concepts in the careers literature, which had recognized two connections between individuals and their context as: 'fusion' (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011) and 'communion' (Svejenova et al., 2010), in this study I identify additional connections as five agentic bonds: fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration. These bonds between the individual and the context arise from the interplay of structure, culture and the individual. The theoretical contribution is significant in demonstrating approaches to cultural sensitivity in career theories, as it permits a view of the dynamic and fluid

interaction between the individual and their context while accounting for cultural variations in temporal and relational norms.

The contribution shows the importance of analytical dualism for culturally sensitive career theories. This study therefore, rejects the position of career scholars who stress that career concepts of structure and agency are two sides of the same coin and should be treated in an integrated manner (Cuzzocrea & Lyon, 2011; Dany et al., 2003; Duberley et al., 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010;), Rather, this study shows that it is necessary to look at structure and culture, by understanding the combined forces as the temporal-relational context. This framework provides an operational approach to separating the temporal-relational context of action from career agency for analytical purposes. Extant perspectives (Cuzzocrea & Lyon, 2011; Dany et al., 2003; Duberly et al., 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010) merging the elements of culture, structure and agency, sink them into one category and thereby limit the analysis of the interplay between them. In doing so, these theories fail to achieve cultural sensitivity. A culture-centred approach to theory development requires an analysis of the interplay of culture, structure and agency (Mitra, 2015). The findings in this study support analytical dualism (Archer, 1996) for the study of culture, structure and agency in careers. This study explores culture/structure as the temporal-relational context separate from agency and reveals the emergence of agentic bonds by observing the interplay of culture, structure and agency within temporal-relational dimensions. This, combined with the CCA (Mitra, 2015) lens, permits agency to be explored as liminal, hybrid and fluid. This combination of perspectives reveals a culturally grounded agentic process. In this way, the contributions of this study also support a relational framework for international diversity management practices (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009) and cautions MNCs against ignoring local relational norms when transferring diversity practices to other countries. This study provides a theoretical framework for achieving cultural sensitivity in women's career theory development. This contribution builds on Mitra's CCA (2015), by disaggregating and operationalizing career agency and providing a critical realist approach to the analysis of career narratives.

8.5 Empirical contribution: A rich study of the careers of Indian managerial women

The study shows the ways in which Indian managerial women exert career agency throughout their life phases. Starting the analysis from the pre-career phase when career intentions are established with parental influence to future career projections which reveal a desire to integrate personal and collective expectations, this study highlights the temporal and relational shape of Indian women's career agency. The career intentions established before careers begin and in relation with parent sets the stage for the temporality and relationality in further career development. The study adds to the records of women's careers, by including the voices of Indian managerial women. This study draws on interviews with 36 Indian managerial women at MNCs in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. The review of literature on Indian managerial women in Chapter 3, shows that their careers are situated within their larger familial and organizational contexts. The messages from these larger contexts in India are mixed; on the one hand enabling careers through evolving gender ideologies, and on the other hand constraining full integration into public/professional life through traditional gender norms. The Indian managerial women contend with mixed messages from their structural and cultural environment about their careers. They grapple with misalignments with their personal career intentions. Societal and familial demands are essentially collective in nature and seek the women's attention as the primary nurturers of family life. Additionally, organizational assumptions tend to be individualistic in nature and seek their full availability for work. Indian managerial women are therefore simultaneously shifting between traditional, collective, family norms and modernizing, individualistic, organizational norms, by forming emergent agentic bonds to leverage support when available and compensate for withdrawal of support.

This study extends the literature by exploring the ways in which modernity is experienced by Indian managerial women in support of the claim that in India neither modernity nor tradition prevails, rather they find a way to co-exist (Mohanty, 2014). Indian modernity has done away with overt gender discrimination in religion and law but continues to support identification and

adherence to modified versions of the collective institutions with certain patriarchal characteristics remaining predominant in urban Indian society (Mitter, 1991; Donner, 2008). In the landscape of the career journeys of Indian managerial women, modernity is represented by social identification through caste, religion and regional/linguistic identification moving ever so slightly to the background but with the institution of family remaining prominently in the foreground. With this study, I demonstrate that modernizing does not imply Westernizing and consistently individualistic behaviour. Modernizing for Indian managerial women means reconciling misalignments through an agentic process shifting between collective and traditional requirements on the one hand, and individualistic and contemporary attitudes on the other hand. In this study, the process is characterised by shifting agentic bonds that consistently convert career intentions into career actions. Societal conditions for Indian managerial women require them to be appropriately Indian woman (Radhakrishnan, 2011). They need to retain sufficient "Indianness" through family life while embracing a sufficient degree of modernity to be appropriate in both the private and public spheres of society. In this context, urban Indian women have access to a professional life if it is not at the expense of their primary role as nurturer of the family. The findings in this study illustrate the negotiation with cultural and structural standards referred to as the *"patriarchal bargain"* by Misra & Roychowdhury, (1997, p.252) and echoed by Radhakrishnan (2011) as well as Dhawan (2010).

The family mediates women's access to social life. The women in the study strive to maintain their careers and exhibit sufficient Indian values which might be prioritizing family as well as pursuing their careers. They do so through marriage and family life. Biographical data, along with the narrative analysis, demonstrate that most women in my study marry within a few years of graduating from university and therefore submit to the hegemony of marriage as the legitimate structure of family. Dhruvarajan (1996), Ghosh & Roy (1997), Lau (2010) and Hapke (2013) imply that despite material progress, cultural influences and family ideology mediate women's access to social status and equality. Women continue to be socialized to view their professional work as

subordinate to that of their spouse and conceive it as an extension of housework. This study supports the literature on the value given by women to their family lives and their role as nurturers. This study also partially supports the literature which shows the tendency of women in India to express family decisions as personal decisions and merge family choice as personal choice (Dhawan, 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2011; Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). The findings of this study, however, enhance these findings by showing that the fusion of choice is temporally limited and not a permanent state. It is more likely to be experienced in childhood when the family shelters the woman and diminishes later in life when families withdraw career support. The literature fails to explain why women continue with their careers, even when the family withdraws or reduces instrumental and emotional backing (Dhawan, 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2011; Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). The study shows that future career projections are relatively free of tensions and women expect the challenges they are facing in their current situation will ease off and demonstrate confidence, in their ability to work through the challenges, and demonstrate that the benefits of having a career are worth working through the challenges. Successful corporate women do not question the hegemony of the institution of marriage and family life (Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha, 2001; Dhawan, 2010). This study supports the significance of marriage and the collective of the family as a key component and conduit of women's professional lives. Yet, the literature fails to explain how and why Indian managerial women continue in their careers, once the support of family is withdrawn. This study picks up where literature falls short, and through its expanded construct of agentic bonds, comprising an agentic process, explains how and why Indian managerial women continue their careers once support from the family is withdrawn.

Organizational institutions, particularly MNCs, assume an essentially Westernized modernity in their corporate culture and human resource practices in India. Indian tradition by and large adheres to patriarchal values and requires allegiance to societal institutions represented by: caste, religion and regional/linguistic identification. Haq (2012) shows the Indian approach to diversity focuses on three groups, officially defined in the Constitution of India

as: scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes. Laws in the country require public sector and local government to fulfil hiring quotas in these categories. Although the law does not include the private sector, corporate policies in Indian organizations tend to mirror these diversity concerns. The arrival of MNCs with Western diversity concerns has led to debates about establishing quotas for women. Legal quotas were not established but gender tends to be included in MNC policies. However, the belief in MNCs carrying the perceived Western values of meritocracy and equality has led to a resistance to affirmative action policies in corporations. Hence, Indian managerial women tend to believe that hard work will be rewarded equally (Radhakrishnan, 2011). Indian managerial women also believe that they need to be more proactive and aggressive to adapt to organizational expectations (Adya, 2008). These beliefs in the inherent meritocracy and equality of MNCs, and the responsibility being on the women to adapt to succeed, are supported by this study. The culture-centred model of the agentic process of career agency shows that the women are driven by a career intention established in childhood. Insofar as they have collective support for their career intentions, they display a communion approach to their careers. This study shows that the individualistic approach to careers emerges when the support of the collective is withdrawn and not because of their perceptions or beliefs in the MNC's individualistic and meritocratic values.

This study advances the understanding of Indian women's careers by demonstrating the delicate balance between the individual and collective agency, which shifts as circumstances shift. This study highlights the way that Indian managerial women interact with the enabling and constraining aspects of their contexts. This study demonstrates that modernity in India does not imply Westernization and that modernity and tradition co-exist (Mohanty, 2014). The women in this study grapple with the tensions of the opposing forces of the collective norms of tradition and family and the individualistic expectations of professional life, to continue their careers.

This study contributes by resolving the struggle to understand Indian women's career agency. The extant literature is fragmented in trying to explain the career agency of Indian women in this context, which is simultaneously collective and individualistic. Indian women's careers are characterised by tensions and paradoxes and, surprisingly, also by the continued desire for a career. The study synthesises the fragmented findings in studies from India, revealing a culturally adapted understanding of agency, termed in varying ways in the extant literature: interactional agency by Bulbeck (2010), constrained agency by Shenoy-Packer (2014), and nuanced agency by Uppalury & Racherla (2014). This study extends the work of these scholars, and for the first time helps to resolve the struggle to identify a type of agency, by showing that it is an agentic process of fluidity between collective and individual agency through varying agentic bonds that leads to continuation of careers. The career shifts from being a collective priority to an individual priority but never fully residing in one or the other. This repositioning between the self and other, through experiences of fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and integration, demonstrates liminal and hybridized agency. Hence, the study explains how and why women continue with their careers when others withdraw or reduce their instrumental and emotional backing. The answer lies in understanding the dynamic relationship between the context and the individual, and is represented by the emergence of agentic bonds and the process of career agency.

8.6 Practical contribution: a culturally-sensitive approach to career coaching rooted in a processual view of career agency

The practical contribution is to my profession as a career coach and cross-cultural management consultant. Career coaches will benefit from deeper knowledge of the agentic process by understanding the ways in which individuals interact with support, or lack of support, of others and how the interaction shifts over time. This will also help MNCs avoid the "one-size-fits-all" trap and provide culturally sensitive insights on designing appropriate career interventions and cross-cultural transfers of diversity initiatives (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009).

It provides career coaches and human resource staff interested in supporting women's careers into senior management with an assessment and intervention tool (Chen, 2006). This model of the agentic process encourages us to look beyond a rigid view of age/stage and individual agency of women's career. This study encourages the practitioner to take a liminal/hybrid/fluid view of women's career agency. With awareness of agentic bonds, career coaches can help managerial women to stimulate agency by reflecting on the degree of support from the context. They can facilitate the process of self-reflection to help women assess their options and arrive at a conscious choice for their careers in their own cultural frameworks of temporality and relationality. We can also then distinguish the ways in which women assert themselves individually within this landscape and explore that alignment with their intentions and actions. The objective with such a model would be to help the women see their interconnectedness and make conscious choices that respect their interdependence with the temporal-relational context in their career story.

I have already found this model helpful in my work as a career and leadership coach as well as a cross-cultural management consultant. I have enhanced my practice in two ways; first I have sharpened my focus on the liminality and hybridity in career agency. Rather than focusing on individual agency as the primary mode of agency, I pay more attention to the ways in which aspects of collective agency might contribute to the careers of my clients to help them leverage all modes of agency. The second related point is my focus on the tensions they express and the ways in which relief is brought into career narratives and to assess the properties of agency that flow in to contribute to relief. The interventions I will develop from now on will consider properties and modes in their separate parts as collective, individual, intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness, and consider the interaction of all the parts within the contextual and cultural environment.

8.7 Wider applications of this study

Further to the practical applications for career coaching discussed above, this study has wider applications beyond the career agency of Indian managerial

women. Identifying the agentic process and agentic bonds of younger women, older women and women working flexibly in a range of cultural contexts would enhance developing theories of women's careers.

Emerging 'new career' theories have focused on individual agency as a mechanism of career development in the contemporary organizational context. Individuals in Western contexts are changing their career attitudes and behaviours in response to many factors, including increasing life spans, changing family structures, increasing number of dual-career couples, single working parents, eldercare responsibilities, and more individuals seeking to fulfil needs for learning, development, and growth. Therefore, men and women are taking career breaks for a variety of reasons including caregiving for children or elderly relatives. Because of the career breaks, increasingly, men and women are taking varied career paths that differ from traditional careers paths characterised as continuous upward progressions within an organization. The stages of younger women's careers might be impacted on by varied career paths and greater individual agency of the younger generations (Lyons et al., 2015). These forces are nevertheless opposed by contextual forces, as women are still expected by most societies to be the primary care givers and are expected to modify their careers to fulfil caregiving roles. This study for the first time provides a theory on how such opposing pressures are dealt with by women in terms of career development. The concept of agentic bonds provides a broader view of the career agency of younger women, both individual and subjected to contextual expectations. Individual agency may be overstated by the new careers literature (Inkson et al., 2012). The concept of 'agentic bonds' in this study permits a more nuanced view with more types of agency than individual. Additionally, the theoretical and practical focus in flexible working literature on the individual has raised a concern that work-life balance discourses might have intensified the pressure on humans to find solutions independent of contextual constraints (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015). A view of flexible working through the concept of agentic bonds, might shed light on ways that work and life are reconciled, rather than perfectly balanced, and identify women's career strategies as a shifting blend of individual and collective

agency. Therefore, a review of flexible working literature and new careers literature might be enhanced and broadened beyond individual agency with the concept of agentic bonds. The findings around types of agentic bonds in this study therefore, might be transferred beyond India to other contexts to explain the different kinds of decisions women make in their careers to reconcile individual and contextual expectations.

8.8 Limitations and future research

The research design choices around sampling, data collection, reporting and analytical approaches in this study have inherent limitations. Each of these is discussed below.

Snowball sampling relied on personal contacts and resulted in a specific set of respondents heavily weighted towards the IT industry. The women's demographic profile was consistent across the sample. On the one hand this is by design and responds to the targeted profile, but on the other hand there are limitations of studying a sample with a high level of similarity. There can be selection bias (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) and therefore overstate the cohesiveness of the sample. I mitigated this risk by interviewing a relatively large sample for qualitative research. There is also the risk of gatekeeper bias (Creswell, 2008), as we rely on the judgement and choices of the original contact to access the sample. I mitigated this by reaching out to three initial contacts rather than only one.

The narrative interview method for data collection has inherent weaknesses, relying on memory and recalled life stories and efforts to rationalize the disconnects between work and life events in the past (Glick et al., 1990). These were mitigated by the analysis of 36 cases, a relatively large number for a qualitative study. The study did not include interview data from other actors in the career narratives, such as parents, husbands, in-laws, and bosses, and therefore may have limited my understanding of the legitimacy of the women's

version of events (Rousseau et al., 2005) in presenting a view of the women's careers from the collective side of the story.

There are inherent challenges in reporting qualitative data; these include the risks of relativism and as well as the risk of losing or misinterpreting data in the researcher's efforts to interpret the findings. These risks are addressed by being aware of researcher bias (Ritchie et al., 2014).

There is always a risk of data interpretation, particularly when certain terms may carry culturally-specific meanings, and colloquialisms might be used. I relied on my knowledge of Indian culture and use of English in the urban Indian environment. I mitigated the risks of researcher bias by using an audit trail built into NVivo, checking interpretations with each participant, and considering negative, inconsistent and diverse elements during the interviews. I kept notes and memos of my thoughts and reactions throughout the process to strive for reflexivity and reduce personal bias as much as possible. Additionally, I addressed the risks of 'lone researcher' bias (Lofland et al., 2006) in my data collection, analysis and interpretation. My PhD Supervisor co-coded the data analysis of the first five interviews, reviewed further interviews and discussed the emergent categories with me throughout the data analysis process. I presented my data analysis to senior academics in three review panel meetings, disseminated my findings at a doctoral symposium and three international conferences for feedback. I also shared the findings with two practitioners based in India, who had been sources for the snowballing sampling and are senior managers at two of the organizations from which I had interviewed several women.

To determine the areas for future research I will review the analytical choices made in this study. The data analysis approach focused on the themes of the narratives and on disaggregation of these themes into culture, structure and agency. The study does not reflect the impact of functional role, or type of organization and organizational culture on the findings. The study did not assess the views of others, such as family and organizational actors, in the women's stories. In addition, the study was a snapshot in time; it was not

longitudinal. Therefore, the understanding of temporality is limited to the narrative at one given point and cannot be assessed against actual career intentions and actions at various life phases.

Areas for future research could include returning to the women in the narrative five years on from the original interview to assess the evolution in their careers and compare it to their narratives in this study, to determine the value of the model to predict future actions. The study could be enhanced by gathering data from the others who appear as actors, such as family members, colleagues and bosses in the women's narratives, to develop a 2-way relational picture of the interplay of culture, structure and agency. In addition, a comparative analysis of the agentic process using the analytical framework with women who left their careers to assess the impact of being actively engaged or disengaged in a career at the time of the interview could be undertaken. Further studies applying the agentic process and the analytic framework to the career narrative of Indian managerial men would enhance our understanding of gender and careers within a national context. Lastly, a comparative analysis of the agentic process of careers across cultures would help to identify the convergences and divergences in varying cultural contexts.

8.9 Aims and personal learning

As stated in Chapter 1.3, the purpose of this study was to develop a culturally-sensitive model of women's career agency. Adopting a qualitative research method, by analyzing semi-structured interviews with 36 managerial women in India, this study produced two key outputs; first a *framework for culturally-sensitive analysis of career agency* was developed, then the framework was applied to produce a *culture-centred model of career agency*. This model highlights the way managerial women's career agency interacts with the enabling and constraining aspects of the temporal-relational context in which their careers unfold. This study broadens our understanding of women's career agency by revealing the dynamic relationship between the context and the individual. Career agency is conceptualized as a process of emergent agentic bonds shifting between fusion, communion, divergence, assertion and

integration between the individual and the collective in a temporal-relational context.

The findings and contributions of this study have met the aims of this research to develop a culturally sensitive understanding of women's career agency. I am satisfied that I have achieved this aim and that I made a valuable contribution to knowledge. I am grateful for the learning and growth that the overall research process has provided me. I have progressed by acquiring the skills of a researcher and the analytical capabilities of an academic. The ability to identify an issue, assess it critically, understand its academic and practitioner relevance, rigorously conduct primary research, arduously investigate the findings, make connections to disparate bodies of literature, overcome the sense of despair when the findings do not seem to lead me anywhere, manage the excitement of theoretical discoveries leading me down multiple paths, coming back to the aims to chip away at the research questions, work with and learn from established academics such as my PhD Supervisors and my research panel, have all given me confidence in my ability to keep learning. I am left breathless when I think of all that this project has entailed. I am grateful to all the respondents for sharing their candid and most personal stories. They helped me to reflect on who I am and how I got here. The most important learning I take away from this experience is the immeasurable personal value of listening to the stories of those in our presence.

8.10 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have discussed the contributions of the study. In Chapter 8.1 I reviewed how the findings respond to the research question. In Chapters 8.2 and 8.3 I discussed how findings responds to the two sub questions. In Chapters 8.4-8.6, I discussed the theoretical, empirical and practical contributions. In Chapter 8.7 I discussed the wider implications of the findings. In Chapter 8.8 presented the limitations and future research possibilities. In Chapter 8.9 I concluded by reviewing the aims of the study and my personal learning from the research process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Interview protocol

<u>Confidentiality:</u> This research has been given ethical approval by Cranfield School of Management. With permission from each participant, the interviews will be recorded. They will remain totally confidential and transcripts and recordings will only be accessible to the researcher and her supervisor at Cranfield School of Management. Quotes may be used in writing any reports and great care will be taken to "anonymise" such quotes so that they are not attributable to any individual.

<u>Introduction:</u> This research project is aimed at exploring the impact of external and personal factors on women's careers. Through your career story, I hope to work out with you the significance of these factors on the evolution of your career. Please begin by telling me your name, number of years in the workforce, current position and organisation where you work.

<u>Main question:</u> What has been your career journey and how has this journey been impacted by any life circumstances including social, family, organizational and personal factors? (If they hesitate, I may prompt them with: For example, when did you first think of having a career, how did that idea develop?)

<u>Probing questions:</u> Probing questions will be asked to clarify points or if some aspects are glaringly left out, such as no mention of any one of family, society, organization or personal factors at all. Also, questions may be asked to keep the story going, if interviewee is hesitant.

<u>Concluding question:</u> What are your future career goals and what are your plans for the next step in your career?

Appendix B Biographical data

Pseudonym	Industry	Married/single/divorced	Worked/studied abroad	Yrs.Worked	University level	Love/arranged marriage	Lived in joint family	Children	Interviewed in
Abha	Banking	Married	Yes	20	MBA	Love	no	3	Mumbai
Aditi	Social venture	Married	Yes	12	MBA	Love	no	2	Bengaluru
Aishwarya	Consulting	Married	New York	6	Masters	Love	No	None not sure she wants any	Delhi
Binita	Consulting	Engged	Moving to UK soon	18	BA	Engaged Love	Will do	0	Mumbai
Dipti	IT	Single	No	9	Masters	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Delhi
Gayatri	Accounting	Unmarried	No	14	CA	n/a	No	0	Mumbai
Hansa	IT	Unmarried	No	16	Masters (marketing)	n/a	no	0	Delhi
Janaki	IT	Divorced	Yes	29	Masters Eng.	Arranged	yes	1	Bengaluru
Jasmin	Pharmaceutical	Married	No	16	Masters	Love	With mom-in-law	2	Mumbai
Kajal	IT	Divorced	No	22	B. Eng	Love	No	1	Bengaluru
Lakshmi	IT	Married	No	17	Masters Eng.	Love	No	2	Bengaluru
Lalita	Oil and Gas	Married, was divorced	Singapore	10	Masters	Arranged	No	1	Delhi
Mala	IT	Married	Tokyo	21	Bachelors	Arranged	Joint with in-laws	2	Delhi
Malika	IT	Married	No	6	MBA	Arranged	yes	0	Delhi
Manvi	Communications	Divorced	No	25	BA	Engaged Love	Yes	1	Mumbai
Meera	Consulting	Married	London	5	Masters	Arranged	No	None not sure she wants any	Mumbai
Mridu	IT	Married	No	14	Masters	Love	Joint with in-laws	2	Delhi
Neha	IT	Married	Yes	15	Masters Eng.	Arranged	no	1	Bengaluru
Pia	Consumer products	Married	Hong Kong	28	Masters	Love	No	2	Delhi
Radhika	Biotech	Married	Yes	16	Masters (dentistry)	Arranged	No	1	Gurgaon
Renu	Biotech	Married	No	17	Masters	Love	First few years	2	Gurgaon
Reshma	IT	Married	No	16	2 Masters	Arranged	No	Pregnant with 1st child	Gurgaon
Rita	Development advisory	Married	London	15	2 Masters	Love	No	2	Delhi
Ruchika	Consulting	Married	No	12	Masters	Love	No	0	Mumbai
Saanvi	IT	Married	No	20	B.Tech	Arranged	no	1	Delhi
Sachi	IT	Married	Yes	10	Masters Project Management	Arranged	Yes	2	Bengaluru
Sadhana	IT	Engaged	No	5	Bsc Computer science	Engaged Love	will not	0	Delhi
Sahana	Manufacturing	Married	No	10	MBA	Arranged	yes	1	Delhi
Samaya	IT	Married	Yes	22	B.Tech	Arranged	Yes	1	Delhi
Sameera	IT	Single n	No	16	Unassigned	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Delhi
Sanchali	Consulting	Married	No	14	2 Masters	Love	First few years	Not planning to have	Mumbai
Sarika	IT	Married	No	13	Masters	Love	No	2	Delhi
Sharmila	Real Estate	Married	No	17	Masters	Arranged	No	1	Mumbai
Sonali	Health products	Married	No	28	Undergrad	Love	Yes	0 decided before marriage	Delhi
Sonia	Biotech	Married	No	16	Masters	Arranged	Yes	2	Gurgaon
Sunita	IT	Married	No	15	Masters	Love	Yes	2	Mumbai

Appendix C Overview of findings

Pseudonym	Mode of agency		Property of agency				Source of fragmentation				Temporality			
	Collective Agency	Individual Agency	Forethought	Intentionality	Self reactiveness	Self reflectiveness	Family related	Organisational	Personal	Societal	Pre-career	Past career	Current career	Future career
Abha	11	2	2	0	8	5	0	3	0	3	4	13	9	2
Aditi	19	3	3	3	4	11	4	0	1	2	7	16	12	1
Aishwarya	28	3	2	4	4	8	0	11	1	4	13	5	37	2
Binita	20	5	3	2	5	17	8	7	2	3	1	27	16	7
Dipti	3	13	2	3	6	13	0	3	1	8	10	7	16	3
Gayatri	9	3	5	8	3	7	2	4	2	0	4	5	22	3
Hansa	6	4	7	3	1	13	0	3	1	0	3	15	6	1
Janaki	3	7	2	4	8	7	1	5	0	1	6	17	4	2
Jasmin	11	2	1	1	12	11	0	3	0	0	3	9	25	2
Kajal	13	3	2	5	9	15	2	0	1	0	3	13	20	4
Lakshmi	10	3	0	1	2	5	0	3	1	0	5	6	8	2
Lalita	16	4	0	1	14	17	1	10	3	4	6	10	36	2
Mala	20	4	0	2	10	18	1	8	7	1	2	14	43	0
Malika	10	1	1	1	3	9	0	1	0	1	3	3	11	1
Manvi	27	2	4	1	2	23	3	12	1	2	11	23	25	1
Meera	23	2	5	0	8	10	1	12	3	6	6	7	29	5
Mridu	18	2	0	1	9	7	0	0	2	1	4	9	17	0
Neha	12	0	1	2	5	12	1	5	1	0	0	26	8	1
Pia	17	3	0	1	13	10	1	8	0	4	6	7	36	2
Radhika	18	2	4	0	14	7	3	5	0	1	6	19	24	1
Renu	22	1	2	1	6	7	4	6	0	1	14	35	19	0
Reshma	24	1	3	3	6	7	3	6	0	1	11	14	22	3
Rita	17	1	2	5	3	7	15	12	0	1	13	35	28	7
Ruchika	17	3	6	0	7	13	6	9	2	0	4	3	28	12
Saanvi	18	0	2	2	8	13	7	15	5	3	6	28	8	1
Sachi	12	3	2	1	3	11	1	1	1	1	3	8	17	6
Sadhana	6	2	3	0	1	5	1	0	2	0	1	10	6	6
Sahana	16	1	2	1	8	9	1	2	1	0	4	1	15	3
Samaya	10	0	0	2	6	8	0	0	0	0	1	6	5	0
Sameera	8	5	1	0	3	10	0	5	1	2	4	6	14	0
Sanchali	15	1	1	2	12	13	0	7	1	3	1	8	27	4
Sarika	27	2	2	1	15	26	0	3	3	1	6	27	34	1
Sharmila	27	0	0	0	8	5	6	3	0	0	8	20	11	1
Sonali	15	3	2	2	9	10	4	12	2	1	4	22	19	6
Sonia	15	1	0	1	15	13	3	5	1	2	5	27	35	2
Sunita	18	5	3	1	11	20	8	7	2	0	4	35	16	9

Appendix D Literature selection criteria and quality appraisal

A final selection of articles was based on the following criteria:

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Relevance to review question by topic	Professional/managerial women in the Indian private sector	Rural, public sector, NGO, government careers	Focus on a specific demographic subset
Age of research	From 1980 onwards	Pre 1980	Focus on studies leading up to and beyond liberalization of Indian economy in early 1990s
Language	English	All non-English	English is the language of academic publication in the regions of interest
Location of research	Indian MNCs. When necessary on Western research covering potentially universal factors	Non-Indian organizations, SMEs, Non-profit, NGOs, Public sector except for comparative studies including managerial Indian women	Focus on the Indian organizational context and comparative or explanatory research from Western studies
Nature and field of research	Theoretical and empirical (qualitative and quantitative) in the social sciences	Excluding criminology, law, political science	Focus on social and organizational context related to women in management
Type of publication	Academic papers, Practitioner research reports (Gartner, Catalyst) International and national non-profit organization publications (World Economic Forum,	General press articles, conference papers and proceedings, working papers and theses	Focus on high quality scholarly journals. Additional information from practitioner reports & non-profit

	International Labour Organization)		organization reports to supplement with demographic information if required.

Quality appraisal

After the above selection process was completed, each of the papers was read thoroughly and scores were assigned according to the quality criteria below:

Quality Criteria	Not applicable (value=0)	Inadequately met (value=1) LOW	Somewhat met (value=2) MEDIUM	Adequately met (value=3) HIGH
Theoretical contribution	Not applicable to this paper	Poor literature review, concepts not clearly embedded in existing literature	Reasonable literature review, resulting in a clear rationale for the concepts and relationships	Strong critical literature review, cross referencing opportunities convincing arguments and rationale
Empirical contribution	Not applicable to this paper	Findings do not add much to existing knowledge	Findings are relevant and significantly extend to existing knowledge	Important, useful findings that contribute in a novel manner
Methodological rigour	Not applicable to this paper	Poorly designed and no clear explanation of methodology and analysis	Design, methodology, and analysis are aligned and clearly explained	Design, methodology, and analysis is very clear and consistent providing an interesting and applicable set of data/concepts
Quality of argument	Not applicable to this paper	Oversimplified or broad generalizations	Clear arguments that are consistent with theoretical basis	Logical flow developing a clear argument, consistent with theory and supportive of conclusions
Presentation & structure	Not applicable to this paper	Aim and structure are not clearly stated, language and grammar errors are evident	No glaring language errors, meets academic writing standards, clear structure	Aim, structure & findings explicitly stated, consistent and logical presentation

Quality Criteria	Not applicable (value=0)	Inadequately met (value=1) LOW	Somewhat met (value=2) MEDIUM	Adequately met (value=3) HIGH
	Include if scores in at least 2 criteria have a value of greater than or equal to 2			